

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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October 19, 2016
Start: 1:11 p.m.
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HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Daniel Dromm
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Vincent J. Gentile
Daniel R. Garodnick
Margaret S. Chin
Stephen T. Levin
Deborah L. Rose
Ben Kallos
Andy L. King
Inez D. Barron
Chaim M. Deutsch
Mark Levine
Alan N. Maisel
Antonio Reynoso
Ydanis A. Rodriguez
Helen K. Rosenthal
Mark Treyger
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Elizabeth Rose
Deputy Chancellor for Division of Operations at
NYC Department of Education

Jared Fox
Department of Education LGBTQ Community Liaison

Bonnie Laboy
Superintendent Community School District Two

Kenyatte Reid
Senior Director of School Culture and Climate
from Office of Safety and Youth Development

Lois Herrera
Chief Executive Officer at Office of Safety and
Youth Development

Sterling Roberson
UFT Vice President for Career and Technical
Education High School

Neil Sakar [sp?]
NYC Public School Student

Katerina Core [sp?]
Eastside Middle School student

Harvey Chism
Executive Director of South Bronx Community
Charter High School

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Elizabeth Payne
Queering Education Research Institute at Hunter
College

Eliza Byard
GLSEN

Jillian Weiss
Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund

Gena Miller
Advocates for Children

Evan Bernstein
Anti-Defamation League

Jordan Greenberg
Aram American Family Support Center

Saif Siddiqui
Aram American Family Support Center

Debbie Almontaser
Muslim Community Network

Ambreen Qureshi
Arab American Family Support Center

Charlotte Pope
Children's Defense Fund New York

Amy Leipziger
NYCLA Education Commission

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Elvis Miguel
NYCLU Teen Activist Project

Paulette Johnson

Lillian Rivera
Hetrick-Martin Institute

Robert De Sena
Council for Unity

James Clementi
Tyler Clementi Foundation

Marla Brassard
Professor in School Psychology Program at
Teachers College Columbia University

DeJohn Jones
Parent Action Committee

Jeff Ervine
Bridg-it School Founder

Harjot Kaur
Sikh Coalition

Rishi Singh
DRUM

Ivan Kristhiane Daquial
Ugnayan

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Athena Arielle Magno
DRUM

Terrenze Rienton
DRUM

Kian Anilao
Ugnayan Youth

Camilla Bacolod
Ugnayan Youth

Khushu Bijaz [sp?]
DRUM

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2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Good afternoon, and
3 thank you all for coming to this very important
4 Education Committee hearing on bullying, harassment
5 and discrimination in New York City schools,
6 protecting LGBT and other vulnerable students. I
7 would like to note at the outset that October is
8 National Bullying Prevention Month, and 2016 marks
9 the 10th anniversary of this effort. In fact, today
10 is Unity Day. To show that we are all united against
11 bullying, and tomorrow is Spirit Day when millions
12 will wear purple to show their support for lesbian,
13 gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning
14 youth, and to speak out against bullying in all
15 forms. Unfortunately, bullying remains a serious
16 problem every day in every community, starting with
17 preschoolers and getting worse as children grow
18 older, and the national climate only seems to be
19 emboldening [sic] bullies of all ages in our society.
20 According to the National Center for Educational
21 Statistics, 22 percent of students nationwide
22 reported being bullied during the 2013 school year,
23 the latest year for which data is available. While
24 any student can be the target of bullying, members of
25 certain groups are disproportionately victimized,

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2 namely individuals who have disabilities, are
3 overweight, practice Islam, or appear to challenge
4 norms around gender or sexuality. Research has found
5 that students with disabilities are two to three
6 times more likely to be victims of bullying than non-
7 disabled students. Students who are overweight
8 experience bullying at similarly high levels. In a
9 political climate that fosters Islamophobia, bullying
10 of Muslim students is also widespread. A 2015 study
11 by the Council on American Islamic Relations found
12 that 55 percent of Muslim students reported having
13 been victimized by bullying based on their religion,
14 more than twice the national average. LGBT students
15 are also overwhelmingly victims of bullying and
16 harassment. According to the Gay, Lesbian and
17 Straight Education Network, or GLSEN, 2013 National
18 School Climate Survey over the course of one year
19 more than 74 percent of LGBT students were verbally
20 harassed, and more than 36 percent were physically
21 harassed. Sadly, the mistreatment extends to school
22 policies and practices. Over 55 percent of LGBT
23 students indicated that they have personally
24 experienced discriminatory practices or policies at
25 their school. Almost one-quarter of LGBT students

1 had been prevented from writing or discussing LGBT
2 topics in class projects and assignments. Bullying
3 can have a devastating impact on both victims and
4 bullies. Illustrative of this are the tragic cases
5 of bullied youth who commit suicide and of bullies
6 who land in prison. Most of the results of bullying
7 do not reach the news, but can still be quite
8 devastating. Bullying leads to increased
9 absenteeism, decreased academic achievement and
10 greater likelihood of dropping out of school. In
11 addition to academic difficulties, victims of
12 bullying re more likely to experience negative health
13 effects, such as sleep difficulties and headaches,
14 and mental health problems including depression and
15 anxiety which may continue into adulthood. The
16 negative consequences extend to those doing the
17 bullying who are more likely to abuse alcohol and
18 other drugs, drop out of school, engage in acts of
19 domestic violence, and have criminal convictions.
20 Despite the extensive damage that bullying does, a
21 number of students do not report incidents to school
22 staff. A 2010 study based on national data found
23 that 64 percent of students who were bullied did not
24 report it. We've got to do a better job informing
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1 all students about the dangers of bullying and the
2 need to talk with appropriate school staff when
3 incident do occur. To combat bullying, we need to
4 obtain accurate information on who, what, where,
5 when, and why. That brings me to the issue of under-
6 reporting of bullying incidents in New York City
7 schools as required by the state's Dignity for All
8 Students, or DASA, Act, which went into effect in
9 July 2012. A daily news analysis of DASA data from
10 the 2012 to 13 school year showed that 80 percent of
11 schools reported zero occurrences of bullying. An
12 analysis of 2013-14 data by the State Attorney
13 General found that 70 percent of city schools
14 reported zero incidents, and 98 percent of city
15 schools reported 10 or fewer incidents. Most
16 recently, data for 2014 to 15 shows 53 percent of
17 schools reported zero incidents, and 94 percent
18 reported 10 or fewer incidents. While there has been
19 a slight increase in reporting of incidents over
20 these three years, the level of under-reporting is
21 still unacceptable. The Attorney General's Report
22 also found some confusion and uncertainty among
23 schools about what incidents must be reported and how
24 they should be classified. This raises serious
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1 questions about the training that schools are
2 receiving on DASA's reporting requirements as well as
3 training on bullying prevention more generally. I'm
4 interested in hearing how many incidents of bullying,
5 harassment and discrimination, especially related to
6 sexual orientation and gender identity, have been
7 reported to the Office of Equal Opportunity. I am
8 also interested in hearing about the various ways in
9 which bullying, harassment and discrimination
10 manifest themselves. Much of the focus is on
11 student-on-student incidents, but what happens when
12 the bully is an adult? This hearing will probe
13 deeper than individual incidents to uncover the
14 institutional homophobia and transphobia at the root
15 of some of the problems. A key question is, how
16 consistently and constantly is the DOE implementing
17 in every single school anti-discrimination measures
18 where LGBT issues are concerned. With all of these
19 concerns, I look forward to hearing about the
20 progress of Jared Fox, the DOE's LGBT liaison who
21 came on board with Council funding. Jared has been
22 working hard on fulfilling his considerable duties,
23 very considerable, including preparing a
24 comprehensive plan, something that surprisingly the
25

1 largest school district in the country has never had
2 before. As of the beginning of this hearing, we do
3 not know some of the basic facts about the situation,
4 but I hope Jared will provide us with the necessary
5 data, especially given how much the DOE relies on
6 data. We need to know how many schools have programs
7 specifically to promote gender and sexuality
8 alliances or GSA's and how many others are being
9 developed. How many teachers and administrators are
10 out of the closet, and what is being done to
11 encourage others to come out and serve as role
12 models? In addition, I am interested in hearing how
13 professional development of all members of the school
14 community, curricular modernization to ensure the
15 accurate portrayal of LGBT history and current event
16 response are being used to tackle an issue too often
17 shrouded in shame and silence. We are in the midst
18 of a seismic societal shift, but do our students know
19 the forces that led us to marriage equality and the
20 continuing struggle for transgender rights. As far
21 as current events are concerned, after the worst mass
22 shooting in US history at the Pulse gay nightclub in
23 Orlando, how did the DOE direct teachers to respond?
24 Finally, I am interested in hearing how the new
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1 council-funded gender equity position within the DOE
2 will complement Jared's work. From many
3 conversations that I've had on this topic, I know
4 there are schools in New York City and across the
5 country that are doing an admirable job on this
6 issue. So, I am eager to hear how the DOE is
7 implementing these best practices in every school.
8 At today's hearing, the Committee will examine the
9 DOE's current policies, practices and reporting
10 mechanisms, as well as recommendations for
11 improvement to ensure that every school provides a
12 safe and welcoming climate for all students. We also
13 look forward to hearing testimony from parents,
14 students, educators, advocates, unions, and others
15 regarding the concerns and recommendations of the
16 DOE's efforts to combat bullying. I would like to
17 remind everyone who wishes to testify today that you
18 must fill out a witness slip which is located on the
19 desk of the Sergeant of Arms in the front of the
20 room, and to allow as many people as possible to
21 testify, testimony will be limited to three minutes
22 per person, and I have to be extra strict about that
23 today because I think we're going to have a number of
24 people giving testimony. And I'd like to say that we
25

1
2 have been joined by Council Member Chaim Deutsch from
3 Brooklyn, Council Member Mark Levine, and Council
4 Member Salamanca from the Bronx. So, thank you for
5 being here with us today as well, and I expect other
6 members of the Committee to be joining us. And let
7 me swear in the first round of people to give
8 testimony, and they are Deputy Chancellor Elizabeth
9 Rose, Jared Fox with the DOE, and Bonnie Laboy who is
10 also with the DOE, I think the Superintendent of
11 District Two if I'm not mistaken. So, if I could ask
12 you to raise your right hand? Do you solemnly swear
13 to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but
14 the truth and to answer Council Member questions
15 honestly?

