

In The Matter Of:
Department of Education

Freire Charter School
February 10, 2014

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STATE OF DELAWARE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
CHARTER SCHOOL OFFICE

In Re:

Freire Charter School

Carvel State Office Building
Auditorium
820 North French Street
Wilmington, Delaware

Monday, February 10, 2014
6:56 p.m.

PUBLIC HEARING

BEFORE:

JENNIFER NAGOURNEY
Department of Education

DONNA JOHNSON
State Board Executive Director

CATHERINE T. HICKEY
DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL
- and -

ILONA KIRSHON
DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL
Department of Justice

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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1 MS. NAGOURNEY: Good evening. I
2 declare this public hearing to be open. My
3 name is Jennifer Nagourney. I'm the executive
4 director of the Charter School Office of the
5 Delaware Department of Education, and I have
6 been appointed by the Secretary of Education to
7 conduct this public hearing.

8 Freire Charter School has filed
9 an application for a new charter. As required
10 by law, the matter was referred to the Charter
11 School Accountability Committee to review and
12 report. This joint public hearing is being
13 held by the Department of Education and the
14 State Board of Education to give the school and
15 the public an opportunity to comment on the
16 application.

17 I'd like the record to reflect
18 that the notice of the time, date, and place of
19 today's public hearing was posted at the
20 Charter School Accountability Committee's
21 official place of business on the Department of
22 Education's official website and the state
23 public meeting calendar on the state's official
24 website on January 17th, 2014. Further, the



1 applicant was personally notified of the time,
2 date, and place of today's public hearing on
3 that date.

4 A court reporter is present so
5 that a record of this hearing can be made. It
6 will be necessary for each speaker to identify
7 himself or herself clearly before beginning to
8 speak so that the court reporter will be able
9 to note who you are. The record of this
10 hearing will be provided to the Secretary of
11 Education and members of the State Board of
12 Education, together with any written or
13 electronic comments received.

14 We will proceed in the following
15 manner: First, we will hear from any
16 representatives of the charter school who wish
17 to comment on the application. Then we will
18 take comments from anyone else who wishes to
19 speak. There were sign-up signs on the side of
20 the room. If you have a desire to speak, and
21 if you have not yet signed up, please come
22 forward now.

23 May I have a show of hands of all
24 those who desire to make any comments so I can



1 determine whether or not we have to impose time
2 limits on comments? Given that there is a
3 large number of people who want to speak, we
4 will need to impose time limits on comments.
5 So for individuals it will be three minutes,
6 and for people presenting in the group, it will
7 be five minutes. Ms. Johnson will be keeping
8 time. I reserve the right to limit comments if
9 it's truly repetitive or cumulative.

10 At this point we will accept
11 comments from representatives of the school,
12 beginning with William porter.

13 MR. PORTER: Hi. Good evening.
14 My name is Bill Porter, and I wanted to present
15 the video we were going to show. That video
16 contains kind of the value of our school, a day
17 in the life of Freire students, as well as our
18 after-school activity program.

19 MS. HICKEY: We will make this
20 Freire Exhibit 1.

21 MR. PORTER: That works. Good
22 evening. As I said, my name is Bill Porter.
23 I'd be the head of school for Freire Charter
24 School Wilmington.



1 I wanted to start to say that I
2 was actually born and raised in Delaware. I
3 grew up in a lower middle-income neighborhood
4 where through a series of decisions made by
5 grownups that were well over my small head that
6 the school choices weren't good where I lived.

7 So after second grade my family
8 made the hard decision that my father work the
9 night shift at the local General Motors factory
10 on Boxwood Road. Because he worked the night
11 shift, basically we didn't see him in the
12 evenings we were in school. The night shift
13 basically gave our family the opportunity to
14 pay the private-school tuition that my parents
15 needed for both my sister and I to go to the
16 local parochial school.

17 They realized, both of them, that
18 the choice of a quality education was paramount
19 for my sister and I to be successful in life.
20 Unfortunately, not all kids in my neighborhood
21 had the ability to have a parent work the night
22 shift or maybe they didn't even have two
23 parents to begin with. So they had to resign
24 themselves to the local school option which



1 wasn't necessarily the best at that time.

2 As my sister and I moved into our
3 teen years, the disparity became all too clear
4 between how my sister and I kind of evolving
5 our teen life and how so many of our friends
6 that we played with were evolving in theirs.
7 Kind of a lot of ills of teen society basically
8 plagued them.

9 The power of a quality education
10 to change the direction of one's life has never
11 left me. The kids that I played with had the
12 same potential as me, but the potential wasn't
13 nurtured. The inequality of the school systems
14 has guided my work for over a decade now. I
15 have been proud to work for the past 12 years
16 at Freire Charter School, a school that serves
17 a population where education all too often is
18 the only way out.

