

1 DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

STATE OF MISSOURI

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RIVERVIEW GARDENS SCHOOL DISTRICT

8

PUBLIC HEARING

9

NOVEMBER 20, 2013

10

11

Family Community Resource Center

St. Cyr Road

12

St. Louis, Missouri 63137

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(Starting time of hearing: 6:34 p.m.)

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

2 MS. POWELL-ROBINSON: Good evening,
3 everyone. Thank you for coming tonight. My name is
4 Melanie Powell-Robinson and on behalf of Riverview
5 Gardens School District, I want to welcome you here
6 tonight. I would like to take a moment to
7 acknowledge our student groups that have assisted us
8 tonight.

9 First, we have -- if you will just stand up
10 and wave right quick. We have our jazz ensemble
11 "Point Of View." We have our choir here tonight.
12 We have cadets from our NJROTC. And we have
13 students from our National Honor Society.

14 Please welcome the commissioner of education,
15 Dr. Chris Nicastro.

16 COMMISSIONER NICASTRO: Thank you so
17 much and I too want to say thank you to the student
18 groups who entertained us before tonight and got us
19 ready for an exciting meeting. Thank you very much.

20 I would also like to thank Dr. Scott
21 Spurgeon, his staff and, particularly, the special
22 administrative board and all of my friends from the
23 Riverview community. I feel like I'm back home and
24 I really appreciate seeing so many familiar faces.
25 It's wonderful to see such a great turn out for such

1 a really important topic.

2 We are here tonight to listen. We want to
3 hear from the community. We want to hear from
4 staff. We want to hear from parents and we want to
5 hear from students about what's going on in your
6 district, how we at the Department of Elementary and
7 Secondary Education can support your efforts and
8 what the future of the District should look like.
9 What are your ideas about things that need to happen
10 that maybe aren't happening? We need to figure out
11 how together we can build a stronger school
12 community to serve the children, the families, and
13 the neighborhoods of Riverview Gardens.

14 We understand that it has been a somewhat
15 traumatic year for all of you. The transfer program
16 has certainly put some stress on this community. It
17 has put stress on the school district and certainly
18 it has put some challenges before our children.

19 We want to make sure that if that program
20 continues, that we do it in such a way that it does
21 not bankrupt this district or any other district.
22 And that we can figure out what are the other ways
23 that we could provide parents with positive options,
24 particularly here in the community where they live.
25 That's what we're after. That's what we want to

1 talk about and, as I said earlier, we're going to
2 listen.

3 So, we're looking forward to hearing from
4 your superintendent. We want to see exactly what it
5 is you all are doing. We have had lots of staff,
6 the department has had lots of staff in and out of
7 all of your schools. I do want to ask the folks who
8 are with me tonight to just stand if you're from the
9 Department of Elementary and Secondary Education so
10 that we can acknowledge all of you who are here.
11 Some are working.

12 I also want to acknowledge and I'm not going
13 to do it individually, but there are a number of
14 elected officials here, so pardon me for not
15 introducing you individually but I think it's
16 important that this community know that your
17 officials, both local and state, care very much
18 about what happens in Riverview and they're here
19 tonight to support you. So would you all please
20 stand. Thank you.

21 Thanks again for having us. It's going to be
22 a nice evening. We appreciate the time. And at
23 this point I introduce deputy commissioner of
24 Learning Services, Margie Vandeven.

25 MS. VANDEVEN: Thank you. And I too

1 want to thank you for such a warm welcome. What a
2 great way to kick off this event tonight. I do just
3 want to go through a few of the logistics to enable
4 the meeting to flow smoothly this evening.

5 The meeting is scheduled from 6:30 until
6 8:00 p.m. We will wrap up by 8:00 p.m. We'll begin
7 by hearing the presentation from your Superintendent
8 Dr. Spurgeon, Dr. Scott Spurgeon and then next we'll
9 move to the public comment period.

10 And I would just like to let you know there
11 are three ways for you to provide public comment
12 period this evening or the next few weeks. First of
13 all, you do have your blue comment cards and you can
14 provide written comment this evening. The blue
15 cards that Maureen is holding up.

16 You also may provide written comment and
17 those -- we have handouts in the back that provide
18 that email address for you. It is Riverview Gardens
19 comments dot DESE dot mo dot gov. So if you would
20 like to go home this evening and provide some
21 written comments, please feel free to do so.

22 And then, finally, we will also have a public
23 comment period and we want to make sure that anyone
24 who is interested in speaking tonight has completed
25 the gold -- one of the gold speaker cards. The

1 ushers will collect those. Make sure they have been
2 turned in. If you need one now, raise your hand and
3 we'll make sure you get those. And then we will
4 randomly select from the basket of names who will be
5 our speakers until roughly 7:50 this evening, is
6 when we'll start to wrap up the evening.

7 So, at this time, I would like to hand things
8 over to Dr. Scott Spurgeon.

9 SUPERINTENDENT SPURGEON: It's probably
10 time, about that time for you guys to have church.
11 Are you guys ready to go?

12 AUDIENCE: Yes.

13 SUPERINTENDENT SPURGEON: Let's make it
14 happen. It's interesting that back on June the 12th
15 we had a major decision handed down by the Missouri
16 Supreme Court that allowed students to transfer out
17 of unaccredited districts to a district that either
18 was in the same district in the county or an
19 adjacent county.

20 As I started my position July the 8th, we had
21 quite a feat to accomplish to ensure that we took
22 care of all of our children, not only those children
23 that chose to exercise the option to transfer but
24 also the students that chose to exercise their
25 option to stay with the Riverview Gardens School

1 District.

2 So, just to let you know that we have done
3 our best to comply with the Missouri Supreme Court
4 case handed down, we will continue to do so as we
5 try to adhere to Revised Missouri Statute 167.131.
6 I'm hoping in the future there are some changes to
7 that statute and/or some rules so that we can keep
8 our students here at home.

9 But let me turn you for just a second on the
10 5,000 students that chose to stay with Riverview
11 Gardens School District and I want to spend a little
12 bit of time talking about what we're doing to ensure
13 that we actually receive District accreditation.

14 Now, if you were in District conversation
15 back when our teachers first came back everybody
16 knows that this is our year to restore academic
17 honor to all of our schools and what I mean is, if
18 you have been in this district for any period of
19 time you know for a fact that the Riverview Gardens
20 School District at one point in time was the
21 premiere school district in the Greater St. Louis
22 area.

23 Just so that you know what the expectations
24 are of the District, I have it up on the screen.
25 We're going to support students, families and each

1 other, no exceptions, no excuses. And that's not
2 punitive. That's not meant to be something that's
3 fearful or scary. It just simply it is what it is
4 because our children get up every day and come to
5 school every day and our job is to serve the needs
6 of the kids which attend Riverview Gardens School
7 District. It's always been about our kids.

8 I want you to take a look at the list that
9 you see up on the screen because one of the things
10 that I want to make sure everybody understands is
11 what are my expectations of the Riverview Gardens
12 School District. I want to make sure that my
13 expectations match what your expectations are of our
14 schools.

15 First and foremost, we're going to act with a
16 sense of urgency. Let me be honest with you and
17 tell you this, there's not a single thing that I can
18 do to change a single minute from yesterday, last
19 year or three years from now. Can I say that we
20 didn't get it done in the last three years? I can
21 say we didn't get it done in the last three years
22 and I say I'm sorry for that.

23 But I can tell you right now we have some
24 hardworking professionals, students and staff. I
25 work with some of the -- I will say this on camera,

1 I will say it anywhere, I work with some of the most
2 of talented staff members, the most talented
3 students I have ever worked with in my educational
4 career in this district. Absolutely without
5 question.

6 So what we will see in schools and what you
7 should expect from us is to act with urgency. So if
8 you have needs, one of the things that we have not
9 done in the District is to respond to the urgent
10 needs of our families, of our staff, of our
11 students, of our district and we're beginning to
12 start to act with a sense of urgency.