16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: I do.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. And Chancellor
18 Rose, would you like to start?

19 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Yes, thank you.
20 Good afternoon, Chair Dromm and members of the
21 Education Committee. I am Elizabeth Rose, Deputy
22 Chancellor for the Division of Operations at the New
23 York City Department of Education, DOE. I am joined
24 by Jared Fox, the DOE's LGBTQ Community Liaison, and
25 Bonnie Laboy, Superintendent for Community School

1 District Two in Manhattan. Thank you for the
2 opportunity to discuss the DOE's work to ensure that
3 all of our schools maintain a safe, inclusive and
4 supportive learning environment for all students and
5 staff, and specifically for our LGBTQ and other
6 vulnerable youth. Cultivating and maintaining a
7 positive and supportive school culture is one of
8 Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Farina's top
9 priorities. The DOE works to promote a positive,
10 inclusive school culture that is free from bullying
11 and bias-based harassment and intimidation of any
12 kind through a variety of methods including
13 establishing and enforcing clear behavioral
14 expectations and guidelines, raising student and
15 staff awareness through our Respect for All Program,
16 providing curriculum and professional development
17 opportunities, and establishing strategic
18 partnerships with community-based organizations, or
19 CBO's. Before I begin, I'd like to thank Chair Dromm
20 and the City Council for your leadership and
21 participation on this important issue and for
22 supporting LGBTQ students and staff. Over the years,
23 the DOE has been fortunate to work very closely with
24 City Council on several school climate initiatives.
25

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2 Last year, with funding from the City Council we were
3 able to hire a fulltime LGBTQ Community Liaison, and
4 the funding for this position was baselined in DOE's
5 budget beginning this school year. The position,
6 currently held by Jared Fox, has been invaluable in
7 our work to ensure that schools maintain an inclusive
8 and supportive environment. The safety of every
9 student is of paramount concern to the DOE. To that
10 end, Chancellor's regulations A831 and A832 prohibit
11 all forms of student-to-student bullying and
12 intimidation, sexual harassment and bias-based
13 behavior on the basis of actual or perceived race,
14 color, religion, ethnicity, national origin,
15 immigration status, gender, gender identity, gender
16 expression, sexual orientation, disability, or
17 weight. The policies and procedures of regulation
18 A832 which conform to New York State's Dignity for
19 All Students Act, or DASA, extend to behavior that
20 happens on school grounds, school buses, and at all
21 school sponsored activities, programs and events, and
22 on other than school property when such behavior
23 interferes with the educational process. This become
24 especially relevant with the multiple forms of social
25 media at students' disposal. A832 requires staff to

1 report all incidents of bullying and for schools to
2 investigate all reports of bullying in accordance
3 with the established procedures and protocols. A832
4 requires the appointment by the principal of at least
5 one fulltime Respect for All Liaison in each school
6 to whom reports of bullying can be made and who
7 serves as a resource for the school. The Discipline
8 Code outlines the range of disciplinary responses and
9 supports and interventions that may be imposed based
10 on the findings of the investigation. As you may
11 know, Respect for All is a cornerstone of our
12 initiatives to combat bullying through celebrating
13 and recognizing the richness of our City's diversity.
14 Respect for All involves proactive, universal
15 activities and classroom lessons to promote positive
16 and respectful behavior and attitudes. A key focus
17 of the Respect for All program continues to be
18 professional development because of the vital roles
19 school staff play in creating a supportive and
20 inclusive school culture and the critical impact they
21 have in nurturing positive social behavior in our
22 students. These trainings include the Respect for
23 All Liaison training. All schools are required to
24 designate a Respect for All Liaison who must attend a
25

1
2 mandatory two-day training that was developed in
3 collaboration with Gay Lesbian Straight Education
4 Network, or GLSEN, Morningside Center, Operation
5 Respect, and the YES program of the New York City
6 LGBTQ Center. This training takes the lens of LGBTQ
7 issues as an entry point to promoting respect for all
8 students. The training is offered for schools serving
9 grades K-5 and 6-12. We also have Respect for All
10 confronting religious biases. In collaboration with
11 the Anti-defamation League, last spring we began
12 offering one-day training designed to help school-
13 based staff and students develop a common language
14 for discussing issues of cultural competency and to
15 increase participants' likelihood to interrupt and
16 address religious bias and bullying. While this
17 training is open to all staff, we targeted schools
18 with a number of incidents. All schools are required
19 to distribute our Respect for All in New York City
20 public schools brochure and display a Respect for All
21 poster that identifies a designated staff person to
22 whom concerns and complaints can be addressed. Last
23 year, we added a second poster, and here I have
24 visual aids, highlighting that Respect for All
25 includes LGBTQ students and indicating the designated

1 staff person. Concerns and complaints about bullying
2 and intimidation can also be sent directly to the
3 Respect for All email address which is monitored by
4 staff within the Office of Safety and Youth
5 Development. Additionally, our borough field support
6 centers or FSC's provide direct support to schools on
7 a daily basis. The FSC's include positions that have
8 not existed before such as the addition of a school
9 climate and culture manager who works with other FSC
10 student support services staff and OSED [sic] staff
11 to address the climate and culture in schools and
12 monitor incident reports to determine if schools have
13 noticeable trends or spikes in incidents related to
14 bullying or harassment. Another effort to improve
15 school climate and supports for students is our
16 expansion of restorative practices. Under this
17 Administration and with the welcomed support of the
18 City Council, we have significantly expanded
19 preventive and responsive training in restorative
20 practices in schools as well as onsite coaching in
21 these approaches. Restorative practices were
22 effective in creating and sustaining positive and
23 inclusive school climates as well as being an
24 effective way to respond to situations involving
25

1
2 harm. Bullying is often an insidious secretive
3 behavior, more easily committed when the target and
4 bully are not well known to each other. Restorative
5 circles help students build relationships and get to
6 know each other in a personal way. We are also very
7 proud of the new component that we've included in our
8 restorative practices training, one that seeks to
9 empower students to stand up to bullying. In
10 collaboration with our CBO partners, we have updated
11 our training and student advisory curriculum which
12 now includes an entire unit called Celebrating
13 Identity: Standing up to Oppression. We use this new
14 component promoting diversity in all of our training
15 in restorative practices. We launched our initial
16 version of the transgender student guidelines in
17 March 2014 to provide direction for schools and
18 support for transgender students. These guidelines
19 are intended to help schools ensure a safe learning
20 environment free of discrimination and harassment and
21 to promote the educational and social integration of
22 transgender students. New York City continues to be
23 a leader in this area. Our guidelines are currently
24 being revised based on almost two years of
25 implementation and best practices for students,

1 families, staff, and community-based organizations.

2 The revised guidelines will be published soon and

3 accompanied by central and school-based staff

4 training. We've made significant strides to build a

5 safe, supportive and inclusive school community for

6 all students, especially for our most vulnerable

7 populations who face their own unique challenges. We

8 know there is more work to be done, and we are deeply

9 committed to that work. I would now like to turn to

10 Jared Fox who will update the committee on his work.

11 Jared will be followed by Superintendent Bonnie

12 Laboy. Superintendent Laboy's work with middle

13 school students to expand gender and sexuality

14 alliances, or GSA's, is featured in this month's

15 Principal Notes, the Chancellor's monthly newsletter

16 to principals. We will then be happy to answer any

17 questions.

18
19 JARED FOX: Good afternoon, Chair Dromm

20 and members of the City Council Education Committee.