19 Freire, it is an amazing place,
20 and I'd like to share a few statistics. We
21 were awarded the Title 1. This means that we
22 served a student body that has a high number of
23 students who get free and reduced lunch, and we
24 have successfully served them for a number of



1 years on closing the achievement gap in that
2 body.

3 We also won a National Ethic
4 Award from the United States Department of
5 Education. This looked at individual students
6 where they came into our school at and then, by
7 the time they were juniors, how far they had
8 regressed. And we were one of three charter
9 high schools in the entire country to win that
10 award for showing student gains.

11 MS. JOHNSON: Sir, you have
12 30 seconds left.

13 MR. PORTER: And last I'd like to
14 share the percentage of students enrolling in
15 college within two years. For the last three
16 graduating classes that we have records for
17 from the National Student Clearinghouse, 88,
18 89, and 90 percent of our kids enrolled in
19 college within two years of graduating.

20 I would now like to introduce my
21 comrade, Kelly Davenport, who will take over
22 from here.

23 MS. DAVENPORT: Good evening,
24 everybody. My name is Kelly Davenport, and



1 it's an honor to be in front of you. Thank you
2 for coming out.

3 I want to, like Bill, tell you
4 about the founder of our school, Jay Guben, who
5 came to the United States in the '50s. He was
6 a Jewish Russian immigrant who was raised in
7 the Philadelphia School District who was
8 ostracized constantly inside the district, and
9 when he dreamed about opening Freire, he
10 dreamed about a place where any and every kid
11 could experience a joyous education, and that
12 really is who we are today and who we would
13 like to be in Delaware.

14 We're a school for any kid, every
15 kid. Doesn't matter the size, color, race
16 background, our admissions process is
17 completely transparent and open. We have X
18 amount of kids apply, we put all their names
19 randomly in a cookie jar, and we select them
20 out till we get to the bottom, and that's our
21 list and that's how we enroll kids.

22 We are transparent, and we
23 believe in accountability, and we think the two
24 go hand-in-hand. So you have to be held to a



1 high standard, and you need to do that in a way
2 that shows who you are and is transparent. We
3 don't hide anything at Freire. You're welcome,
4 if we're so lucky to open in Delaware, to come
5 and see any and every bit of who we are on the
6 public record, in written form, our financials,
7 our board meetings.

8 We're here to be your partners,
9 not your adversaries. We know this is
10 extremely hard work. We want to serve every
11 and all children. We want to move the needle
12 for every one of them so they can be who they
13 want to be, and that's going to require our
14 partnership.

15 We believe all kids can achieve,
16 and it is our job to make that happen. One of
17 the key ways to do that is to make sure the
18 environment is rich and ripe and safe for kids.
19 To that end, we have family therapists at each
20 of our campuses. We have academic advisers,
21 college counselors, team leaders, teachers,
22 study skills leaders, coaches, parents, other
23 kids, graduate students, everybody working for
24 the good of our kids.



1 We're not here to make a profit.
2 We're not here to take over more. We're here
3 to simply serve kids and to do it in a safe
4 environment, one with dignity, one with high
5 expectations and high support for kids.

6 In short, I just say it's an
7 honor to be here to be participating in the
8 state of Delaware with you in this conversation
9 and to be looking at how important this topic
10 is together to serve our kids.

11 MS. NAGOURNEY: Next Ben Lewis.

12 MR. LEWIS: Good evening. My
13 name is Ben Lewis. I'm a teacher at Freire
14 Charter School. I currently teach 12th grade
15 social studies, and I also serve as the team
16 project coordinator. Thank you for having me
17 this evening.

18 Similar to Bill, I have a certain
19 loyalty to Delaware. I was born and raised in
20 Bear, Delaware. Went to high school not too
21 far from here in Wilmington as well. So I'm
22 invested in the success and future of this
23 community, of this population, and I'm excited
24 at the prospect of opening a Freire in our city



1 for that reason.

2 I'm here to tell you a little bit
3 about my story as a teacher in Freire and to
4 talk about my perspective of the school from
5 that vantage point.

6 When I was first hired to teach
7 at Freire, I stepped into the building, I had a
8 conversation with my principal, and she said,
9 "Because you're teaching a 12th grade senior
10 seminar, here's the curriculum from last year,
11 take it, use it, change it if you like." Now,
12 as a first-year teacher on day one, my jaw
13 dropped. Overwhelmed at the prospect of having
14 to create my own curriculum, I was kind of
15 shocked. I didn't know what to do.