13 The issue around that is, if you have not
14 done that in a while, it takes a little bit of
15 practice to get there. So are we there? Are we
16 where we want to be right now? Not yet but we're
17 making progress.

18 The next expectation is professionalism in
19 all we do. We are going to treat everyone with
20 professionalism, with respect. We're going to treat
21 people like they are a part of our family. We have
22 not done a good job with that in the past. We have
23 not treated students the way we should have treated
24 them. We have not treated each other the way we
25 should have been treated. But I can tell you that's

1 changing as of today.

2 The next thing is around collaboration and
3 collegiately. We should work together. We should
4 not compete with one another because we are our
5 greatest resources. Everything that we need to
6 change this district is in this district. It's
7 right here. The resources we have available for
8 classroom teachers, for students, for faculty, for
9 staff, for families, community, everything we need
10 is right here.

11 The next couple pieces are around
12 communication. One of the things that I have
13 expectation about is about following the chain of
14 command. And I reach out to parents and community
15 members, if you have issues, work with the chain of
16 command. Same as what we would do if we have issues
17 in organization because high quality education has a
18 system and processes and procedures in place to
19 ensure that the organization runs efficiently and
20 effectively. That's what we need to start doing.

21 I talk many, many times with my faculty and
22 staff and my central office staff members, is that
23 there are things that we do as an organization and
24 there are things that we don't do as an organization
25 and we have to start working well together.

1 The last couple things I want to talk about
2 is trust and respect. Trust is something that we
3 earn through our actions every day, every time,
4 every action reveals who we are. So we have to
5 ensure that we do everything we can to take care of
6 our kids.

7 The last piece I want to talk about is follow
8 up and follow through. If there's one thing that
9 you should expect from us differently, more than
10 anything, is our ability to follow up and follow
11 through with the things you're asking us to do.
12 That, in and of itself, when it happens over and
13 over again, it breaks trust. It all of sudden
14 creates a sense of they're no longer going to deal
15 with us. So we have to work on the follow up and
16 follow through.

17 So those expectations that I have in the
18 organization are expectations that you should have
19 of me and for all of us. Fair enough?

20 Okay. Here is how accreditation works, those
21 of you that have been through this PowerPoint
22 before, I'm going to do it because my message is
23 going to stay the same over and over again. So
24 let's talk about how we get here.

25 The accreditation process really is like a

1 grade card. It's like a report card that each
2 district gets in the State of Missouri. There are
3 five different standards and there are four separate
4 accreditation status. The first one is accredited
5 with distinction. The next one is fully accredited.
6 The next level is provisional accredited and the
7 last level is unaccredited.

8 You will notice on the board that 0 to 69
9 points is the unaccredited range. As a district, in
10 our last report card, we actually scored 40 points,
11 which was two points better than 2012, in which we
12 scored 38. You'll notice the range 0 to 69, 70 to
13 97, 98 to 125 and 126 to 140. So does everybody
14 understand where the points come from? 140 points
15 possible. It's almost like taking a test of 140
16 points.

17 So let's take a look at each of those five
18 standards. The first one is around performance.
19 Now MSIP5 moved from some resource and some check
20 item list opportunities to really about how are our
21 kids performing. That's a higher level of
22 complexity, a higher level of rigor to require our
23 students to perform.

24 So the first piece is around student
25 performance and there are 56 points possible in four

1 content areas. You'll notice English, language
2 arts, math, science and social studies is only worth
3 8 points because we only administer that at the high
4 school.

5 Standard No. 2, it's worth 14 points. This
6 is called the super subgroup. The super subgroup
7 was a new item added to MSIP5 because prior to that,
8 the students that -- for example, let's say Scott
9 Spurgeon is an English language learner, an IEP
10 student and I'm free-reduced lunch. My scores would
11 have counted for report card purposes those three
12 times plus total, so that student could have helped
13 you or hurt you on four separate occasions. Make
14 sense?

15 Now, with MSIP5 they created what they call a
16 super subgroup, which means all of those students
17 are encapsulated within one cell. Now, that's a
18 positive and/or could be negative for some districts
19 because, quite honestly, we are the super subgroup.
20 So if we do well, then we get points in both areas.
21 If we don't do well, we don't do well in both areas.
22 Other districts have the opportunity to not do well
23 in one and yet still make progress with those super
24 subgroup areas.

25 Here's how the MPI are calculated. This is

1 how we actually get points in Standard No. 1. On
2 the MAP test -- heard of the MAP, raise your hand,
3 say yes?

4 AUDIENCE: Yes.

5 SUPERINTENDENT SPURGEON: End of course
6 exams. Every year our students in grades three
7 through high school are required to take these
8 tests. So for every student that scores a specific
9 achievement level on the exam, they're actually
10 counted in one of those four categories. So every
11 student that scores below basic, that number of
12 students is multiplied by one. So for every student
13 that scores in the basic area, that number is
14 multiplied by three. Every proficient score by four
15 and every advanced score by five.

16 Let's take a look at a scenario. Here's one
17 example: If we have 100 students that took the MAP
18 and EOCs, we have 25 students score in each of the
19 four achievement level categories. Twenty-five
20 times one below basic, 25 points. Twenty-five times
21 three, 75. Twenty-five times four, 100 and so
22 forth.

23 At the very bottom you'll see an MPI score of
24 what's called 325. If every single student in our
25 district was basic, that MPI score would be 300. If

1 every student was proficient, that score would be
2 400. If every student was advanced that score would
3 be 500.

4 So what does that mean? If every student in
5 our district is basic, that's a 300-point MPI. Make
6 sense?

7 Let's take a look at what would happen if you
8 took 20 of those students from the basic area and
9 moved them into proficient. Just simply by moving
10 20 students from basic to proficient takes the MPI
11 score from 325 up 20 points to 345. Sounds pretty
12 good, right?

13 Let's take a look at another scenario. What
14 if we took those same 20 students and moved them
15 from below basic to the basic category. It takes us
16 from a 325 MPI score down to a 365. You know why
17 that is? If you remember, below basic times one,
18 basic kids are times three. It's a double bump
19 every time we move one of our below basic kids into
20 the basic category and above.

21 So what's my point? No below basic kids.
22 Why? Because I think we do an injustice and a
23 disservice to kids if we don't ensure that they are
24 at least basic MPI and beyond. Simple enough?

25 Standard No. 3, and, again, I'll look at this

1 list real quick, Standard No. 3 is around college
2 and career readiness. Standard one through three is
3 about how kids do on the ACT, the SAT, the COMPASS
4 test and the military ASVAB. Our kids can get
5 points towards our grade card or report card just by
6 simply taking the test but that's not good enough.
7 We have not done an adequate job of preparing our
8 students for those college and career readiness
9 tests but we're doing better and we're making a
10 difference and I could show you on paper and we'll
11 have some more scores probably by the end of the
12 semester.

13 Standard No. 4 is around how kids do on their
14 AP exams, how they do on the International
15 Baccalaureate program, how they do in the dual
16 credit courses that they take and how they do on the
17 Technical Skills Assessment in their college and
18 career and technical education classes. Again,
19 these are all assessments which kids have to score
20 at a certain range to be able to be accounted
21 towards our accreditation process.

22 And then the last one is five through six,
23 tests what do our kids do when they leave high
24 school. Do they go onto college, two-year college
25 and technical school? Do they go onto universities?

1 Do they go onto the military? Or are they working
2 in a career related to the training which they
3 received when they left our school?

4 So we have to keep track of that and that's a
5 complicated issue because we have kids sometimes
6 that leave us and we can't find them. And, so what
7 we're asking you to do as parents, is if you know
8 and you can help us, whenever students graduate from
9 our high school, if we have to receive some help, do
10 that for us because every time we can't find a
11 student that graduates, that counts against us.