21 My name is Jared Fox, and I'm the DOE's first-ever

22 LGBT Community Liaison. I'm thankful for the support

23 of this committee and the creation of this role and

24 funding of several initiatives that we've undertaken,

25 and my gratitude mirrors that of the students,

1 families and staff that I have the pleasure of
2 working with and have worked with since January.
3 Today, just on the road at Stuyvesant High School,
4 the entire freshman class listened to speakers from
5 one of our community partners, PFLAG. This is the
6 first time that a program of this magnitude has taken
7 place at Stuyvesant, and I am proud to say that this
8 is just one of many projects that encourages respect
9 for gender and sexual diversity, as well as
10 clarifying the rights of LGBTQ students. Last June
11 we established the LGBT Advisory Council. This
12 council quickly expanded to include 34 participating
13 organizations that meet bi-monthly to offer support
14 and resources to LGBTQ students, families and staff.
15 Families are at the cornerstone of the work that we
16 do with students. When we speak of vulnerable
17 populations such as LGBTQ students, there is a
18 conversation of coming out where students disclose to
19 their family, friends and loved ones that they
20 identify as LGBTQ. This is why when I began in
21 January I immediately partnered with the Division of
22 Family and Community Engagement, FACE, to offer
23 training to almost 1,000 parent coordinators. These
24 parent coordinators are among over 2,000 individuals
25

1
2 I have personally trained during nearly 40
3 professional development sessions. These sessions
4 range from a two-hour overview of ways to make
5 schools more affirming for LGBTQ students to a full
6 day intensive on gender identity. The attendees
7 include school-based and field support staff, parents
8 and students themselves. We also support families
9 headed by LGBTQ parents. We held our first-ever
10 Family Pride event in this June in partnership with
11 FACE and the Office of Counseling Support Programs.
12 The celebrations continued during Pride Month, and we
13 are proud that for the first time the DOE
14 participated in Queens, Brooklyn, Staten Island, and
15 the larger heritage of Pride events, even with the
16 downpour of rain in Queens, we were delighted to have
17 students, teachers and families hold the banner with
18 the DOE logo. This year, our focus is on expanding
19 curriculum and improving direct student support. At
20 the DOE we view curriculum as both a window and a
21 mirror. By that we mean that LGBTQ students can see
22 their identity reflected across the curriculum,
23 whether classmates can see a world outside of their
24 own. This philosophy is especially evident in
25 literature, particularly in books that can transport

1 a student anywhere. During the 2015/2016 school year,
2 we piloted the Land of Literary [sic], LGBTQ Writers
3 in Schools Program to amplify the LGBTQ voice in our
4 English curriculum. The program pairs a teacher with
5 an LGBTQ author, provides students with copies of the
6 books and bring authors into the school to discuss
7 their work. Our schools hosted 19 visits last year,
8 and we will double this reach this year. Many
9 students in our 2015/2016 program said it was the
10 first time that they had met an author of a book that
11 they had read. That was a powerful statement, and
12 we're grateful for the Council support to expand our
13 curriculum initiatives, including launching
14 partnerships with Columbia Teacher's College and
15 WNET. These will greatly enhance our existing
16 efforts, including our annually published list of
17 grade appropriate LGBTQ books, and our work on
18 infusing LGBTQ themes into literacy and social
19 studies. One of our priorities this year is to
20 expand the number of gender and sexuality alliances
21 in our schools. Research from GLSEN has shown that
22 the presence of a GSA has an impact on school climate
23 and culture with students reporting lower incidences
24 of bullying and harassment on the basis of sexual
25

1 orientation and gender identity in these schools.
2 GSA's create a space of LGBTQ students and allies to
3 socialize, support one another and advocate for
4 inclusive practices in their schools. This year,
5 GLSEN named the Academy for Young Writers in District
6 19 in Brooklyn as the GSA of the year nationwide.
7 This is a testament to the high-quality of GSA's
8 across the five boroughs. We have even started a GSA
9 for central office staff. The New York City Schools
10 Pride Employee Resource Group brings together LGBTQ
11 and allied staff from across all five boroughs for
12 social and educational events. In conclusion, we are
13 deeply committed to providing all of our students,
14 families and staff with a safe and supportive
15 environment where they can learn and thrive, and
16 we're equally committed to address the academic and
17 social/emotional needs of students who exhibit
18 challenging behaviors. While we have made enormous
19 progress, we recognize that there's more work to be
20 done. It is our mission to support all schools to
21 become models of positive school climate and culture
22 in which all students feel included, respected and
23 safe. To that end, we look forward to continuing to
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1
2 partner with the City Council to reach this goal, and
3 now you will hear from Superintendent Bonnie Laboy.

4 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Thank you, Jared.

5 Good afternoon, Chair Dromm and members of the
6 Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity
7 to testify today about our work to support District
8 Two middle schools and their students who want to
9 deepen-- excuse me-- to dive deeper into issues of
10 diversity and tolerance in their schools. Two years
11 ago, we created the district-wide Middle School
12 Leadership Council to bring together students from
13 different schools to share interests and work
14 collaboratively on a social action project. The
15 students developed democratic leadership skills and
16 are responsible for running the Council and making
17 all decisions. Adult facilitators help students
18 engage in a robust process to reach consensus around
19 a topic they care deeply about, surface common
20 concerns, research possible solutions, and craft
21 resolution. Last year, the Student Council chose to
22 focus on celebrating diversity and tolerance, and
23 successfully advocated to form a Gender and Sexuality
24 Alliance, GSA, in every middle school in District
25 Two. To learn about the impact of GSA's, that GSA's

1
2 have on schools, students met with LGBTQ advocacy
3 experts as well as elected officials, Councilman Ben
4 Kallos, Assemblyman Dan Quart, and a representative
5 from Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer's
6 Office. Students analyzed research showing that
7 students who have a GSA in their school are less
8 likely to hear "gay" used in a negative way, such as
9 "that's so gay." Students in schools with GSA's are
10 also less likely to feel unsafe because of their
11 sexual orientation or gender identity or gender
12 expression, and more likely to feel connected to
13 their school community. Students in the Council
14 bring back ideas to their school communities for
15 implementation, and as a result, 16 out of 18 middle
16 schools in District Two have established or are in
17 the process of establishing a GSA. I attend monthly
18 meetings with the District Two Middle School
19 Leadership Council students along with Principals
20 David Getz, Jackie Getz and Raquel Mackrey [sp?].
21 Several teachers and guidance counselors also join
22 us. It is obvious that students take great pride in
23 representing their representative school, and have
24 come to value and embrace different perspectives.
25 This experience has empowered students to use their

1 voice, to exchange ideas, to work through
2 differences, to advocate for one another, and to grow
3 as leaders. We hope our middle school initiative
4 will serve as a model for other districts looking to
5 create more diverse and inclusive school communities.
6 Thank you.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Well, thank you very
9 much to all of you for your testimony here today, and
10 let me congratulate you also for all the work that's
11 been done on this issue since last-- well, I guess
12 since February of 14. We really have taken some
13 giant steps forward, and I'm very pleased to hear of
14 a lot of the work that you're doing. I'm very
15 pleased. I was ecstatic to hear when I read the
16 Superintendent's-- I mean, excuse me, when I read the
17 Chancellor's notes, newsletter, to hear that all of
18 the students in District Two in middle schools will
19 have an opportunity to become involved in what I used
20 to call a Gay Straight Alliance, now called Gender
21 Sexuality Alliance, but I do like to refer back to
22 the original words as well, because these are open to
23 everybody, not just to LGBT students, and I think
24 that that's what makes these gender sexuality groups
25 so effective is that they are a mixture of all

1
2 different students, and questioning students can join
3 this as well, but no matter what, every student who
4 joins those GSA's, you know, it's a place for them to
5 feel free to be themselves, and I think that's really
6 important. And Superintendent Laboy, I'm very
7 curious, because most times when we talk about GSA's,
8 we talk about them in the high school. So, this is
9 really groundbreaking that you've done this district-
10 wide in the middle schools. I'm wondering what
11 obstacles you might have met. How did you work with
12 parents who might have had concerns? How did you
13 deal with those types of issues in your schools?

14 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Thank you, and I
15 just want to reaffirm, one of the things that we
16 learned from our Student Council is that establishing
17 a GSA is equally important for straight students so
18 that they have an opportunity to come and ask the
19 questions that they have regarding LGBT issues, and
20 that's something that's surfaced with our work with
21 students. With respect to obstacles, certain
22 principals have spoken to me about public messaging
23 of a GSA to their communities. I think there's a
24 readiness factor for some parents to-- particularly
25 six grade parents-- to embark on the conversation

1
2 around gender and sexuality with some of their
3 children. So, a lot of support is needed in helping
4 principals' message, the Gender Sexuality Alliance
5 and its purpose. I think a key thing to remind
6 parents is that it's not a mandated club. It's open
7 for anyone. It really is a place for kids to engage
8 in open and transparent dialogue and that it's
9 student-led, right? Clubs in schools are student-led
10 initiatives, and that we have to really impress upon
11 parents that this is a conversation that our young
12 kids want to embark upon, and we want to create a
13 safe place for them to do so.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And I think an
15 important part of that-- I would agree with
16 everything that you said-- is that to reassure
17 parents that these are not about gay sex 101 type
18 clubs, right? Because I think that parents-- yes.
19 But many people do come to these-- when they hear
20 about these GSA's, think that's what this is all
21 about, and I think that when we assure parents that
22 this is about providing a supportive environment for
23 students to be themselves, basically, and not make
24 any decisions, and nobody is forced to make any
25 decision one way or the other. I think that they see

1
2 the benefit of that, and I've actually seen that work
3 as well in a school in Queens at IS230 where Jared
4 went out and worked with the parents. And in your
5 testimony, I believe, Chancellor Rose, you mentioned-
6 - or maybe it was Jared, who mentioned the training
7 of parents as well, of parent coordinators. So, I
8 think a smart way to work with schools is to get to
9 the parents first to let them know what is happening
10 and why there's a need for these types of things.
11 But at IS230, which was predominantly a Muslim
12 school, many religious folks as well who in some
13 instances might have thought that Islam was opposed
14 to having these types of clubs. You made great
15 strides moving forward, and in fact, created a GSA in
16 that school as well. So, Jared, maybe you can just
17 tell us a little bit more about the interaction that
18 you had with the parents there.