16 The butterflies subsided, nausea
17 subsided, too, and I became a lot more
18 comfortable and confident with the prospect of
19 creating my own curriculum. And I got excited
20 at the prospect of doing so. So what I did was
21 I looked back and saw what I did in college and
22 I tried to incorporate some of the stuff that I
23 studied while a college student into my own
24 class for own seniors. So I was able to use



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1 some of the urban studies curriculum that I
2 studied in college and implement it for my
3 seniors, which is exactly what seniors deserve,
4 a truly college prep curriculum. What better
5 way to do that than to actually use
6 college-level materials? But that's what
7 Freire does. They combine autonomy with high
8 expectations, and, as a result, produce student
9 results.

10 Now, all the educators in the
11 room could attest to how important it is to
12 have a student lead your classroom and walk
13 next door and be held to the same high
14 expectations that they were held to when they
15 were sitting in your classroom. That's a
16 beautiful thing. And I can truly say at Freire
17 that that is the truth. A student leaves my
18 classroom, walks next door, and I know they're
19 going to learn just like they're learning in my
20 classroom. In the end, the reason that we can
21 do this is because teachers have autonomy, and
22 they have high expectations, and we can then
23 turn over this autonomy and these high
24 expectations onto our seniors and the rest of



1 our students at Freire and, in the end, produce
2 the results that we just heard about from
3 Ms. Kelly and Mr. Bill, as we call them.

4 You're going to hear from some
5 students later who can demonstrate what Freire
6 is all about. Thank you.

7 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you. Next
8 John Pierson.

9 MR. PIERSON: My name is
10 John Pierson, P-i-e-r-s-o-n, and I'm a
11 volunteer board member, a new board member with
12 the Freire school.

13 I'm excited about the potential
14 of opening here in Delaware. Some previous
15 speakers referenced some statistics specific to
16 college entrance of graduates that I think are
17 quite impressive, and I think the statistics
18 would show and in our application that Freire
19 has done some amazing things with student
20 achievement using their existing model they
21 have in Philadelphia.

22 Addressing the student culture,
23 according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the
24 most basic of needs for humans is that we have



1 food and water and shelter, and then those
2 needs we have safety, we have acceptance,
3 self-esteem. But that specific need of safety
4 is, according to Maslow, the second most
5 important need for folks to be successful.
6 Safety in the form of feeling safe and secure
7 about your health and family and safe and
8 secure around your property and safe from
9 violence.

10 As a father of two children, one
11 a senior at Mount Pleasant High School and one
12 who will be in kindergarten next year at Mount
13 Pleasant Elementary School, my wife and I work
14 very hard to provide those needs for our
15 children so that they will be successful. And
16 my daughter's been successful in her career
17 academically thus far, but I'm aware of the
18 incidents taking place at her school, at Mount
19 Pleasant, fighting in the parking lot or
20 cafeteria and students are suspended and
21 there's a system in place where subsequent
22 offenses are dealt with using longer or more
23 severe consequences.

24 But my daughter's been fortunate



1 in her experience at school. She's been led to
2 make some great choices where she's
3 participated in sports and clubs and been part
4 of an academic program, International
5 Baccalaureate Program, which is a program you
6 all are very familiar with. It's helped quite
7 a few of our public high schools to attract
8 students and be more successful. But what
9 about the kids at Mount Pleasant High School
10 that aren't in her academic honors program or
11 aren't on the soccer team?

12 I visited Freire this past
13 December in Philadelphia before I made the
14 commitment to join the board, and I take the
15 commitment with sincerity. I believe in what
16 the school does. I spoke with students and
17 teachers while I visited the school. I saw
18 kids engaged in classroom activities, and I
19 sensed pride that all the students and staff
20 had in their school. I asked several kids why
21 they were at Freire, what makes their school
22 different. One kid said, "I have everything
23 here I need to succeed. All the resources and
24 assistance needed are right here in this



1 building. And it's safe."

2 I asked a second student, "Why
3 are you here? What's different about this
4 school?"

5 And this student just looked at
6 me and said, "Here I'm safe."

7 Students are respected, they're
8 learning because the academic bar is set high,
9 and the students reach their full potential
10 because they all feel that way.

11 I believe Freire can make a
12 positive impact in our downtown Wilmington
13 community. Kids living in Wilmington need a
14 high school in their own neighborhood, and kids
15 in Wilmington need a place where they feel
16 safe.

17 Thank you.

18 MS. NAGOURNEY: Would you like to
19 submit your written statement as part of the
20 record?

21 MS. HICKEY: We can take that as
22 an exhibit so that the full story of what you
23 want to say will be admitted. This will be
24 Freire Exhibit 2.



1 MS. NAGOURNEY: Tom Caramanico?

2 MR. CARAMANICO: Good evening.

3 My name is Tom Caramanico, C-a-r-a-m-a-n-i-c-o.

4 I'm the president of the board of Freire

5 Charter School in Philadelphia.

6 Based on the -- you might say
7 based on my performance in that position, I
8 will not be a member of the board of the Freire
9 Charter School in Wilmington, Delaware. But I
10 am here to speak about the school that I know
11 in Philadelphia.