12 Fair enough?

13 AUDIENCE: Yes.

14 SUPERINTENDENT SPURGEON: Okay. In the
15 performance area around attendance, this changed in
16 MSIP5 as well. It used to be we actually got to
17 count the total number of hours possible divided by
18 the total number of hours that our kids attended.

19 So if we have a number of students that came all the
20 time, their high attendance always offset those kids
21 that chose not to come to school very often. In
22 MSIP5 now we're graded on the fact that 90 percent
23 of our kids have to attend 90 percent of time. Now,
24 could that be an issue for us?

25 AUDIENCE: Yes.

1 SUPERINTENDENT SPURGEON: Absolutely.

2 But can it be corrected?

3 AUDIENCE: Yes.

4 SUPERINTENDENT SPURGEON: Absolutely.

5 It's a cultural change. It means that every single
6 person in this room that has children that attend
7 this district, you have to make sure they get out of
8 bed. You got to get them up. You got to make sure
9 they get here. Even on those days when they're like
10 oh, my gosh -- (applause from audience) -- because
11 it makes a difference. Not only because it makes a
12 difference for our accreditation process, it makes a
13 difference because every time your child misses a
14 day it causes a classroom teacher to pull that
15 attention away from the rest of the class and have
16 to make sure to meet the individual needs of that
17 child and make that effort.

18 Not that that's not doable because we do it
19 every single day, I'm just simply saying every day
20 they're here makes it easier to take those kids to
21 higher levels of rigor and to more places they would
22 like to go.

23 The last one around is graduation rate. Not
24 only do we get to count the four years, we get to
25 count the five-year, six-year and next year we get

1 to count the seven-year graduation rate. Now, what
2 we're trying to do is we're trying to make sure that
3 even some of those students that dropped out last
4 year, two years ago, we're trying to provide some
5 extra credit support so that they can actually
6 graduate or provide some alternative program so
7 those kids can actually get a diploma. So
8 graduation rate matters.

9 So here's how it works. If every single
10 person in this room was a ninth grader starting this
11 year, you could be our graduation cohort. So for
12 every one of you that leave this cohort, if we don't
13 know where you go, you're a drop out. If we can
14 determine where you go, then we're able to say that
15 you are a transfer out. Because we get kids that
16 come in. We get kids that come out.

17 What hurts us is the fact that we can't find
18 some of you. We don't get records requests. We
19 don't know what phone calls to make. We don't know
20 who to contact. And every time we can't find you,
21 that takes our numerator and keeps it at a point
22 where we can't really make the difference up because
23 we have a numerator that's too high. So you can
24 help us by ensuring that if you move your child out
25 of the District or you know someone who does, make

1 sure we can find them because it help us out
2 tremendously.

3 Okay. We talked about our scores. Forty
4 this year and 38 last year. Let's take a look at
5 some projections. I don't know if you see this but
6 I want to talk through this just real quick. You
7 will notice at the top our score this past year for
8 communication art was 268.7. An MPI of 268.7. We
9 just talked about if everybody was basic that MPI
10 score would be 300. So you see a projection up
11 there. If we, as a district, bring a 291.2 -- which
12 we know that 300 is basic, right -- is that doable?

13 AUDIENCE: Yes.

14 SUPERINTENDENT SPURGEON: Absolutely.
15 By doing that, that's a 5 percent increase over the
16 average of year one and two and that brings us 12
17 progress points towards the accreditation process.

18 Here's the one I want to mention: Progress
19 points only give us those points for a year. And
20 that's what hurts us as a district because when we
21 are at the floor, the only points we can access are
22 the points for progress and so we not only have to
23 do well, we have to continue to do well. But once
24 you get the system in place and the balls rolling,
25 things begin to change and kids begin to get more

1 and more a sense of confidence.

2 Look at the MAP score. Last year you see we
3 brought a 251. This year I'm asking for a 269.4.
4 Is that doable?

5 AUDIENCE: Yes.

6 SUPERINTENDENT SPURGEON: Absolutely it
7 is. Remember 300 is when all of our kids are basic.
8 Now, again, you can look down through there. And,
9 again, I'm short for time so you didn't get a chance
10 to see that but those are the projections. That's
11 the hope that we have in this district because at
12 this time everything you see on that board is
13 absolutely doable. Okay. All right.

14 Here's what we're doing to restore some of
15 our -- to restore our accreditation. First and
16 foremost, I want to mention this: In order for a
17 person to turn our system around, you have to leave
18 the politics, you got to leave the egos at the door.

19 We have a tremendous amount of work to do and
20 what we don't need is to cloud that work and those
21 efforts with red tape and having to be beholden to
22 people because other people have different
23 interests. I'm not trying to be disrespectful. I'm
24 just telling you like it is. We have got to ensure
25 that we leave the politics and the egos at the door

1 because our kids matter.

2 We talked a little bit about customer service
3 and I'm not going to reiterate that. I just want to
4 simply say our change in philosophy around customer
5 service is you are a part of our family and we
6 should treat you as such. If it takes us an extra
7 30 seconds or an extra minute or two to make sure
8 that you're well taken care of, we need to do that,
9 every time, all the time, every day.

10 The next piece is around a reduction of
11 discipline. It's a focus area for us. One of the
12 things that I've noticed just starting this first
13 three months, we're trying to reduce discipline.
14 We're coming off of a system that has been
15 unaccredited since 2007 and there may have been some
16 of you that woke up every morning thinking is there
17 really a reason why I should come to work? Amen?

18 AUDIENCE: Amen.

19 SUPERINTENDENT SPURGEON: Okay. All
20 right. I'm just making sure I'm talking to the
21 right people.

22 But what I'm saying is you have to move from
23 a culture of looking for reasons to get kids out of
24 your classrooms and out of school to I'm going to
25 take the extra time and the extra effort to reach

1 out and establish a relationship because I can tell
2 you doing it the hard way is lasting. Doing it the
3 other way is frustrating and it never ends.

4 Okay. The next piece I want to talk about is
5 eliminating inconsistencies. If we can do one thing
6 in this district to turn it around as quickly as
7 possible is to eliminate the inconsistencies across
8 the system.

9 Now, for example, the most money that we get,
10 the programs that we do participate in, I love that
11 because it provides resources. However, in the
12 past, it has created factions. It has created
13 inconsistencies because I have two schools doing
14 this. I got three schools doing that. I got four
15 schools doing this. And then when they get together
16 to have a conversation what in the world do you talk
17 about? See my point. What in the world do you talk
18 about?

19 So we have to eliminate the inconsistencies
20 for making ourselves better at being communicators.
21 Eliminate those. Do the things that you know you
22 can do well. We're not starting new programs, new
23 services. We don't need new programs and services.
24 We need people to get it done.

25 Last thing I want to talk about here real

1 quick is building student confidence and efficacy.
2 It's amazing what happens, even with adults, that
3 when you get success it builds confidence. It
4 builds success. It builds confidence.

5 When I came into this district the first
6 three weeks of school, A, number one, I saw a number
7 of our kids sitting straight with their heads down
8 and no smiles on their faces, really anticipating it
9 was going to be something like they had experienced
10 in the past. But I can tell you and you know I'm in
11 your classrooms, our kids are smiling. They're
12 acting. They're learning. Things are changing and
13 I have to say thank you for that.

14 The last piece I want to talk about is when
15 we talk about putting systems in place, sometimes we
16 are our own worst enemy. We want to improve
17 attendance and yet there's a state law that requires
18 all of our students to have the appropriate
19 immunizations by this period of time in September or
20 we have to send them home. Well, what happens if we
21 have parents that don't have access to resources or
22 a way to get their kids there? Why can't we do
23 something different?

24 So, here's what we did. Why would I want to
25 send 250 students home and then some of them stay

1 home for weeks on end and we think we're going to
2 improve our attendance by doing that? So I asked
3 Ms. Bosley (ph) to contact some of our area medical
4 organizations and we now have those immunizations
5 set up inside of our schools. We're busing kids
6 over to get them. Why can't we do things
7 differently?