19 JARED FOX: So, my interaction with
20 IS230, which again, Council Member Dromm, is in your
21 district, I was approached by the principal saying,
22 "I have students who want to start this club. I have
23 a school leadership team that wants to be supportive.
24 We just want to make sure that parents are on board
25 as well." So, the school leadership team along with

1
2 their parent coordinator held a Family Information
3 Night. They sent posters home. They did robo-calls.
4 They sent letters home. It was every opportunity for
5 parents to come and ask questions, and what I did
6 with them is I spoke to them a lot around what is
7 gender, right, and what is sexuality, and that young
8 people experiences every young person has a gender.
9 Every young person has a sexual orientation. I think
10 often times we get into this thing that it's only
11 something that LGBT people are concerned about, but a
12 lot of work is around making sure that schools are
13 gender equitable places. So, I'm excited for the
14 addition of our Gender Equity Liaison so that we can
15 continue this work together. But the parents came
16 and they asked really great questions, and they've
17 been really successful at this year launching their
18 middle school GSA at this school. The number of
19 students who are very interested, they actually
20 marched with us in Queens Pride, and we're excited to
21 support other schools along with that. That's one of
22 many that we're working with.

23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I was fascinated about
24 at that particular school as well is that two young
25 people, I don't think they could have been more than

1
2 14 years old, actually did come out of the closet as
3 a result of their involvement in that, and stated to
4 me publicly at the school and then in the parade and
5 at subsequent meetings of them in the neighborhood
6 how grateful they were to have that safe environment
7 and how much better they felt about themselves after
8 having attending that. I think they were in eighth
9 grade and they've now moved onto high schools where
10 hopefully their high schools will have GSA's. But I
11 do remember also in a previous hearing asking
12 questions, in the previous Administration actually,
13 and saying to the Deputy Chancellor at that time, not
14 our current Deputy Chancellor, that you know, there
15 are gay students in every school, right? So, I
16 particularly appreciate District Two's efforts to
17 make this happen in every school, because yes, 10
18 percent of the student body anywhere between three
19 and 10 percent of the student body is probably LGBT
20 or Q, questioning, and so I think that it's really
21 important that we have these. And so, Deputy
22 Chancellor Rose, thank you for leading up this effort
23 and for overseeing it as well. I have some questions
24 too, that are a little tougher in terms of numbers--

1
2 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: [interposing]
3 Actually, if I could just jump in for a second.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Sure.

5 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: We only have
6 Superintendent Laboy--

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] I don't
8 know if your mic is on.

9 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Yes, but I'll
10 speak more loudly.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay.

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: We only have
13 Superintendent Laboy with us for about another 15
14 minutes. So if there are questions from you or from
15 other Council Members specifically for the
16 Superintendent, we would appreciate it if we could--

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Sure,
18 okay.

19 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: get to those.

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, let me introduce
21 the other Council Members who have joined us. We've
22 been joined by Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez,
23 Council Member Mark Treyger, Council Member Alan
24 Maisel, Council Member Helen Rosenthal, Council
25 Member Ben Kallos, and Council Member Steve Levin are

1
2 also here with us today. So, do anybody, any of my
3 colleagues have questions for Superintendent Laboy?
4 Alright. I may, so hold on for 15 minutes more.

5 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Will do.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And let me just get
7 to some of the other questions that I had in terms of
8 some of the numbers.

9 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Sure.

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: In 2010, the DOE found
11 their first annual audit on bias-related and bullying
12 incidents in the New York City public schools, and
13 this audit was supposed to provide baseline data
14 against which future progress and preventing bullying
15 related incidents could be measured. However, no
16 further audit results have been published since that
17 time. Why hasn't the DOE released any audits on
18 bias-related incidents since 2010?

19 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: So, in effect,
20 that audit got replaced by our reporting to the state
21 under DASA. And so we do report bias-related
22 material incidents to DASA. These are reported to
23 the state on a school by school basis. We can-- the
24 original audit looked at a citywide level, and I
25

1
2 think we can look into can we create something
3 comparable.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, what is the
5 number in percentage of bias-related disciplinary
6 incidents last year that were related to students in
7 the DOE?

8 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: So, last year--
9 well, for 2014-2015 which is the last year that has
10 been reported, we reported 4,293 incidents to the
11 state that are bullying-- material bullying bias or
12 harassment related.

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And is that where the
14 54 percent number comes from based on that number?

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Yes, I believe
16 that's correct.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. And was that
18 broken down into gender identity, disability,
19 religion, etcetera?

20 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: So, we do have
21 that broken down by the different categories. There
22 were 201 that were related to race, 135 related to
23 national origin or citizenship, 47 related to
24 religion, 64 to disability, 276 to gender, 195 to
25

1
2 sexual orientation, 143 to weight, and 3,232 to
3 other.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And what could be
5 included in the other, clothing?

6 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: So, it could be
7 clothing, it could-- I mean, there are a number of
8 categories or ideas that are not one of those
9 protected classes. It could be clothing. It could
10 be economic status. It could be height. It could be
11 children who wear thick glasses.

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Could any of that be
13 attributed to under-reporting or misreporting of
14 incidents?

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: So, each of
16 these incidents had to go through an investigation by
17 their schools, and the investigations have to
18 determine and make an effort to determine whether the
19 incident was based on a bias in one of the categories
20 that are defined. In these cases, the investigation
21 did not show a clear bias.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, what is the end
23 result when bias has been found? What happens to
24 those who have engaged in it, who have caused it, who
25 initiated it?

1
2 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Well, whether
3 it's bias or not with bias, there is still a
4 disciplinary action that needs to be taken based on
5 the disciplinary code, and we have a-- for each type
6 of infraction, there are a range of possible
7 disciplinary actions.

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, let me ask you
9 then, how many reports of school staff to student
10 harassment have been filed?

11 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: So, reports of
12 staff to student must be filed with the OEO, the
13 Office of Equal Opportunity. And so, I have a number
14 of years' worth of data here. For 2015, and this is
15 now calendar data, for calendar year 2015 there were
16 a total of 37 complaints of staff to student, most of
17 which are pending.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Most of which are
19 what, I'm sorry?

20 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Are pending at
21 this point.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And are those-- so I
23 guess, would those cases have been initiated by
24 students or do other staff members also report when
25 they witnessed something?

1
2 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: So, a staff
3 member who witnesses behavior is required to report
4 it, and this also could have been reported by the
5 students themselves.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And so if a staff
7 member is a subordinate and witnesses coming from a
8 principal or an administrator, they are also required
9 to report the administrator?

10 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Yes, they are.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And what type of
12 protection is provided to the subordinate?

13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: So, our
14 regulations do also provide protection from any
15 potential retaliation for making a report.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Is it against the
17 retaliation or is it whistle-blower protection?

18 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: It is
19 retaliation.

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. What are the
21 steps that staff is told to take when they see or
22 what they believe to be a bias-related incident?

23 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: So, they are
24 supposed to report any incident that they witness to
25

1
2 their Respect for All Liaison within 24 hours of the
3 occurrence of that incident.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, as Superintendent
5 Laboy mentioned, and I've witnessed it myself
6 actually when I was teaching, quite often you'll go
7 into a school, particularly middle schools, actually
8 I heard it a lot where you'll hear kids say, "that's
9 so gay," and then other things worse than that as
10 well. If a teacher witnesses that, is that something
11 that they're required to report or how is that dealt
12 with?

13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: So, any kind of
14 slur is a reportable incident.

15 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, technically, they
16 are required to report that? Here's what I'm trying
17 to get at is obviously I think the number of reports
18 is under estimated, that we're only getting 54
19 percent. I know there's been an improvement since
20 the reports were initially done, and I think in my
21 own testimony I said it started out at about 80
22 percent, dropped down to 70 and is now at 54. But
23 what efforts or how are we going about getting people
24 to report more incidents? Because I fear also that
25 often times there's a hesitancy to mark a school

1
2 negatively if there's a high number of bullying
3 incidents that go on in the school. How are we
4 addressing that issue?

5 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Well, so first,
6 we are every year reinforcing with principals and
7 with our Respect for All liaisons the importance of
8 reporting. Reporting is mandated. This is
9 reinforced to principals every year as part of their
10 emergency response training, which is a mandated
11 training every year. We also require our Respect for
12 All liaisons to refresh and train all school staff in
13 the beginning of the year of their responsibility to
14 report any incidents that they may witness in the
15 school.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, I know also when
17 I was teaching the OEO office would offer training
18 specific to sexual orientation. Have people been
19 taking advantage of that? Because I think that it's
20 important for staff to know, you know, at faculty
21 conferences or whatever, that even amongst themselves
22 this type of bullying or discrimination is not
23 acceptable.