12 I have been on the board for
13 14 years. I have been the president of the
14 board for the last eight or nine years. One of
15 the most important things that I'd say about
16 what Freire Charter School does, the high
17 school only, I'm told that in the charter
18 school world in inner cities, the most
19 difficult job is to be a high school only
20 because you get the kids out of the regular
21 public school system and that sometimes has not
22 been able to serve them well.

23 Freire Charter School in ninth
24 grade we get about 70 percent of our kids who



1 can't read at a fifth-grade level. In 11th
2 grade they're tested. The most recent test in
3 Philadelphia, in Pennsylvania the PSSA test,
4 our 11th grade students are chosen by lottery
5 only, our 11th grade students perform higher
6 than any other traditional high school in the
7 city than any other charter high school in the
8 city and half of the selected admission high
9 schools. That is the students -- the schools
10 that select students based on their
11 intellectual ability.

12 That's the kind of performance
13 that comes from a no-excuses mentality, that
14 comes from the board to the teachers to the
15 students. We tell our teachers that there is
16 no excuse for these students not performing
17 well. There is no excuse for these students
18 not being able to get to college like every
19 other student in the state of Pennsylvania.

20 There's no excuse. We know that
21 they come from difficult families. We know we
22 don't have all the money that we'd like to
23 have. We know that sometimes there's violence
24 in the neighborhood and violence in the home.



1 We know that there's sometimes single family --
2 single-parent families. We know that sometimes
3 kids don't have homework -- have assistance at
4 home with their homework.

5 None of those things, none of
6 those things are an excuse for our teachers not
7 to teach those kids and have them succeed and
8 get into college. That's the kind of
9 no-excuses mentality that we have from the
10 board to the staff. And that's part of the
11 reason why we succeed.

12 You will hear from students, you
13 will hear from some other teachers, you will
14 hear that the teachers care about the students,
15 and we think that that's a big part of why the
16 school is safe and a big part of why the
17 students achieve.

18 You will hear or you have heard a
19 lot about our nonviolence policy. We don't
20 allow violence in the school, and if a student
21 is violent, we ask that student to leave.
22 Because of that policy, and because that policy
23 is enforced rigorously, we generally don't have
24 any violence, which means we don't have to ask



1 many students to leave. But the reason we have
2 high academic success is because of that
3 nonviolence policy, because every student can
4 feel safe, and when we get to the situation
5 where a student is asked to leave, it's not to
6 punish that student but it's to protect the
7 499 other students.

8 Thank you very much for allowing
9 me to speak.

10 MS. NAGOURNEY: Next,
11 Anthony Harris.

12 MR. HARRIS: Hi. I'm
13 Anthony Harris. I don't think I need the
14 microphone.

15 I'm not from Delaware, but I
16 enjoy tax-free shopping, and I'm just a proud
17 parent. My daughter was picked out of that
18 cookie jar. We had a chance to take her to a
19 school that's right down the street from my
20 house. It's all dressed up from the outside
21 and look nice. The reality of things is I care
22 about education, and I deserve better for my
23 child than to have her in a failing school with
24 metal detectors going off when she walks in the



1 door. I don't want that for my child. I want
2 a better opportunity for my child.

3 Freire has given my child that.
4 A safe environment, free lunch, we benefit from
5 that, because I'm one of those parents that Tom
6 was talking about, Kelly was talking about.
7 I'm that parent. And that's why I came here.
8 Really this means a lot to me.

9 I think Delaware should open the
10 doors up for a charter school here. It's a
11 great opportunity for inner-city children to
12 get a quality education, because, really, the
13 parents have the power. Who has the power? I
14 can't hear you. Who has the power? That's who
15 has the power. And we should be the ones to
16 make that choice where we want to send our
17 children at because they deserve quality
18 education just like any other child. Any other
19 child. They deserve that same quality
20 education, and that's why I'm here.

21 Please open the doors up. Any
22 way I can help, I'm here to help. Again, I
23 enjoy tax-free shopping. Delaware will be a
24 fine place for a charter school. And you have



1 quality people that can make that happen.

2 Thank you.

3 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you. Next,
4 Christian Willauer.

5 MS. WILLAUER: My name's
6 Christian Willauer, W-i-l-l-a-u-e-r, and I live
7 in Wilmington, on the west side of Wilmington,
8 and I'm a parent of two children ages three and
9 six. I'm also the director of community and
10 economic development at Cornerstone West CDC
11 where my focus is the revitalization of
12 Wilmington's West Side neighborhoods.