8 But the first time that we sit back and say
9 oh, that's not going to work -- really? Anything
10 can work if you have the right people and the right
11 mindset. Anything.

12 The next piece is around we used to not let
13 kids get on the bus because they didn't have their
14 IDs. Not doing that anymore. Why would we do that?
15 I understand the safety factor. I understand that.
16 So we decided to think differently. So now we let
17 the kids get on the bus because the bus driver knows
18 who they are and we drop them off at the security
19 office when they get to school to verify they're a
20 student at Riverview Gardens High School.

21 Guess what, if we don't let them get on the
22 bus, guess where they go. They go back home again.
23 Guess where they don't go. School. So if we want
24 to improve attendance we have to stop failing
25 ourselves as a system.

1 Okay. Non-negotiable. Really quick, these
2 are my non-negotiables and I think many of you know
3 these. Everything is around literacy. Literacy is
4 our leverage. When I first came into the District,
5 the first three weeks of school I was in almost
6 every single classroom. I didn't see a book in a
7 kid's hand open anywhere. And so what did I say?
8 Stop, we're not going to do this anymore. I want a
9 book in every child's hand, reading every day, every
10 night, 20 to 30 minutes. Every day, every night.
11 Do I see that now in every building? Absolutely.
12 It's a non-negotiable. It's going to happen because
13 the only way you become a better reader you have to
14 --

15 AUDIENCE: Read.

16 SUPERINTENDENT SPURGEON: -- read. But
17 if you don't have a book, what do you do? Nothing.

18 We're also -- the librarians are helping me
19 out now because you know there's that philosophy I'm
20 going to get in trouble if I check the books out to
21 kids and if they don't bring the books back they
22 have library fines. Not doing that anymore. Get a
23 book in a kid's hand. I don't care. We have kids
24 that show up at our libraries that are taking our
25 books because they don't have any. Should they be

1 doing that? No.

2 So guess what, we're going to check a book
3 out to every kid who wants a book. You know why?
4 Because you got to change the system. You have to
5 think differently because if you don't do that, if
6 you don't change something -- we have to be the
7 adults. If we want the children not to take the
8 books and return the books they have to love them
9 and to love them you have to have them. So we have
10 to do something different or we're just going to
11 continue to keep shooting ourselves in the foot.

12 Okay. Ongoing professional development,
13 these are things that we're working on, Marzano's
14 strategy, the PLC process because the PLC process is
15 extremely important to us because it's when the
16 actual true learning of adults take place. And we
17 know that process is an ongoing piece.

18 The big process we're working on now is what
19 data? And I know that as an organization --
20 teachers, I'm telling you I know that's always the
21 big question is what data and so we're going to have
22 to start working. We're actually talking about what
23 data we want to look at every single year and the
24 PLC process and I get that.

25 We're also working in the PLC, the Missouri

1 Reading Initiative is new for us. It's helping
2 teachers teach reading and we think it's going to be
3 a real strong process for us in the future.

4 District finances real quick. We started
5 this year in '13, '14 and had about a \$5 1/2 million
6 deficit budget on purpose because we added some
7 extra funds for technology and for facilities. From
8 here we're looking at making some budget reductions
9 away from the classroom.

10 On Tuesday the 26th -- and you know what I'm
11 talking about as far as staff is concerned, I'm
12 doing my best to try to hold off on that piece and
13 do our reductions outside the classroom and then
14 we'll right size as we move forward in the
15 springtime through attrition and those who choose to
16 retire leave.

17 So we're going to do our best to try to stay
18 away from the classroom as much as possible. So
19 we're going to make some recommendations coming up
20 on Tuesday that are going to be, you know, several
21 million dollars for us to be able to save for this
22 year and also begin saving for next year. But that
23 will be the first round that we'll have as far as
24 reductions. The next round of reductions will come
25 probably in the springtime.

1 Okay. The last thing I want to look at real
2 quick is some improvement areas. We focused on our
3 attendance. For August and September we only had
4 one school that didn't improve. Eleven out of 12
5 schools overall attendance improved for August and
6 September. In October, the last month, every school
7 increased overall attendance for the month of
8 October.

9 For discipline, and you know we're working on
10 that. We're changing to a culture of relationships
11 and often times that tends to produce a little gray
12 area because we're trying to transition into that
13 relationship.

14 Up to date, the last three months, every
15 single month: August, September, October, our
16 disciplinary referrals were down and in one month
17 significantly. So, to date, first three months we
18 had 1,992 less disciplinary referrals than we had at
19 this time last year, so I say thank you.

20 The last piece I want to talk about real
21 quick is this is some elementary reading data. It's
22 our Fountas & Pinnell reading assessment which gives
23 kids their levels of reading and it tells the
24 percent of students that are proficient and/or on
25 grade level.

1 Now, you can compare that across the May
2 administration, first grade to first grade, but I
3 tend to look at the first graders in May to the
4 second graders in September/October.

5 Now, we didn't see much growth from fourth
6 grade to fifth grade, I get that but we're going to
7 work on that. Again, I'm looking for the positive
8 because what we're doing right now is a
9 non-negotiable, getting our kids to improve their
10 literacy. I'm trying to get some positive
11 information because we have teachers that are
12 working hard and are working smart and I say thank
13 you for this information.

14 Last thing I want to leave you with is a
15 quote by Thomas Edison. It says, "Many of life's
16 failures are people who didn't realize how closely
17 they were to success when they gave up." That is
18 Riverview Gardens School District.

19 I'm telling you it's possible and it's going
20 to happen. So all I'm saying is you've got to keep
21 fighting the fight. You've got to stay disciplined.
22 You have got to stay focused every day. You can't
23 quit. You can't give up. You got to keep moving
24 forward. With that being said, thank you for being
25 here tonight. I appreciate you so much.

1 MS. VANDEVEN: Thank you very much,
2 Dr. Spurgeon. We are now going to move into the
3 public comment period for the evening. I would just
4 like to run through some of the procedures so we can
5 help this go as smoothly as possible.

6 If you have not yet turned in your yellow
7 cards, if you wish to be a speaker and you have not
8 yet turned them in, please raise your hands now so
9 we can make sure we get them submitted into the
10 basket. If your name is called, we'll ask you to
11 proceed immediately to either of the two
12 microphones. There are microphones located on each
13 side, so proceed immediately to the microphone in
14 front of the room.

15 Each speaker will be limited to five minutes.
16 We will have time keepers, Dr. Ricker,
17 Dr. Clancy-May, they will be holding the time cards
18 and they will be raising them when you have one
19 minute left and then when your final minute has
20 expired they will thank you and we ask you to move
21 on to the next speaker.

22 Audience members are asked to permit each
23 speaker to present without interruption. Applause
24 or other distractions during the speaker's
25 presentation will be counted as part of the

1 speaker's time. And any speaker who runs out of
2 time will be invited to discontinue and submit
3 comments in writing or to the email address that I
4 will provide.

5 The final speaker will be called up no later
6 than 7:50 this evening to allow for their full five
7 minutes of comment and any closing remarks that we
8 may have. And I would also like to announce that
9 all comments, verbal and written, become a part of
10 public record and may be posted on the department's
11 website verbatim.

12 So with that, we'll go ahead and begin. We
13 have our student willing to draw some names for us.
14 We're going to start with two names. The first is
15 Caron Burress and then the second is -- on deck
16 we'll have Kelly Gerstner. Is Kelly here? Do we --
17 we have all the yellow cards, right? Okay. Thanks.

18 MS. BURRESS: Hi. Am I on? Hi,
19 everyone. My name is Caron Burress. I have been
20 here for approximately three and a half years. I
21 came from Union, Missouri, out in the country, all
22 the way to St. Peters, all the way here to the inner
23 city and now I'm currently here at the Riverview
24 School District.

25 I have been in every center and every culture

1 that there is. My children has ranged from -- I
2 have six children. So I have been here for three
3 and a half years and I have been in the elementary
4 school, the middle school and the high school.