24 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Well, I know
25 that all central staff are required to take-- all

1
2 central managers are required to take OEO training on
3 an annual basis, and we have similar also for staff,
4 for school-based staff.

5 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And what about on the
6 school level? Is that required or is that only at
7 the request of the principal?

8 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Yeah. So,
9 similar to what is required of central staff, school-
10 based staff is also required to take this training
11 and it is an online training so that it's easily
12 accessible for all staff.

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: How do you address--

14 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: [interposing]
15 Jared wants to jump in.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I'm sorry.

17 JARED FOX: I just want to say too that
18 there's a number of reasons why a young person might
19 not feel comfortable reporting, and I think as we
20 talked about with LGBT students especially, there is
21 this fear that they may not be out and there's this
22 fear of possibly having to come out as a result, and
23 I think as societal attitudes have shifted, we've
24 seen more young people empowered to be able to say
25 that this is not okay, and actually making statements

1
2 and reporting bullying. The other thing is that all
3 new employees go through training on DASA. So, that
4 is not only OEO, but the Division of Human Resources.
5 We also train on DASA and the requirements around
6 reporting.

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, just in regard to
8 training and specific to LGBT students as well, how
9 much training are we doing of teachers? Because I
10 know in the past we've done guidance counselors, but
11 the issue of teachers, because they're rally the
12 people on the front lines, how are we getting to
13 teachers and what are we teaching and training them
14 to do?

15 JARED FOX: So, since I've started in
16 January, I often throw out this number, 2,149--

17 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: [interposing]
18 Forty-two, Jared.

19 JARED FOX: Forty-two, 2,142 which is the
20 total number of people that I've trained in a minimum
21 of two hours. Now, when I go down that list, right,
22 most commonly it's teachers. So, the Chancellor
23 instituted last year Monday Professional Development
24 time, which is an hour, and what I've done is I've
25 actually asked principals, can I take two of those

1 back to back? Because one I thought was not enough.
2 One was like let's tip toe and get our feet wet a
3 little. The second one was a little bit more. We've
4 also done full-day trainings. So, what we realized,
5 especially our transgender students, is that
6 principals needed to be able to be empowered to have
7 these difficult conversations that may come. So we
8 partnered with the Hetrick-Martin Institute to
9 develop a full-day training specifically for school
10 leaders, and it goes through terminology, role-plays,
11 it goes the policy. I mean, it's in-depth. We
12 offered to about 150 school leaders in May and June
13 of last year, took that feedback and no have tweaked
14 it, and we'll be offering it this year twice a month
15 for the rest of the year starting November.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, who--

18 JARED FOX: [interposing] That's just--

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Who does that?

20 JARED FOX: That is Hedrick Martin
21 Institute and myself. So, Hetrick-Martin is supported
22 from City Council from Speaker Melissa Mark-
23 Viverito's initiatives, and so they have training
24 capacity built in.

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And last year I
3 attended what I thought was a successful conference
4 in Manhattan on transgender students. Is that going
5 to be repeated again? And I'm particularly
6 interested in knowing whether or not you're going to
7 be doing that in the outer boroughs.

8 JARED FOX: So, Hetrick-Martin was given
9 funding to the youth summits in every borough, and so
10 what we figured is if students are going to be there,
11 we also want to be able to create sessions for staff,
12 and so we'll be adding, with their youth summits, a
13 portion of the day that is for staff. We're kicking
14 that off November 22nd in Brooklyn with the Brooklyn
15 LGBT Youth Summit at Sunset Park High School, which
16 is deep Brooklyn, and we're excite to then go to all
17 of the other boroughs and continue this work to not
18 only make sure that students have a safe space, but
19 that staff also have a safe space to be able to
20 engage in these conversations.

21 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: And if I can
22 just add onto that, the particular event that you
23 attended last year was on one of our professional
24 conference days, and it was organized by the
25 Manhattan field support center. So, each of our

1 support centers are empowered to develop programs for
2 all of the schools in their boroughs on a variety of
3 topics, and we've seen ones on empowering women.
4 We've seen others on transgender students and a
5 variety of different forms and types of student
6 needs. And so I expect we will see those around the
7 city of different types.

8
9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, when we see an
10 incident occur, is there an effort to go to that
11 particular school to do some training? I'm thinking
12 of a particular incident that happened in a district
13 in Queens where an inappropriate flyer was
14 distributed, and I'm wondering if in that type of a
15 case where we've been made aware of an incident of
16 that type occurring do we go in and do some training
17 in those schools?

18 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: So, anytime we
19 have an incident that requires additional support,
20 the School Climate Managers from the Field Support
21 Centers go and work with the principal and help
22 identify what is it that the schools needs and would
23 benefit the school to learn from whatever that
24 incident was. So, we do have staff that go
25 immediately to each individual school.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Very good,
3 okay. I wanted to ask another question, too. The
4 Chancellor was kind enough to give me an opportunity
5 to address guidance counselors at a UFT pre-opening
6 of school summer-- end of summer type conference, and
7 when I spoke experiences, etcetera, so forth and so
8 on about being an openly gay teacher, a number of the
9 guidance counselors, maybe a dozen or so, came over
10 to me and they said, "You know, we're very good with
11 the issue. We've been trained on what it means to be
12 LGBT, but one of our biggest questions is how do we
13 deal with parents who are not supportive of their
14 children?" I'm wondering if maybe Jared or even the
15 Superintendent can describe to me what efforts are
16 being made to deal with that issue in particular.

17 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: So, we have--

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] And
19 Superintendent, is your mic on?

20 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: I don't-- sorry.

21 Yes.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay.

23 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Maybe just pick it up
25 a little bit so we can hear you.

1
2 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: So, at the
3 District level, we have two family support folks who
4 work with families and guidance counselors as well as
5 principals when we feel that we've reached a
6 crossroad with school staff and parents. And this is
7 a very, very delicate issue. They've received
8 training from Jared's office on how to handle these
9 conversations. Many times what we'll do is we'll
10 have a prep session and role play because we have to
11 be really, really prepared to understand both the
12 child's side as well as the family's side, and come
13 to some mediation so that folks leave like they have
14 a plan of action. And our main sort of strategy is
15 to really work towards opening up a healthy dialogue
16 between the parent and the child, because sometimes
17 issues are not resolved at our meetings, but really
18 help them think through strategies so that when they
19 leave, they can continue the conversation. But our
20 team, I'm very grateful. We have wonderful parent
21 folks on my team that we're eternally grateful for
22 and who have expertise. They could be guidance
23 counselors and therapists themselves, and sometimes
24 it just calls for an outside voice to come and sit at
25 the table, and they've been doing a really great job.

1
2 I think one of the thing that Jared talks a lot about
3 is the need for professional development. I think
4 this is an evolving area of our work as educators and
5 the support that we've received from his-- from him,
6 his office has been instrumental in helping us think
7 through these very, very sensitive and delicate
8 issues.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I mean, I would agree.
10 I think sometimes teachers also don't quite know what
11 to do when they're handed this issue as well, and
12 that professional development is really very, very
13 important. I do have some Council Members that want
14 to ask questions, but let me just wrap up my
15 questions, and I'll come back if further questions
16 once they finish. But, budget, I think I know the
17 answer, but Jared, what is your budget?

18 JARED FOX: So, we're working through
19 right now specifically a budget around supporting
20 gender and sexuality alliances. So, the first part
21 of my strategic plan that we've talked about is
22 really about supporting gender and sexuality
23 alliances. We've put together a several year plan
24 around GSA's. I've made some requests around funds,
25 and that's currently being circulated, and my

1 position has been baselined. And then, there are a
2 number of initiatives that are supported from City
3 Council that fall directly under my purview including
4 our Teacher's College and WNAT [sic] funds.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, that's something
7 that I definitely would like to work with you on and
8 the Deputy Chancellor as well, is to really see how
9 we can increase this budget going into the next
10 budget session, and provide you with some substantial
11 amount of funding to do some of the very basic things
12 that you do. I see that we have a number of the
13 members of the Administration, if you could just
14 stand for a moment, I'd like to see your "Out"
15 badges, yes?

16 UNIDENTIFIED: Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Even, and those are
18 fantastic, because they show kids-- I know everybody--
19 -

20 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: [interposing] And
21 I want to say that I'm wearing my old and ragged one
22 that I wear every day, and not the shiny new one that
23 Jared handed me for today's hearing.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I left mine at home,
25 so I am-- I'm guilty of that, but even something as

1
2 simple as that costs money, and so you know, we
3 really need to make sure that those types of things
4 can continue to happen in the schools.