13 I came here to speak in support
14 of the charter application from Freire Charter
15 School to open a high school modeled after
16 their highly successful college prep high
17 school in Philadelphia. I had the chance to
18 visit Freire Charter School this winter and
19 speak with some of their faculty and students.
20 When we asked the students what they
21 appreciated most about their school, their
22 answer was the lack of fighting, which they all
23 said had been a problem at other schools they
24 had attended. They all spoke about how the



1 school's focus on reducing violence and
2 interpersonal conflict of any kind let them
3 focus on their studies which is why they were
4 there. When we asked for more details, the
5 students and staff explained together how the
6 school has a very effective mediation program
7 so that when a student has a problem with
8 another student, they can meet with the
9 mediators and work out the problem. It's an
10 avenue for communication. And when they have a
11 problem with a teacher, there's a mediator
12 there who's an adult. So there's a student
13 mediator and adult mediator.

14 And so what was the result of
15 this? When the students explained the impact
16 of that, in one of their words they said,
17 "There's no drama," which let them focus on
18 what they needed to do, which was study.

19 So then I was told by the
20 student -- it's a school culture where the
21 focus is learning. I looked at the statistics
22 for the school, and they have a very impressive
23 track record of sending students to college.
24 It's not that they achieve this by selecting



1 the best students, because it's an
2 open-admission school, but the students at
3 Freire reflect the overall population of the
4 Philadelphia schools.

5 So the school that they plan to
6 open here would have the same policy, which is
7 an open -- where they offer this quality
8 education to everybody. And at their
9 Philadelphia school some of the students enter
10 the school years behind. However, we learned
11 from some of the students they talked to they
12 had the opportunity to catch up. And I just
13 want to talk about my experience with talking
14 to students.

15 They said the teachers here want
16 us to succeed, the teachers will give us
17 whatever kind of support we need to succeed.
18 They have after-school programs. They pay
19 students who are within the school body to help
20 out other students, and the achievement I think
21 is clear when you hear about all the students,
22 90 percent of the student body going on to
23 college. So this investment in each student
24 works.



1 Aside from the statistics, the
2 students that we talked to told us about their
3 college plans, and they had applied to schools
4 like UPenn, Penn State, Swarthmore, Bryn Mawr,
5 University of Delaware, and one of them was
6 admitted early and attended college.

7 I did write my comments out.
8 I'll provide them for the record. But I just
9 want to say as a parent, Delaware's education
10 is coming a long way in providing quality
11 education. I would love to see Freire added to
12 what Delaware has to offer.

13 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you.
14 Justin Cunningham.

15 MS. HICKEY: This will be Freire
16 Exhibit 3.

17 MR. CUNNINGHAM: Good evening,
18 everybody. My name is Justin Cunningham. I'm
19 an '07 graduate of Freire Charter School, 2011
20 graduate of Penn State University main campus.
21 I'm here to speak to you on the power and
22 influence that Freire had on my life.

23 Mama knew best. In June of 2003
24 mama, she told me, said I was going to Freire



1 Charter School. Freire? What's that? I
2 didn't know. I knew I was going to my
3 neighborhood school with my three friends from
4 elementary school. I can say a couple of them
5 are dead. Some of them are still at home.
6 Mama knew best. I thank her every day that she
7 allowed me to go to Freire Charter School.
8 It's a great, great high school, great middle
9 school. They had a lasting impact on my life
10 and friends that I still have to this day that
11 are other graduates of Freire Charter School.

12 If you let them open up a new
13 facility here in the Wilmington area, I'm sure
14 there will be a positive impact at Freire.
15 They overprepared me for school I should say.
16 They taught me advanced calculus, themes in The
17 Great Gatsby, the importance of the Industrial
18 Revolution, but also the soft skills that
19 employers most want, how to shake a hand, how
20 to say hello in the morning, a whole bunch of
21 other soft skills that you need to learn in
22 life. And that's the importance of why Freire
23 should be in this environment.

24 Thank you.



1 MS. NAGOURNEY: Next, Taja Mack
2 and Naesha Reeves.

3 MS. MACK: Good evening. My name
4 is Taja Mack, and I'm a senior at Freire
5 Charter School. I would like to talk about the
6 academic support that Freire offers.

7 Being at a school that's college
8 prep, support from parents and staff members is
9 needed. What Freire offers in order to
10 accommodate to the rigorous and challenging
11 curriculum are centers, as well as teacher
12 support in and out of school. These centers
13 such as math, writing, or science centers are
14 run by student peers, as well as teachers
15 themselves. These centers not only help the
16 student being taught but strengthen the
17 understanding of the students and teachers
18 themselves.

19 Likewise, the teachers are very
20 supportive and help the students in and out of
21 the classroom. These teachers can be emailed
22 at any time night or day and are quick to
23 responding to a question. Because of the
24 support the teachers and centers offer to help



1 young scholars, students who attend Freire are
2 pushed to sort out both the obstacles and
3 strive to be the best, preparing them for the
4 next step in life, college.