5 The problems that I have seen is, of course,
6 a lack of adult participation, which is given, PTA
7 meetings, whatnot. I have also seen after school
8 programs, which my children have attended, that did
9 not work. I have seen a lot of things that should
10 have been good that has not been good.

11 What I come to realize with me going and
12 volunteering my time at the middle school and going
13 to the high school and checking up on my children --
14 and my children are not the perfect children in this
15 school district by far, but what I have found is
16 that a lot of these kids are really stressed from
17 the time they get up in the morning, they get on the
18 bus, they get on the school bus, they're getting
19 yelled at. They don't have nowhere to decompress.

20 So the issue that I found is stress. I went
21 to my child's fourth grade class room and there's a
22 little girl that was sitting in the closet. And I
23 walked in and I said why are you in the closet? She
24 said I'm bad. I said, well, do you feel that you're
25 bad? She said no. I said, well, I'll be back

1 tomorrow to check on you. The next day I came in
2 and she's still in the closet. I was like why are
3 you in the closet? Because I'm really restless. I
4 can't sit still. The teacher gets mad because she
5 gets distracted when she teaches. So, I, again,
6 asked her, do you feel that you're being a
7 distraction and she's like no. And I said, well,
8 I'll be back the next day.

9 Well, meanwhile, my child is getting in
10 trouble and getting wrote-up for walking around the
11 classroom, not sitting down and being still. So
12 after going every day or sending notes, trying to
13 find out was my child acting up for real or is there
14 an issue with the teacher, the issue wasn't with the
15 teacher. The teacher was stressed. The kids were
16 stressed. She didn't have nobody to turn to, the
17 faculty. The kids couldn't talk to anybody because
18 they were getting yelled at and getting in trouble
19 because they're getting in trouble.

20 So after me being there and just writing
21 notes back and forth to this one child and being
22 there for her, it turned her world around because
23 the teacher was acting up, there was two kids that
24 were going hey, the teacher ain't treating us right.
25 So instead of me going oh, my poor child, I had

1 somebody else that was saying hey, the teacher is
2 really not teaching this kid right or this kid is
3 acting up.

4 So I have come up with the idea called "P.S.
5 because I care." If one of us, that has a child in
6 a classroom, simply takes the time to go in and
7 befriend another child or one of your child's
8 friends and constantly sends notes and that
9 encourages that one child that they are -- they can
10 be a success, it would make all the difference in
11 the world and it doesn't cost a dime. And because
12 of that, that child has gone to the middle school,
13 her grades have gone up, her self esteem has gone up.
14 I met the child's mother and I'm like, you know, why
15 is the mother not around in all these meetings and
16 PTA and whatnot. The mother had too much of a
17 burden. She had nine kids. So this child was
18 stressed.

19 Another problem that I'm seeing, other than
20 that, is these kids don't have playgrounds, P.E.,
21 music, art, every day, every moment of the day. How
22 many of you here can go to work and sit in your
23 chair and not go outside and smoke a cigarette? How
24 many of you can't go outside and get fresh air
25 during the day? Well, this is what's happening to

1 our kids.

2 My child is currently in the middle school.

3 I have been told -- I have been told that -- that

4 has P.E. only once a time or semester. That has

5 become a problem because he's restless. He needs to

6 get out his energy. So I ask all of you to take the

7 time to look into your child's classroom and see

8 what you can do to de-stress your child and make a

9 difference because it's about your kids. This is

10 not about the politics or the numbers. It's about

11 we are all stressed, come up with a solution because

12 I have, "P.S. because I care."

13 MS. VANDEVEN: Next we'll hear from

14 Kelly Gerstner and then on deck De Anne Toussaint.

15 Okay.

16 MS. GERSTNER: Good evening. My name is

17 Kelly Gerstner. I have been a teacher in the

18 Riverview Gardens School District for seven and a

19 half years. In that time I have worked along side

20 talented and dedicated educators, teachers with

21 decades of experience with the wealth of knowledge

22 that goes along with it and new teachers with

23 incredible energy and creative ideas. These men and

24 women are not only experts in science, math,

25 literature, art, and health, they are experts in

1 education in the science of learning and the art of
2 engaging young minds.

3 As lifelong learners we have advanced
4 degrees. We attend workshops, seminars, and
5 training to make sure that if there's a more
6 effective way to do something, we know about it.

7 We are highly qualified education
8 professionals. We are in the classroom each day
9 making great strides with our students. We know how
10 they learn and we know what most engages them. We
11 diligently differentiate to ensure sure that each
12 child is met on his or her level and given the tools
13 to rise to the next level. However, we have been
14 largely left out of decisions regarding their
15 instruction and assessment.

16 I think we can all agree that there are
17 easier jobs than education. Certainly there are
18 jobs with better pay. There are even districts in
19 which the job might not be quite as challenging as
20 it is here. However, as talented and dedicated
21 educational experts, we have chosen to make our
22 careers here in Riverview for one simple reason: We
23 care about this community and these students.

24 We come early and we stay late. We sponsor
25 clubs and activities to enrich our students lives

1 outside the classroom. We tutor before and after
2 school so that students receive the extra help they
3 need. We spend hours and hours analyzing data to
4 identify our students' strengths so we can use those
5 strengths to improve their areas of need.

6 Throughout the turmoil of the last several
7 years we could have sought employment opportunities
8 elsewhere but we are still here because we care
9 about this community and these students. Because we
10 believe together we have what it takes to succeed.

11 So, with all that said, I suppose I have two
12 questions. When will you start trusting the
13 teachers as educational professionals and
14 collaborate with us for student success? And who
15 can reach our students more effectively than those
16 of us who have dedicated our careers to doing so?

17 MS. VANDEVEN: Thank you. We'll next
18 hear from De Anne Toussaint and our -- we got two of
19 them. It's your lucky night. You should play the
20 lottery. You got two names pulled in a row. Okay.
21 Theresa Beck, you're on next.

22 MS. TOUSSAINT: Hi, my name is De Anne
23 Toussaint and I have been living in Riverview
24 Gardens School District since 1973. I graduated
25 from Riverview Gardens Senior High School in '86,

1 when this was still a good school district. I have
2 been watching Riverview gradually decline since the
3 late 80s. My two older daughters are 24 and 20 and
4 I was able to mostly keep them out of Riverview
5 schools by homeschooling and private schools.

6 The younger of the two is a social butterfly,
7 so she decided that she didn't want to homeschool
8 anymore, so I placed her in the Riverview School
9 District from grade 4 through 12.

10 I knew she wasn't getting properly educated
11 but it wasn't until she got to college that she
12 realized how poor of an education she had actually
13 received. She really struggled her first year to a
14 point where she didn't want to continue with school.
15 But, with a lot of encouragement, she decided to
16 continue. Every day is a struggle but she refused
17 to quit.

18 I also have two younger children in the third
19 grade in Ferguson/Florissant School District. I
20 managed to homeschool them as well until the middle
21 of last school year when I made the decision to go
22 back to school full-time to become a teacher. This
23 is when I was forced to put them in the Lewis &
24 Clark Elementary School in Riverview.

25 Our experience there was every parents'

1 nightmare. In the four short months that my
2 children were there my son had a bookbag thrown at
3 his face and my daughter was viscously attacked by a
4 fourth grader, a fourth grade student in the
5 lunchroom. She was strangled to the point of
6 leaving a red ring around her neck.

7 The last straw for me was at the end of the
8 school year when several girls were antagonizing my
9 daughter on the jungle gym and she was trying to get
10 away. She fell and fully blacked out -- in a fully
11 blacked-out concussion. The school did not contact
12 me -- I'm sorry -- the school did contact but made
13 it seem like it was no big deal. It wasn't until I
14 went to pick my daughter up when I found out what
15 really happened. I immediately rushed my daughter
16 to the emergency room for a CAT scan.