5 JARED FOX: I will say that several of
6 our initiatives are supported from federal grants.
7 So, we have, through the Office of School Wellness,
8 the "Out for Safe Schools" program is actually
9 through a CDC grant, and correct me if I'm wrong, it
10 is a five year grant that not only supports the "Out
11 for Safe Schools" Badges, but also additional
12 training, a GSA summit that we held for the first
13 time last year, technical support for 25 schools in
14 establishing school wellness councils in GSA's. So
15 we gave out close to 10,000 badges last year, and
16 this year we're slated to give out almost 30,000,
17 which would be a grand total of 40,000 staff people
18 wearing those badges, and it's not just in schools.
19 I wear it when I'm going into work. I have people
20 stop me in the bus, people in the bank, and they ask
21 me what's that about, and sometimes I get kids that
22 just say, "Thank you for wearing that." And that's
23 the power of that "Out for Safe Schools" badge.

24 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: I think it's
25 important to recognize in the "Out for Safe Schools"

1
2 program is a perfect example, that the total level of
3 effort around improving school climate inclusive of
4 LGBTQ issues encompasses a number of different
5 departments at the Department of Education. It
6 includes the Office of School Wellness programs. It
7 includes initiatives through ThriveNYC, the First
8 Lady's focus on mental health supports. It includes
9 our Restorative Justice programs, and all of these
10 help address our students as well as in addition to
11 the programs that are specifically focused on LGBTQ.

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I'd still like to see
13 him get his own budget line there. So we're going to
14 talk about that and fight for that. So--

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: [interposing]
16 Okay.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Definitely, we'll try
18 to negotiate that, hash that out as we go into the
19 next set of budget negotiations, but I hear what
20 you're saying.

21 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Okay.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And--

23 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: [interposing] I
24 do just have-- we do need to thank Superintendent
25 Laboy--

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Yes,
3 yes.

4 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: for joining us
5 today.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much,
7 Superintendent Bonnie Laboy. Thank you for being
8 here with us, and thank you for the work that you're
9 doing in District Two. It is fantastic.

10 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: It really, really is.
12 Thank you. Okay, we're going to go to Council
13 Member-- oh, we've been joined by Council Member
14 Rose, Council Member Gentile, Council Member Chin,
15 and Council Member Reynoso, and Council Member Kallos
16 has some questions.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Bonnie, don't run
18 away so quickly.

19 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Hey, Ben, I'm
20 back.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: No, worries. I
22 just wanted to--

23 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: [interposing]
24 It's her district.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thanks--

1
2 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: [interposing] His
3 district.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: my Superintendent
5 Bonnie Laboy for your great work, Jared Fox for your
6 great work, and of course, Elizabeth Rose, thank you.
7 So, first, thank you for hosting the GSA. That was a
8 great group of kids. A lot of tough questions. Did
9 not expect that to go into Constitutional Law. A
10 question about whether or not there is-- I guess, the
11 question that came out of that, and on behalf of the
12 kids I guess I must ask, and it kind of parallels
13 what Chair Dromm was focusing on which is I do have
14 member item funding, but I haven't had a school yet
15 ask me for-- to provide funding to the GSA's in their
16 buildings. I don't have that many middle schools,
17 but what can we do as a DOE to make sure that there's
18 set-aside of 500 or 1,000 dollars per school that has
19 a GSA to supplement the kids' activities so that they
20 can go on trips and engage in activities and raise
21 awareness?

22 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: So, thank you,
23 Councilman Kallos, for meeting with our kids. It was
24 an instrumental and memorable day with them. So,
25 thank you. You're going to be hearing from some of

1
2 them this afternoon during public comment. They're
3 here as part of work.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Eastside Middle
5 School, or what school?

6 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Yes, Eastside
7 Middle is in the house.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Okay. Oh, I see
9 Principal Getz there.

10 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Principal Getz is
11 here, and Principal Getz is here as well.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Absolutely.

13 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Two principals.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Good to see my
15 constituents. Thank you for being here.

16 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: So you're going to
17 hear more directly from students around budget and
18 what they would like to have funded, but you will
19 also be hearing from all of our middle schools that
20 are in your district soon to get access to that money
21 that you are referring to. So, we'll take action on
22 that very, very quickly.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Do we have a
24 specific type of number or what we're looking at?

1
2 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Can I just--
3 David, are the kids going to speak to that, the
4 budget that they're requesting later? I don't want
5 to take away from them.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Okay, no worries.

7 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: That's okay.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So do we have the
9 sign-off from the kids or not? Should we talk about
10 money or do they want to talk about it? Okay.

11 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: So, the kids were
12 looking at about 5,000 dollars, some to put aside for
13 materials to advertise the GSA such as the "Out," the
14 lovely "Out." They also were looking for additional
15 funding to provide training for some staff members
16 who would like to engage in, as we discussed,
17 sensitive conversations so that they feel equipped to
18 handle the questions that come forth to them. So,
19 some money is set aside for training. Some money's
20 set aside for materials, and some money is set aside
21 for per-session [sic] to run afterschool clubs, if
22 lunchtime clubs were not available. Do you want to--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] And
24 is this district-wide or is this just for one campus?

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2 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: My students are
3 advocating for this citywide.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So--

5 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: [interposing] And
6 they're working on a bill to present to City Council.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Great, and I will
8 probably fight with my colleague Chair Dromm over who
9 can be the lead sponsor and who will be second on
10 that bill. But, and so is that 5,000 per school or
11 per district, or?

12 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Per school, every
13 school that has a GSA, they would like to have it.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Okay, and is DOE
15 interested in being the funding, or are you looking
16 for that to come from-- can that come from the Mayor
17 or can it come from the Council?

18 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: They're going to
19 request it through a bill of the City Council.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And so the City
21 Council would be asking the Mayor to set this aside?

22 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Yes.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And do we have
24 support--

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2 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: [interposing] The
3 bill is still in draft, so don't get nervous, but
4 it's coming your way soon, yeah.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And is this going
6 to-- and is there support from the Chancellor for
7 this legislation that the kids are working on and
8 funding?

9 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: They're going to--
10 they're still working on the draft of the bill, and
11 once it is more formalized they'll be meeting with
12 the Chancellor. But she is deeply committed to this
13 work. She asks me for monthly updates around the
14 work with the students. They have not yet presented
15 it to her because they're working with Councilmen
16 throughout Manhattan to sort of fortify the bill.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Great. And so I
18 guess to the extent it could be included in the
19 Executive Budget that would be incredibly helpful. I
20 guess, just one follow-up question, and thank you for
21 the work around GSA and LGBT, and also around
22 different ethnicities and religions. You know, we're
23 just getting through the Jewish holidays. We're
24 still not even done yet. Happy Sukkot, for those of
25 you who are celebrating. There's actually a Sukkah

1 on 84th Street and FDR Dri-- sorry, in the East River
2 Esplanade Promenade for any of the kids who are
3 interested in stopping by and having a nosh. In
4 terms of what else are we doing around protecting
5 people for religious observances and religious-- and
6 then another piece, just having been nerdy for a kid
7 at Bronx Science, which is I guess quite an
8 accomplishment, what about for kids who are getting
9 teased or made fun of because they're the kid in the
10 class in who always gets the "A" or on the flipside,
11 they're the one who has the special teacher there to
12 help them? So, what are we doing to help the kids at
13 both ends of the special education spectrum so that
14 other kids aren't giving them a hard time for being
15 at the top or in a different place on the spectrum?

17 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: So, I think
18 bullying and discrimination and harassment comes in--
19 come in many different forms, and you've articulated
20 a few. In our district, many of our middle schools
21 have Restorative practices, Restorative Circles, so
22 that when an issue like this comes up, it's presented
23 to the school community at the student level, because
24 we feel firmly that impacting student behavior and
25 understanding and engaging students in dialogue

1
2 around their behavior, not only how the behavior
3 injures on person, but also injures the entire
4 community is really the way that we're going to
5 impact change. So, I'm very, very proud of the work
6 that our schools are doing around restorative
7 practices, which also get at not just narrowing it
8 down to LGBTQ students, but really any form of
9 discrimination or harassment that's taking place that
10 injures again an individual, but also injures the
11 community.

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Actually, if we
13 could bring up Kenyatte Reid, our Senior Director of
14 School Culture and Climate from the Office of Safety
15 and Youth Development who leads our restorative
16 practice work, I think-- Bonnie gave him the perfect
17 lead-in.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And Mr. Reid, I need
19 to swear you in, so if I could ask you to raise your
20 right hand?

21 KENYATTE REID: Sure.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Do you solemnly
23 swear or affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth
24 and nothing but the truth and to answer Council
25 Member questions honestly?

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KENYATTE REID: Yes, I do.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. And state your name for the record.

KENYATTE REID: Kenyatte Reid. So, just to touch on that, as a former Principal and also now the Senior Director of School Culture and Climate, we have a plethora of training of opportunities that revolve around restorative practices which speak to what you mentioned, Council Member Dromm, as far as establishing a safe and supportive environment where children feel and connected with one another, and when that happens, then there's far less likelihood of any kind of bullying, intimidation, picking on one another, and then it also creates environment where they have a go-to, an adult. They have a go-to adult whether it be their advisor that's in that circle or something. So, that type of training which are for DOE employees and Deputy Chancellor Rose touched on which now includes confronting bias and oppression really goes a long way as far as creating a climate in the school that allows children and adults to see each other as humans and not as a label, not as a race, religion, gender, or anything of that nature.