5 MS. REEVES: Good evening,
6 everyone. My name is Naesha Reeves. Like my
7 colleague, Taja Mack, I'm also a senior at
8 Freire Charter School.

9 There are many aspects that work
10 hand-in-hand in making Freire the great school
11 it is today. However, in my personal opinion,
12 the most important aspect that Freire offers is
13 its sense of community and sense of safety.

14 It took many years for Freire to
15 establish the sense of community it has today.
16 Working through many strategies and techniques,
17 Freire was able to figure out how to make
18 students, as well as staff members, feel as
19 safe as possible. This sense of safety is
20 acquired through our nonviolence policy. With
21 the combination of students and teachers
22 working hand-in-hand, teachers enforcing the
23 policy and students abiding by it, Freire is
24 now one of the safety schools I know.



1 Almost all of my neighborhood
2 schools have a system set up where as soon as
3 you walk in, there are security guards on one
4 side and metal detectors on the other side.
5 This system makes students focus on their own
6 personal safety versus preparing themselves for
7 education. Growing up in a school where fights
8 broke out on a daily basis, this nonviolence
9 policy is important to me because I now don't
10 have to worry about my safety being threatened
11 at any given moment.

12 Having this nonviolence policy
13 that prohibits us from judging one another, I
14 was able to better my public speaking skills,
15 enhance my communication skills, and,
16 therefore, better prepare myself for the next
17 step in life, college.

18 MS. NAGOURNEY: Next, Basil
19 Wright.

20 MR. PORTER: He was going to do
21 the video.

22 MS. NAGOURNEY: Next,
23 Halimah Abdulhaqq.

24 MS. ABDULHAQQ: Good evening. My



1 name is Halimah, H-a-l-i-m-a-h, Abdulhaqq,
2 A-b-d-u-l-h-a-q-q. I'm a parent of Freire
3 Charter School. This is my daughter. As a
4 parent, it was hard for me to send my first
5 child off to school coming from -- myself
6 coming from a background of a private school.

7 So as I was looking for a charter
8 school for my child, knowing all the other
9 schools were closing, all the private schools,
10 didn't have a lack of academics or they didn't
11 have after-school care and just sports and
12 things like that. So it was hard for me trying
13 to find a school.

14 One of the things that I looked
15 for was was it going to challenge my children
16 academically? Was it going to be a preparatory
17 school that was going to help her achieve? Was
18 it going to be a safe environment? Was she
19 going to have to walk into a place and be
20 searched? Was she going to have to be frisked?
21 Those were things that were important to me.
22 Was it a clean environment? Was it a bright
23 environment so that it was welcoming? And I
24 found it to be that.



1 The other thing was the
2 geographic location. I was worried that my
3 child traveling from one part of the city to
4 another part of the city and having to be at
5 school early in the morning and to have to stay
6 at school late. Was she going to interact with
7 all the other students because of the different
8 violences with the schools competing with each
9 other and the gangs? So I didn't have to worry
10 about that.

11 The other thing I wanted was for
12 my child to be able to have a place that was
13 going to offer parent, teacher, and child
14 relations. I'm an educator, and that was
15 important to me, and Freire Charter School
16 offered that.

17 When I first came there, they
18 welcomed me. They welcomed my children.
19 Especially my daughter. They called me and
20 they said hello. They wanted to let me know
21 how she was doing the first week. I cried
22 because I said, wow, this place is calling me
23 to tell me how my daughter is doing. They're
24 telling me how she's achieved, her challenges.



1 And I was grateful to be able to have that.

2 So I am thankful for Freire
3 Charter School for all that they have offered
4 for myself, as well as my daughter, and I hope
5 that when she moves back with her father in
6 Delaware, that she will come to Freire before
7 she graduates.

8 That was another issue. Being in
9 a separate home, sometimes one parent wants the
10 child to go another place and another one wants
11 them to go here. And we were able to be a unit
12 and come together and select Freire, and I
13 cried because that was great.

14 So thank you.

15 MS. ALLEN: Hello. My name is
16 Raiyaneh Allen, R-a-i-y-a-n-e-h, A-l-l-e-n.
17 I'm a current ninth grader at Freire Charter
18 School, and I believe that Freire Charter
19 School is a great school for students
20 academic-wise and social-wise.

21 I'm a current tutor in the math
22 center at school, and I feel like not just the
23 math center but the science also gives the
24 students the opportunity to make test



1 corrections, get help with their homework, work
2 on projects, and I feel like it's a way for the
3 students to have a connection with the other
4 students and with the teachers, and they can
5 get as much help as they need Monday through
6 Thursday after school.

7 Another thing that I wanted to
8 talk about was parent mediation, which is where
9 students, when they have a problem with another
10 student. You can even take a teacher to
11 mediation. So I feel like instead of fighting
12 we can resolve your problems like talk it out
13 with another person which I feel is very
14 responsible.