17 In each of these instances my action -- no
18 action was taken towards the bullies. Every day my
19 children were afraid of being in school and every
20 day I worried about their safety. It got to the
21 point where I started to train my children in
22 martial arts. My children are not violent, so this
23 was very foreign and a traumatic experience for them
24 to have to go through.

25 The transfer program could not have come at a

1 better time. My children are the happiest I have
2 ever seen them in their new school. There is a zero
3 tolerance bullying policy and the staff and
4 administration have been extremely welcoming. When
5 I drop my children off they are greeted with smiles
6 from the staff members every morning. They have a
7 lot of friends and they are now behaving like
8 children. It makes me smile.

9 My jaw dropped when I saw that they are able
10 to bring home their textbooks for studying. The
11 difference in our current educational experience
12 versus our previous experience is like night and
13 day. I can now send my children to school without
14 the constant worry.

15 I am here today to tell the Department of
16 Education and Secondary Education how crucial the
17 transfer program is for our children. No child
18 should ever have to go to school in fear of their
19 lives, nor any parent worry day in and day out about
20 the basic safety of their children. Until Riverview
21 Gardens can provide a safe learning environment, it
22 would be criminal to discontinue the transfer
23 program. Thank you.

24 MS. VANDEVEN: Thank you. Theresa Beck
25 is our next speaker and then Pamela Fountain is on

1 deck.

2 MS. BECK: Good evening. I would like
3 to first preface what I have to say with my
4 colleagues would stand behind me when I say I am
5 here for the children and have been here for the
6 children for my entire career.

7 With that in mind, my name is Theresa Beck
8 and I have spent the past 28 years teaching here at
9 Riverview Gardens. I am a proud graduate of
10 Riverview Gardens Class of 1981. Through the years
11 I have embraced challenges before me and have held
12 myself to the highest standards, which brings me to
13 my comments.

14 Three years ago the State of Missouri, in
15 particular, the Department of Elementary and
16 Secondary Education and the commissioner of
17 education, took over this district. In the news you
18 keep hearing how Riverview Gardens is failing.
19 Well, if we're failing, so are they.

20 Throughout this entire take-over period the
21 State has failed to present a well-thought-out plan
22 with the proper accountable course of processes and
23 procedures put in place to hold all parties
24 accountable for their actions. Who is holding us
25 accountable? Who is holding the commissioner of

1 education accountable? Because we know we care
2 about the kids. We come every day for these kids.

3 Three years ago the State had the prime
4 opportunity to create real educational reform, to
5 create a system where a child's self worth is not
6 based on how they score on a test and a teacher is
7 not forced to teach to a test. A system where
8 parents, administrators, committee members,
9 teachers, students collaborate in good faith to make
10 decisions that are in the best interest of the
11 children. A system where teachers have a real voice
12 and are empowered to spend more time teaching and
13 less time assessing and collecting data. A system
14 where we educate the whole child and prepare them
15 for a successful future.

16 So today I challenge DESE and Dr. Nicastro to
17 embrace the opportunity to fix the mistakes, to
18 formulate a plan that results in real authentic
19 change, where everyone involved is held to the
20 highest standards of accountability. Most
21 importantly, a plan that puts a child's best
22 interest first.

23 In conclusion, I challenge you to save this
24 community and future communities. So I ask you now
25 to stand up for our kids.

1 MS. VANDEVEN: Thank you. Next we'll
2 hear from Pamela Fountain and then on deck we have
3 Joseph Anderson.

4 MS. FOUNTAIN: Greetings on behalf of
5 the Riverview Gardens educator, my name is Pamela
6 Fountain. One of the things that we are requesting
7 is more parental involvement. When we talk about
8 looking at the whole child -- the whole child needs,
9 parents -- and the parent may be grandma, grandpa,
10 mom, dad, uncle or aunt -- we need you to get
11 involved.

12 The involvement piece often time we see the
13 kids that are in our sanctuary right now, are the
14 kids whose parents we often see. And every child,
15 no matter if you're an average or below-average
16 child, parents need to be involved. The goal, as
17 the superintendent has spelled out for us this
18 evening, is that in order for us to move students
19 from below-basic to basic to proficient and
20 advanced, that means all of us need to operate
21 100 percent.

22 Our educators here at Riverview Gardens and
23 the Riverview Gardens School District are greatly
24 involved. We are involved in so many facets. We
25 offer after school tutorial to meet the education

1 needs of our students. We make sure that we expose
2 our students for an opportunity to compete with
3 other school districts, other states and other
4 school districts and even to compete on an
5 international level. That takes a rigorous,
6 relevant and engaging curriculum led and facilitated
7 by educators that are in this room.

8 We operate and we implement a planning system
9 to design to allow input from everyone. Granted,
10 you make the choice, you make the decision. In my
11 opinion, this entire auditorium should be filled
12 considering the other night when Dr. Art McCoy was
13 in question you couldn't get a parking space. I had
14 to walk almost a mile to the facility.

15 Parental involvement, that simply just
16 doesn't mean the parents, it's also those taxpayers
17 who are business owners in this community.
18 Politicians, we need you to make sure you speak to
19 your constituents so they can be out there in
20 support because their tax dollars are paying to send
21 kids elsewhere. The same education that they can
22 receive in another school district, is the same
23 education that they can receive here. The same
24 standards were set by the State of Missouri -- and I
25 will focus on career and technical education -- are

1 the same standards that are set in Pattonville, in
2 Fort Zumwalt, in Rockwood, in Mehlville.

3 I don't care what school district, if you are
4 operating under the eyes and you're dancing to the
5 music that the State has decided to play as related
6 to MSIP4, MSIP5, we are all dancing to the same
7 music. And that's the music of accreditation --
8 accreditation, I stand to be corrected and we're
9 moving forward. We operate under the same
10 curriculum.

11 With that being said, I challenge the
12 educators in other school districts to come and work
13 with the students that we have consistently because
14 when Johnny comes to school and he didn't have a
15 meal, we provide crackers and other resources to
16 make sure that Johnny can stay focused so he can
17 meet his academic needs or his learning targets for
18 that particular day.

19 So instruction is number one on our plate.
20 We understand that you have to have the meats, the
21 vegetables and the potatoes and guess what, we go
22 the extra mile to make sure you have dessert.

23 We offer professional development that meets
24 every needs, from Marzano's to making sure that we
25 offer exciting opportunities for kids to build their

1 vocabulary because you know when you're taking the
2 ACT you must have advanced vocabulary.

3 Equipment, we are working to make progress
4 and making sure that we offer quality equipment that
5 meets the standards.

6 In addition, student involvement. We have
7 some wonderful organizations on our campus and our
8 students are involved. We want more. We want
9 100 percent. Just like we want 100 percent of our
10 students in college, earning degrees for the future
11 so they can be change agents and leaders.

12 But, most importantly, parents, we need you
13 to be involved. We need your support to make it
14 happen.

15 MS. VANDEVEN: Thank you. Next we have
16 Joseph Anderson followed by Felicia McGee.

17 MR. ANDERSON: Good evening. As
18 mentioned, my name is Joseph Anderson. I have the
19 distinct honor and pleasure to serve as president of
20 100 Black Men of Metropolitan St. Louis.

21 First of all, let me say that 100 supports
22 the maintenance and rejuvenation of the Riverview
23 Gardens School District. We applaud the new and
24 creative processes around discipline and learning
25 that Superintendent Scott Spurgeon has put in place.

1 We believe that all kids have talents and abilities
2 and so we believe the Riverview Gardens School
3 District is in a transition. A transition from how
4 teaching and learning used to be to how teaching and
5 learning will be in the future. It takes patience,
6 focus, and finances to make it through this
7 transition. We also know that transition means
8 change. And change can be painful but change occurs
9 at the top.

10 So my question is: What changes are the
11 school board and the Department of Secondary
12 Education doing to ensuring that Riverview Gardens
13 School District can be reaccredited and so these
14 kids can get a quality education?