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2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much,
3 and Council Member Chin has some questions.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you, Chair.
5 Good afternoon, Deputy Chancellor and Jared. My
6 question is in terms of, you know, supports for our
7 parents. Often time, you know, when a kid's behavior
8 change and they all the sudden they don't want to go
9 to school, and so what kind of resources are
10 available if parents find out that their kids are
11 being bullied, especially for-- also for immigrant
12 parents? Are there like materials that are
13 translated that are sent home that parent can get
14 hold of, and where do a parent go when they realize
15 that their kids are being bullied?

16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: So, we do-- we've
17 improved significantly our support for parents whose
18 first-- whose language is not English, to both access
19 materials and to have support in school with
20 translation and interpretation services. So, we both
21 distribute information about our behavioral standards
22 and discipline code and expectations at the beginning
23 of the school year to all families. We have a number
24 of brochures that go home with students that are
25 translated into our nine official languages.

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2 Whenever there is a report of a bullying incident,
3 both the parent of the victim and the perpetrator are
4 called in so that the principal can meet with the
5 parents and discuss the issues with them, and we have
6 both in-person or phone translation services
7 available to support the families who don't speak
8 English.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Now, among the
10 resources, I mean, is it clear to a parent that there
11 is someone that you can contact at the school if an
12 incident, you know, bullying happened? Like, who do
13 they call? Maybe call the parent coordinator? The
14 call the guidance counselor?

15 KENYATTE REID: Absolutely. So, everybody
16 at the school is that person, and I could just speak
17 to you as a principal. Every adult in my building
18 was that go-to person. So, you want your advisor.
19 You want your homeroom teacher, your AP, your
20 guidance counselor. That's why we have the RFA
21 training that has to be conducted every year to let
22 every DOE member that you are that person. And then,
23 yeah, specifically we have a Respect for All liaison.
24 So their name is put out front and center to every
25 adult so that they know that all parents can go to

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2 this RFA liaison, but there are no boundaries, and we
3 want to make sure that the parents and the students
4 know that, that it doesn't matter who that DOE
5 employee is, we all carry that burden to make sure we
6 create that safe and supportive environment. And
7 then, if it has to go beyond that, obviously you have
8 the principal. We have our field support liaisons,
9 and then ultimately, my office.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: But I guess
11 specifically, I mean, in elementary school it's
12 probably easier--

13 KENYATTE REID: [interposing] Right.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: because the parents
15 probably are more involved, but when it gets to the
16 high school level, I think that's where more
17 assistance is needed, because parents oftentimes
18 don't get involved in the high school with their
19 kids. You know, they go to-- they don't go to as many
20 meetings or parent/teacher conference, so they might
21 not even know who to go to, and the high schools are
22 much bigger.

23 KENYATTE REID: Right.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: So, in terms of the
25 information that they do get, is there something that

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2 really stands out, especially for high school parents
3 and immigrant parents that-- in the high school
4 level, that there's someone that they can actually
5 just go to, and make sure they get the help.

6 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Well, and we do
7 ask schools to distribute this information to all
8 families so that the student would bring this home
9 very early in the school year. Every piece of
10 information that we do send home, and on the DOE
11 website, there is also a Respect for All email
12 address. So, if you don't know whom to contact or if
13 you're afraid to contact the school directly, we have
14 an email address that any family can use, and our
15 central team receives this information and will reach
16 out to the school as appropriate or follow up on the
17 incident. So, we have a variety of ways for families
18 to find that person if they don't already know.

19 JARED FOX: And just a prime example, the
20 other day a parent sent a message to our Facebook
21 account, the NYC School's Facebook account.

22 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: That's right.

23 JARED FOX: We addressed that, but then
24 we also went back to close that look with the school
25 and to tell that school, "Hey, obviously there's a

1 disconnect and this parent didn't know where to go.
2 So let's work on that a little bit." So, when we see
3 holes we patch them up immediately, and I think
4 that's an important part too is, you know, when
5 things come to us, we want to realize that they may
6 have jumped a couple steps and why did they do that,
7 and sometimes it's because maybe they didn't know who
8 to go to. So we want to make sure that materials are
9 available in the languages and that parents have
10 somebody, and it could-- like Kenyatte said, anybody
11 in that school.

12
13 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Okay. I mean, we--
14 you know, I mean, as with all our Council office,
15 when incidents like this happen, you know, we reach
16 out to our contact in DOE and also try to connect the
17 parents. It's so important to make sure that-- to
18 assure them, you know, that helps are available and
19 is also in a language that you're familiar with and
20 make sure that the resources are there and they know
21 about it.

22 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: So, in addition,
23 the Respect for All poster, every school is provided
24 posters that are supposed to be displayed prominently
25 for students and parents. Every poster includes the

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2 name of the person to contact in the event that you
3 would like to report something or need somebody to
4 speak to. So, if the student is in school they can
5 look for that, or if the parent comes to the school,
6 it's something that should be visible for them.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: I guess my last
8 point is that with DOE is like it'll be good to sort
9 of publicize these information, maybe to the larger
10 community and really utilize like the-- like for
11 immigrant families, the ethnic media. It just, you
12 know, it's good to get those information out there,
13 so the larger community also know what is available,
14 and they can also kind of help each other, and so
15 it's not like just because you have a kid in school
16 that you know; if you don't have a kid you don't
17 know. But if everybody in the community sort of have
18 an idea that these resources are available, I think
19 we can all help each other. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Good, thank you. And
21 I have just a few more questions, actually. Do you
22 have a current list of Respect for All liaisons that
23 you can provide the Council with, a current list?
24
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2 KENYATTE REID: Yes. We have over 3,000
3 DOE employees that have been trained in Respect for
4 All. We can--

5 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: [interposing] All
6 schools are required to submit a consolidated plan
7 which includes a variety of safety information, and
8 they are required to submit the name of their Respect
9 for All liaisons. So, this-- each of the field
10 support centers is responsible to ensure that schools
11 do submit this and it includes that information.

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Do you have a list of
13 GSA's?

14 JARED FOX: So, what we've been doing with
15 our advisory council is gathering all the disparate
16 lists that many of our organizations have kept so
17 that we can then aid all these organizations, and
18 having the most recent data on who the principal is
19 and where the school even is. So, we hope to have
20 that by January 1. It is a comprehensive full list
21 of every GSA across our schools and a plan on how to
22 support those GSA's and increase GSA's in those
23 schools that don't have them.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: January 1, very good.
25 It made me very happy to hear that. We'll hold you

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2 to that date. Okay, I had a question on-- okay, on
3 cyber bullying. We didn't cover that yet. How are we
4 dealing with cyber bullying, and who is responsible
5 in the DOE for addressing the issue of cyber
6 bullying?

7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: So, I'm going to
8 ask Lois Herrera, our Chief Executive Officer of the
9 Office of Safety and Youth Development to join us.
10 The short answer is, cyber bullying is part of all of
11 the work that we do with the Office of Safety and
12 Youth Development to address student safety.

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And Ms. Herrera, I
14 have to swear you in also. So could you raise your
15 right hand? Do you solemnly swear or affirm to tell
16 the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth
17 and to answer Council Member questions honestly?

18 LOIS HERRERA: Yes, I do.

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you.

20 LOIS HERRERA: So, in the Discipline Code
21 it talks about when the Discipline Code is in effect.
22 It talks about when school in session, non-school
23 property and other than schools property when there
24 is a nexus to the school community. So, cyber
25 bullying fits into that. As well in the Discipline

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2 Code we talk about any of the infractions that deal
3 with communication between people-- include digital
4 commutations. So, we feel that cyber bullying is
5 embedded into the Discipline Code, whether it
6 specifically says cyber bullying or not. Some of the
7 infractions do clearly say through the internet or
8 other means, but we believe that it's addressed in
9 the same way bullying is addressed, and it is
10 represented in the Discipline Code an in our
11 policies.

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: And above and
13 beyond that is actually a compliance item for schools
14 to affirm that they have educated students about
15 appropriate online behavior including interacting on
16 social networks.

17 LOIS HERRERA: We also--

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Do you--
19 I'm sorry.

20 LOIS HERRERA: We also have a staff
21 member, I'm sorry, who interfaces with some of the
22 social media sites such as Facebook, and we've had
23 occasions where we've been able if there's a clear
24 threat to have material.

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Do you track the
3 number of complaints for cyber bullying separately or
4 how is that dealt with?

5 LOIS HERRERA: It's not a separate
6 category for us. It's included within bullying.

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, it's including in
8 bullying? Would it be included in DASA reporting?

9 LOIS HERRERA: If it reaches the level of
10 material incident, yes.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. We've been
12 joined by Council Member Barron, Garodnick and King.
13 Oh, yes, okay, so on the issue of the Gender Equity
14 Liaison position, one, have you filled that position
15 yet? And the second one is how will that person
16 interact with Jared, with Mr. Fox's role as the LGBT
17 Liaison? One of the things that the Council was very
18 interested in was included in the gender equity or
19 our transgender folks as well.