15 That's it. Thank you.

16 MS. NAGOURNEY: Next,
17 Tyrone Williams.

18 MR. WILLIAMS: Good evening. My
19 name is Tyrone Williams, and I'm a senior at
20 Freire Charter School, and I also serve as the
21 student body president.

22 Over the past few years,
23 attending Freire Charter School has been an
24 opportunity that I'm truly grateful for.



1 Attending Freire has allowed me to unleash my
2 potential.

3 In eighth grade, sitting within
4 the walls of oppression that was my
5 neighborhood public school, I would have never
6 thought that I would have been an inductee of
7 the National Honor Society, the opportunity to
8 have a conversation with Governor Markell,
9 introduce the house majority leader during a
10 policy speech, and never would I have imagined
11 that I would be offered full tuition
12 scholarships to four universities and have the
13 credentials to be a real contender for
14 admission to an Ivy League university like the
15 University of Pennsylvania.

16 The past four years have been a
17 dream come true, and I'm here today because I
18 want the teens of Wilmington to have their
19 dream come true, and Freire Charter School is
20 the key.

21 Thank you.

22 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you.

23 Zaynab Boyd.

24 MS. BOYD: My name is



1 Zaynab Boyd. I'm a current student at Freire
2 Charter School. I just wanted to say that at
3 Freire --

4 MS. NAGOURNEY: Can you spell
5 your name?

6 MS. BOYD: Z-a-y-n-a-b, B-o-y-d.

7 I just wanted to say at Freire as
8 a student I appreciate their 75 percentage
9 grade level and above as a passing grade level
10 because it gives the students encouragement of
11 doing better and going above that and getting
12 on honor roll and like achieving something.

13 Thank you.

14 MS. NAGOURNEY: Terron Younger.

15 MR. YOUNGER: Good evening. My
16 name is Terron Younger. I'm the athletic
17 director, greeter, and girls basketball coach
18 at Freire Charter School. I have been an
19 employee of Freire Charter School for seven
20 years.

21 During my seven years I have been
22 blessed to have been a part of such a special
23 school. Freire Charter School is most known
24 for its nonviolence policy, college prep



1 curriculum, but also we offer extracurricular
2 activities at Freire Charter School such as
3 after-school clubs and activities and high
4 school athletics.

5 During the past three years we
6 have experienced budget cuts with the School
7 District of Philadelphia and the Department of
8 Recreation. So despite our students receiving
9 a healthy diet of academic instruction, they
10 thirst for more. As a member of the academic
11 support team at Freire Charter School, we
12 quench that thirst by offering such clubs,
13 activities, and athletics, but it's because of
14 our nonviolence policy at Freire Charter School
15 that we provide a safe learning environment and
16 workplace for our staff, students, parents, and
17 visitors.

18 Because of this nonviolence
19 policy, our students can focus on what's
20 important in life, which is getting the high
21 grades that they possibly can. Without this
22 policy, we wouldn't be able to offer such
23 things. We do not have metal detectors. We do
24 not have school police. The reason for us not



1 having school police or metal detectors is
2 because the students that attend Freire Charter
3 School are determined and committed to
4 academics. Let's be honest, the students that
5 are problems in our schools aren't maintaining
6 the 75 average in their classes.

7 So at Freire Charter School, like
8 Tom said, very seldom do we ask students to
9 leave. They just don't come because they're
10 intimidated by those policies and academic
11 standards.

12 Thank you.

13 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you.
14 Brielle Pierce.

15 MS. PIERCE: Good evening. My
16 name is Brielle Pierce, B-r-i-e-l-l-e,
17 P-i-e-r-c-e. I am an 11th grader at Freire
18 Charter School and third-year peer mediator.

19 When I came into Freire Charter
20 School in ninth grade, I didn't know what to
21 expect, honestly. It definitely wasn't my
22 first choice. I'm honest. It wasn't my first
23 choice. But I'm honestly glad that I came to
24 this school. My middle school, to be honest,



1 we didn't know where -- our eighth-grade year,
2 we just went on trips and a lot of lolly gaggle
3 I guess, if you will. When I got to Freire, I
4 was intimidated by the work, I wasn't focused
5 at all, but the teachers and the positive
6 energy around the entire school environment, it
7 really helped me focus and focus on my college
8 career and my future and what exactly I wanted
9 to do in life.

10 I said I was a third-year peer
11 mediator. I have been a peer mediator since
12 ninth grade. Peer mediation is students
13 helping students or teachers helping students
14 and teachers. It enforces the nonviolence
15 policy. It prevent fights, arguments or if two
16 students had an argument during class, a
17 teacher or student anonymously can sign them up
18 for peer mediation. They can work out their
19 issue without it resulting into a suspension or
20 expulsion or fighting or argument. And I think
21 peer mediation is one of the best things Freire
22 can offer because there is a lot of drama in
23 high school, as everyone knows, and it really
24 just keeps the whole school environment safe



1 and positive.