15 MS. VANDEVEN: Thank you. Next we'll
16 hear from Felicia McGee followed by Justin Dixon.

17 MS. MCGEE: Good evening, everybody. My
18 name is Felicia McGee and I am a proud parent of
19 Riverview Gardens School District. I have two boys
20 in the District and we came from Catholic school, so
21 you know they were pretty smart when they got here.
22 I'm just being honest with you but they are both on
23 honor roll and we're at the high school and I'm
24 proud to be there.

25 It has not always been easy but as a parent,

1 if you want change you have to get off the couch and
2 make it happen. You cannot -- you cannot come out
3 and say hey, this happened to me here, this happened
4 to me there and we have never seen you. We don't
5 know who you are because they can't help you if you
6 don't come out and say hey, I have this problem.

7 And you must follow the chain of command.
8 You can't just go straight to central office and you
9 didn't talk the to the principal of the building.
10 Give them the opportunity to make it happen for you.
11 And then if that doesn't happen, then walk the walk.
12 But I am proud of what my kids are doing in this
13 district.

14 Small story, my youngest son, straight A's
15 and he's proud to show it to me every day. Ms.
16 Spowson (ph) is one of his teachers.

17 That's all I kind of want to say. I don't
18 have a long speech. I just wanted you to know that
19 I'm in support of this district. I want to know
20 what you all are going to do to help us help
21 ourselves and please don't take our school from us.

22 MS. VANDEVEN: Thank you. Next we'll
23 hear from Justin Dixon followed by Shavonda Long.

24 MR. DIXON: Good evening. My name is
25 Justin Dixon. I consider it an honor and a

1 privilege to teach eighth grade English language
2 arts at Central Middle School here in Riverview
3 Gardens.

4 Although, I have only been in this district
5 for three years, I can honestly say I have never
6 worked with a more dedicated and hardworking group
7 of educators than I work with each and every day
8 here at Riverview Gardens.

9 In the past six months I've been proud to
10 witness what seems to be a turning point in the
11 District under the leadership of Superintendent
12 Dr. Spurgeon. He has put forth a vision for our
13 staff and our students that was sorely lacking under
14 previous leadership and for the first time, since I
15 have been here, real progress seems possible.

16 It is unfortunate that the hard work of
17 teachers, students, parents and all community
18 members has been undermine by a crisis manufactured
19 by a short-sighted law supported by outside
20 political interest.

21 I am, of course, referring to the transfer
22 law that has been robbing our district of students
23 and of funding and now places the future of our
24 entire community at stake. This transfer process
25 unfairly punished families who have chosen to stay

1 in the Riverview Gardens School District by
2 stripping funding for activities, personnel,
3 facilities and technology.

4 Since the school year began, Riverview
5 Gardens has paid over \$3 1/2 million for our
6 students to attend classes elsewhere. We are
7 spending over one and a half times as much to
8 educate a student in Kirkwood or Mehlville than we
9 are to educate them in our own neighborhood.

10 Meanwhile, activities and field trips have
11 been cancelled and school buildings remain in
12 disrepair and teachers face the uncertainty of
13 looming staff cuts impacting their morale in the
14 classroom.

15 I work in a building where a third of my
16 lockers don't have doors. My students have to wear
17 five layers because the heat doesn't work in some
18 rooms and it's way too hot in others but we can pay
19 students to go learn in Kirkwood. That's a problem.

20 It is impossible that even when so many of
21 our families struggle with poverty, Missouri has
22 chosen to transfer their tax dollars to another
23 community who, frankly, does not need it.

24 Recently some of our staff members were sent
25 to the receiving school districts to observe

1 classrooms and bring ideas back to the District.
2 The overwhelming feedback was that in these
3 districts instructional practice is very much the
4 same. The main differences reported to me was the
5 class sizes were smaller, there were a far greater
6 number of support staff in the classroom and
7 students have far greater access to resources.

8 I ask is it fair to continue to subsidize
9 these schools that by all measures are performing
10 adequately by taking the limited resources from
11 districts who are struggling? Is it moral to steal
12 32 percent of the school district's operating budget
13 to pay for 19 percent of students who have
14 transferred? No. It is needlessly cruel and
15 punitive with no real benefit to students, their
16 families or their community.

17 Just as I cannot ask a student to perform
18 better by threatening with stealing their lunch, it
19 is unreasonable to expect this kind of punitive
20 measure to impact student academic performance.

21 Furthermore, if instruction is two of the
22 same in receiving districts, clearly there are
23 factors at play which cannot be addressed by
24 shoveling students from place to place. I do not
25 need to remind the board of the research pointing to

1 the impact of poverty and student achievement. I
2 must question the wisdom of perpetuating that cycle
3 of poverty by laying the groundwork for the school
4 district and, subsequently, this community to fail.

5 Apart from the financial impact of these
6 school transfers, there are other concerns which are
7 less directly measurable. The process pulls
8 students out of their current classrooms away from
9 the teachers with whom they have built relationships
10 and focuses them to reacclimate in a new
11 environment, placing them behind their peers.

12 Another observation from our district visits
13 to receiving districts is that a disproportionate
14 number of transfer students have been placed in
15 remedial or separate classrooms. Of course there
16 are students who are thriving in their new
17 environments but I think that if we were to analyze
18 their academics at Riverview and in their new
19 district, we would find striking similarities.

20 Every student deserves a high quality school
21 in his or her own neighborhood. In order to ensure
22 that all Riverview Gardens' families are given the
23 opportunity, it is time to end the short-sighted,
24 ineffective and harmful transfers, provide this
25 district with the resources and, more importantly,

1 the time it needs to succeed. Thank you.

2 MS. VANDEVEN: Thank you. Next we'll
3 hear from Shavonda Long followed by Isaiah Smith.
4 Shavonda Long, are you here? Go ahead, Isaiah.

5 MR. SMITH: Can you guys hear me? I am
6 currently a senior at Riverview Gardens Senior High
7 School. I have been in and out of this district
8 since second grade and I have yet to see any more
9 dedicated talented or intelligent students who I
10 have met attending Riverview Gardens Senior High.

11 People broadcast all negative things all over
12 the news, community and maybe even in the State but
13 they have yet to tell them, hey, Riverview Gardens
14 seniors, Class of 2014, has earned more than over a
15 thousand -- a million dollars in scholarships.

16 Nobody talks about our wonderful choir.
17 Nobody talks about our ROTC program. Nobody talks
18 about our speech and debate club, which I'm also in.
19 The board might say, oh, well, this is going on and
20 this is going to be bad, so quick to make a judgment
21 that all you do -- before you can even read the fine
22 print.

23 There are hard working, dedicated teachers,
24 students and parents, some are in this room, working
25 behind the scenes to make Riverview Gardens High

1 School, my school -- I'm sorry -- my school, the
2 best place to achieve academic success. You may
3 shut us up -- sorry -- you may shut us down but you
4 may not shut us up.

5 I -- no -- we, they, you and everybody in
6 this community will succeed. We will not go down
7 without a fight but we need the help of all of you
8 in this room. Riverview Gardens School District is
9 ready to turn up for accreditation.

10 MS. VANDEVEN: Thank you. Our next
11 speaker will be Alfred Long.

12 MR. LONG: Good evening. My name is
13 Alfred Long and I am a member of the Citizens' Task
14 Force for Excellence in Education. And, first, I
15 would like to applaud Dr. Spurgeon, all the
16 teachers, all the caring parents that I see here
17 tonight, because definitely that's what it's going
18 to take not only for accreditation but for the
19 future of our kids.

20 My children aren't in the Riverview School
21 District but I care for all children. And what I
22 see now is -- number one, I'm also involved in
23 prison liturgy and I see the pipeline from school to
24 prison and it's disheartening when I see that and
25 when I see a community that's destroyed because of

1 the law. A community that's destroyed and the
2 anchors in the community taken away because of the
3 law and by people that aren't even in the community.

4 In order to understand some of the problems
5 that we see with accreditation, we also have to
6 understand the socioeconomic challenges that some of
7 these kids face just to come to school. We talk
8 about post-stress traumatic syndromes. When you
9 have to come to school and you don't know where your
10 next meal is coming from. When you have to come to
11 school and focus when you just heard your cousin has
12 been shot. When you have to come to school and your
13 father is in prison and your mother has to work two
14 jobs just to keep up and then you say the parents
15 should be involved. I can't be involved if I'm
16 trying to put food on the table.

17 So my question is: What type of
18 understanding and collaboration is there between all
19 the agencies involved, not only DESE, but all the
20 other agencies that are involved with the outcome of
21 our communities? And I think not only as parents
22 but as everybody, as long as I got time, I'm going
23 to be involved.

24 Okay. My kids are grown. I got a grandbaby
25 in the Hazelwood School District but as I got breath

1 in my body, I'm going to make a change. And the
2 people here, you know, we're preaching to the choir
3 because you're here but take the message to folks
4 that you know that don't come and the folks that
5 can't come, help them. All right. Educate them.
6 Maybe they don't know the importance. Tell them.
7 Help them. Don't talk about it.

8 And to the committee, have a heart, have a
9 heart. When you're talking about taking a school
10 away, you're taking the heart of the community. You
11 are taking a link from grandparent to parents down
12 to children. So consider that when you're making
13 your decision.

14 MS. VANDEVEN: Thank you. Our next
15 speaker will be Niketia Coleman. And our final
16 speaker -- we'll pull one more after Niketia. The
17 final speaker tonight will be Dr. Bush.

18 MS. COLEMAN: Good evening. You know I
19 sat there and I said I'm not going to get up but you
20 all know I have to get up because I am a proud
21 parent of seven children, four of whom graduated
22 from the Riverview Gardens School District. I am
23 also a staff member of the Riverview Gardens School
24 District, Highland Elementary. I am also a
25 homeowner in the Riverview Gardens School District

1 for 14 years.

2 And I am proud to say that my children, yes,
3 even those -- including those who graduated from
4 Riverview Gardens, are productive responsible
5 citizens. They are husbands, fathers, college
6 graduates, potential college graduates. They are
7 homeowners, taxpayers, registered voters,
8 professionals. Now, isn't that the goal of
9 education?

10 I told you they graduated from Riverview
11 Gardens and you probably remember some of them.
12 Riverview Gardens can continue to provide that same
13 quality of education that Jeremy and Jared and James
14 and Joshua received when we have the same resources
15 as neighboring districts. We need smaller class
16 sizes, reading specialists, interventionists,
17 revenue and emotional and social support to meet the
18 needs of our community.

19 There are no shortcuts to quality education
20 and you cannot have quality education without
21 services, resources, professional development, in
22 addition to accountability of all stakeholders.
23 It's not just the teachers. It's not just the
24 administrators but all stakeholders play a part in
25 our success. And, as a parent who worked three

1 jobs, all stakeholders play a part in the success.

2 And, most of all, we need DESE to take a stand for
3 Riverview Gardens.

4 DR. BUSH: Good evening. My name is
5 Dr. Arthelda Bush and I am speaking to you as the
6 chairperson of the Citizens' Task Force on
7 Excellence in Education. Our Task Force consists of
8 educators, parents, students, clergy, civic and
9 elected officials and all who are concerned about
10 our children and their right to a quality education.

11 We have been meeting since August to address
12 issues related to the student transfer program from
13 these unaccredited districts. As a result of these
14 meetings several important questions have been asked
15 and I appreciate this opportunity to share some of
16 these questions with you.

17 Number one: Who is providing oversight and
18 has accountability for the student transfer program?

19 Number two: Is there a plan to address the
20 unreasonable increasing class sizes, decreasing
21 staff and resources and their negative impact on the
22 quality education for those students who remain in
23 the District?

24 Number three: Why have the receiving
25 districts been allowed to charge between \$9,500 and

1 \$20,000 per transfer student? These exorbitant
2 amounts also exceed the current cost of the sending
3 districts.

4 According to the VICC website and that's the
5 Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Council, in
6 2004/2005, in that particular school year, annual
7 tuition payments to districts were capped to the
8 receiving districts. Some of the districts that are
9 participating in this transfer program between these
10 districts the costs were capped at \$7,100 and they
11 recently received an additional increase and now
12 it's capped at \$7,200 for the 2012/2013 school
13 years.

14 So, VICC has a transfer plan that has worked
15 since 1981, why not consult them for guidance with
16 the current transfer program from unaccredited
17 districts?

18 Also, how will the receiving districts be
19 held accountable for the funds that they received?
20 And how will these funds have a direct impact on the
21 transfer students? And, more importantly, is there
22 a plan to evaluate the academic achievement of the
23 transfer students this school year?

24 We realize that this forum does not provide
25 an opportunity for answers to many of these

1 questions, so we are requesting an opportunity to
2 dialogue with Commissioner Nicastro and other
3 decision-makers in a forum such as the one that was
4 held at UMSL very recently when Dr. Nicastro really
5 sparked an interest in developing some
6 non-traditional, cutting edge approaches to
7 educating our children. We're looking forward to
8 resuming these conversations with you.

9 And so we stand united as a task force and a
10 community in efforts that will continue to find
11 equitable alternatives for our children because we
12 all know that providing an excellent education for
13 all of our children cannot continue with business as
14 usual. We look forward to your response to these
15 questions and are requesting to participate in
16 finding solutions.

17 MS. VANDEVEN: Thank you very much. We
18 really do want to thank each of you for coming out
19 this evening to show your support for your children
20 and the Riverview Gardens School District. I would
21 like to remind you that there is still opportunity
22 for you to provide comment through your blue comment
23 cards. Fill those out.

24 You also -- we have a website that is
25 specifically -- not a website -- a web address

1 specifically for comments. That is at Riverview
2 Gardens comments at DESE dot mo dot gov. Pick that
3 address up on your way out tonight.

4 Reminder that we will be having another
5 meeting similar to this. That meeting is scheduled
6 for December the 16th, Monday, December the
7 16th. Same time, same place.

8 And just one final remark before everyone
9 leaves. Lezlie Isaac would like to remind everyone
10 of the scholarship opportunity and so she would like
11 to present that, just a reminder for you. But thank
12 you all very much.

13 MS. ISAAC: Good evening. I'll be very
14 brief. I see people are anxious to get out of here.
15 My name is Lezlie Isaac and I was the president of
16 the Class of 2004. We are honored to be here.
17 Thank you for allowing us to make this final
18 comment. I would like the other members of the
19 Class of 2004 to stand real quickly.

20 We have been working really hard for the past
21 few months in planning our ten-year class reunion
22 but it wouldn't be right if we didn't do something
23 to give back to where we came from. You all, a lot
24 of -- in the audience are teachers and educators
25 that we had. We thank you for what you gave to us

1 because we're all successful because of Riverview
2 Gardens.

3 We have initiated the Hope Scholarship,
4 Helping Others Pursue Education. We're raising
5 money and we have fundraising and all type of things
6 set up to award students, that are currently in
7 Riverview Gardens High School, a scholarship to
8 pursue education.

9 Our website is www view time 04 dot com and
10 you can donate. If you want to give a dollar, if
11 you want to give \$10,000, we welcome all of your
12 donations because we really want to give back and we
13 look forward to partnering with the community and
14 Riverview and the seniors and juniors and freshman
15 and everyone else. Thank you so much.

16 (Whereupon, the record ended at 7:56 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

I, Suzanne Zes, within and for the State of Missouri, do hereby certify that the witness whose testimony appears in the foregoing deposition was duly sworn by me; the testimony of said witness was taken by me to the best of my ability and thereafter reduced to typewriting under my direction; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which this deposition was taken, and further that I am not a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties thereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of the action.

Court Reporter

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