2 Thanks.

3 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you.

4 Felicia Wenell.

5 MS. WENELL: My name is
6 Felicia Wenell, W-e-n-e-l-l. I teach eighth
7 grade at a public middle school here in
8 Wilmington that serves a population similar to
9 what Freire hopes to.

10 Often as teachers we talk about
11 creating a safe space for our students.
12 Initially in my teaching career I thought about
13 that really in an emotionally safe way. Kids
14 need a classroom free from bullying or ridicule
15 so they can be vulnerable and feel comfortable
16 to express themselves and just learn in the
17 classroom.

18 But as I continued to teach, I
19 have also realized I need to think about that
20 in a physical safe way. Violence in our
21 schools is a reality and has a significant
22 impact on the entire classroom of students,
23 both participants and bystanders. When
24 violence appears, it affects both kids and



1 teachers beyond just that period and often
2 beyond just that day. Often times into that
3 week or month. If we want our children to
4 learn and succeed to their fullest potential,
5 we must create safe spaces inside of our
6 schools free from violence so they can do that.

7 As teachers and administrators we
8 can't do that by ourselves. We need to teach
9 our children conflict mediation and the skills
10 to work through their problems on their own.
11 These aren't skills that are going to be tested
12 by a computer, but they're tested every day
13 real life in our schools and in our
14 communities.

15 Our kids need these skills, and
16 we need to be explicitly teaching them. This
17 is what I have seen at Freire. This is what we
18 heard here today. And, ultimately, it's what I
19 hope to see in Delaware.

20 I want a lot for my students, I
21 want a lot for their teachers. As an
22 eighth-grade teacher, especially, I want them
23 to have great options to choose from when
24 they're looking for high school, and I hope



1 that Freire is one of those options.

2 Thank you.

3 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you.

4 Paul Calistro.

5 MR. CALISTRO: Good evening. My
6 name is Paul Calistro. I'm the executive
7 director of West End Neighborhood House. Some
8 of you may know West End Neighborhood House has
9 been serving Wilmington and Delaware for the
10 past 130 years, and we pride ourselves on high
11 achievement levels at all our programs.

12 I'm here on behalf of our
13 organization to support Freire's application
14 for Delaware to have a high school in the city
15 of Wilmington. We desperately, desperately
16 need one today. The students we work with on a
17 daily basis are very similar to those that came
18 up today and made remarks. Unfortunately, our
19 young people don't have those options. The few
20 options they have, and there are some good ones
21 like Cab Calloway or Wilmington High.
22 Unfortunately, many of our young people just
23 are on a waiting list or can't get in. So in
24 the meantime they do not have the choices that



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1 some of these young people have in
2 Philadelphia.

3 As you may know, West End works
4 with young children from preschool age up into
5 high school. We work very hard with young
6 people in the middle school, and one of the
7 complaints we have from our parents is that
8 they don't have choices. Let me tell you why
9 we are supporting it, and we do not give our
10 support easily for any other organizations.

11 First of all, this was the first
12 charter school, and I have been at West End for
13 23 years, that took the time to come into our
14 community to ask us questions about what our
15 young people needed, what were the challenges
16 they were facing, and what were the challenges
17 our schools were facing.

18 In addition, they invited us to
19 come up and see their facility without having
20 to preplan. We sent a team of educators,
21 administrators, and youth workers up to the
22 school to meet with the young people, the staff
23 and to tour the facilities. I would be
24 understating it if I wouldn't say our staff was



1 greatly impressed.

2 On behalf of the board of
3 directors, the staff at West End Neighborhood
4 House, but, more importantly, the thousands of
5 young people we serve, we ask that you
6 favorably consider this application and give
7 our young people and afford our young people
8 the opportunities and choices that some of
9 these very eloquent young students have taken
10 the time to come down from Philadelphia and
11 share with us.

12 Thank you for your time.

13 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you. That
14 is all the registered speakers that signed up.
15 Are there any other speakers who wish to come
16 forward?

17 (No response.)

18 MS. NAGOURNEY: If not, I'd like
19 to thank you all for participating today. The
20 Secretary of Education will consider your
21 comments in deciding what decision to present
22 the State Board of Education.

23 This hearing is now closed.

24 (Hearing adjourned at 7:43 p.m.)



C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF DELAWARE)

)

NEW CASTLE COUNTY)

I, Kimberly A. Hurley, Registered Merit Reporter and Notary Public, do hereby certify that the foregoing record, pages 1 to 44 inclusive, is a true and accurate transcript of my stenographic notes taken on Monday, February 10, 2014, in the above-captioned matter.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 17th day of February, 2014, at Wilmington.



Kimberly A. Hurley, RMR

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