20 LOIS HERRERA: We are in the hiring
21 process. The position has been posted, and we are
22 very close to moving forward with hiring a Gender
23 Equity Liaison. This person will be part of the
24 Office of Counseling Support Program, the same way as
25 Jared is part of that Office, and the role will be

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2 creating professional development for staff, specific
3 programming for students and creating resources for
4 all. The Gender Equity Liaison will ensure a focus
5 on intersectionality of lots of identity
6 characteristics for in both gender identity and
7 gender non-conforming students looking at ethnicity,
8 race, religion, and sexual orientation. This Gender
9 Equity Liaison will focus on prevention and awareness
10 of dating violence, sexual consent, women's
11 empowerment in areas of education, career, expanding
12 opportunities for all gender with pointed attention
13 on the intersectionality and vulnerable populations.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, good. Let me
15 go back to DASA reporting. What is being done to
16 increase the accuracy of the DASA reporting?

17 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Well, what we're
18 doing is we're educating and training and supporting
19 our staff on ensuring reporting, and then we also
20 have technical education on the accuracy of
21 reporting.

22 LOIS HERRERA: And within our system,
23 when schools go to enter an incident, if it's an
24 incident that could possibly be related to bullying,
25 there's a drop-down that guides them through a series

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2 of questions to tease out whether it's a material or
3 not and whether there's bias related. So, this is
4 something that's programmed into our online
5 occurrence reporting system.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, for schools where
7 you have zero incidents of reporting bullying, do you
8 go to those schools and say, "How could this be?"

9 LOIS HERRERA: It isn't-- so let me back
10 up a step, because there are reports of bullying, and
11 then there are those that get reported to the state
12 as a material incident. So, there's a fine
13 distinction.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Is that the Vader
15 [sic]?

16 LOIS HERRERA: It goes-- it gets reported
17 at the same time that Vader gets reported. And so
18 there are a number of reasons. First of all, it's
19 very difficult for students to self-report and let us
20 know about bullying, and so the first task is
21 creating a climate that's conducive to self-reporting
22 and making an adult aware. Secondly, when we know
23 these incidents are reported through OARS [sic], and
24 then as I said, there's a series of questions and
25 prompts to see if it's a material incident and bias

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2 related. Yes, we do look at our numbers very
3 closely, and we are concerned about schools that
4 don't report incidents or seem not to have numbers
5 that would-- you know, at different points on a
6 monthly basis we look at the numbers of reported
7 incidents.

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Excuse me. Okay.

9 So, I think I'm going to let you go now. I do want
10 to say thank you also to Mr. Kenyatte Reid who's
11 here. I want to thank Lois Herrera who's here, Jay
12 Murray who's here as well. And to everybody else
13 who's had a part in this. You know, part of the
14 reason I ran for elective office was when I came out
15 as an openly gay teacher, I faced much opposition
16 within the Department of Education. So it gives me
17 particular pride to know that the Department is
18 working so hard, and I'm very proud of the work that
19 you're doing. Of course, we have a lot more work to
20 do, but I do want to say thank you to all of you for
21 the great job that you're doing. Thank you very,
22 very much.

23 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Thank you very
24 much.

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2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Okay,
3 we're going to call up some students who are here,
4 and one of the Vice Presidents of the UFT as well,
5 Sterling Robison, who is here, because I am very
6 interested in hearing some of the students' stories,
7 and I know that we have been joined by some students
8 from the South Bronx Community Charter School. Where
9 are they? Give us one of these. Alright, like that,
10 over here. Thank you for being with us. And I do
11 also want to thank and congratulate the charter
12 schools for taking this issue so seriously, and my
13 meetings and my talks with the charter schools,
14 they've stepped up to the challenge that I presented
15 to them, and I'm grateful for them for doing that and
16 for working so good on this issue, so well on this
17 issue. So, thank you, South Bronx. We're going to
18 hear from I believe one of your teachers in a moment
19 on that as well, but let me call up this next panel:
20 Neil Sakar [sp?], New York City Public School
21 student. Is Neil here? Okay, good. Come on up.
22 And Katerina Core [sp?], a student in New York City
23 Public Schools, Eastside Middle School. And Sterling
24 Roberson, United Federation of Teacher's Vice
25 President. And we'll also call up Harvey Chism. Is

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2 Harvey here? Okay, I'll just wait for Harvey, and
3 then I'll swear you all in. You're on a timer,
4 though. No, I'm only kidding. There you go. That'll
5 be in the next newsletter. Alright, thank you very
6 much. And can I ask all of you to raise your right
7 hand, please? Do you solemnly swear or affirm to
8 tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the
9 truth and to answer Council Member questions
10 honestly?

11 UNIDENTIFIED: I do.

12 UNIDENTIFIED: Yes, I do.

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, let's start
14 with Mr. Roberson, and then we'll go to Mr. Chism,
15 and then we'll go to the students, okay?

16 STERLING ROBERSON: Good morning, ladies
17 and gentleman, Councilman Dromm. I'm definitely glad
18 to be here to talk about this issue regarding
19 bullying, harassment, discrimination in New York City
20 schools. The testimony is out there, but I'll just
21 highlight some of the important points, because this
22 obviously is an important issue. Although I'm the
23 Vice President currently for Career and Technical
24 Education High Schools, my former hat was the
25 Director for School Safety and Health for the United

1 Federation of Teachers. So, this topic is not
2 foreign to me, but it's also an important topic.
3 Just as-- just in general when we think about the
4 major cultural shifts that has happened in society
5 around the awareness of gender identity as well as
6 gender equity. Many of our schools, obviously,
7 become the focal point of that. We know that more
8 and more students are identifying themselves in terms
9 of being gay, lesbian, bisexual, etcetera, and
10 they're also doing it at a younger age. It was nice
11 to hear the Department talking about going down
12 further to the middle schools in terms of the
13 awareness. In doing so, though, when we think about
14 these societal changes, it also has an impact when it
15 comes to the students. It creates untold challenges
16 that we have to collectively address, which was
17 talked about as well, and these challenges also--
18 think about threatening the safety, the health and
19 the wellbeing of many of the students who come to
20 school to get an education are impacted by other
21 things. One thing that we know at the UFT is that
22 many educators struggle as well as counselors. As
23 much as they want to do the right thing, they
24 actually struggle even though they want to treat

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2 students fairly, they want them to be treated equally
3 and respectfully, but they also, as you heard,
4 struggle with what does that look like. How do they
5 manage to create that environment, and what do they
6 need to do to ensure that that takes place across the
7 board. There's shining examples of schools that are
8 doing some incredible work. We think about in Staten
9 Island, New Dorp High School, where there's two
10 teachers and a paraprofessional who organized the GSA
11 in their school and bringing folks together to support
12 that conversation. We think about the Ert [sic]
13 School and the East Village where teachers of fourth
14 graders and fifth graders, and they're talking about
15 rights movements, not just civil rights. It's all of
16 this, and it's done through an inquiry process where
17 students are researching and having fun and gathering
18 information, but this is all part of the educational
19 process. When we think about the historic Harvey
20 Milk School and the work that they've been doing in
21 terms of the LIS [sic] work in charge of making sure
22 that folks are not just aware, but bringing folks
23 together to have these kinds of conversations. So,
24 it's great that there's quite a few efforts, but we
25 know that there's a lot to do. In terms of the UFT

1 we've done training. In terms of the DASA that was
2 mentioned, we've trained over 12,000 educators in
3 that space. We've also talked about the visibility
4 on how the language that's happening in schools. We
5 touched on it, and Councilman you touched on it in
6 terms of how people speak within the schools. We
7 have a positive learning collaborative where teachers
8 and staff members and others have intensive training
9 to help students deal with their feelings of
10 frustration, anger, as well as rejection and
11 ultimately depression, and we know how that can lead
12 to ultimately to sometimes suicide, which is a
13 tragedy. Also, we have a BRAVE, Building Respect,
14 Acceptance and Voice through Education, a great
15 campaign where there's a hotline where folks can pick
16 up the phone and call when they have issues, because
17 that is part in parcel that was raised. How does
18 parents, how does students, how do they know what to
19 do and when to do it and who to call, and it's a
20 confidential hotline. So, as much as there's some
21 great work, and I have commended Department of
22 Education on their Herculean effort, one of the
23 things that we have to think about is that there's
24 still more work to be done. We have to continue to
25

1
2 build awareness, continue to build understanding not
3 just among students but also among colleagues and
4 staff, and deputize everyone in this effort. We
5 cannot divorce ourselves from the politics in terms
6 of how do we look at these issues and make sure that
7 we have legislation, make sure that we have
8 regulations that support the students that go to
9 school every single day, and how do we provide the
10 intensive training that we know that everyone needs,
11 not just the student, not just the teachers, but the
12 parents and all of us so that as collectively we can
13 ensure that every single school is a safe learning
14 environment for students that regardless that they
15 all are able to flourish through their education, and
16 that should be our primary focus. So, in doing so,
17 at the UFT we work with the Department of Education.
18 We're happy to continue to work with the Council to
19 ensure that all schools are doing what needs to be
20 done, and I always say doing the right thing for our
21 children and by our children to ensure that parents
22 are confident that the school system is a place
23 that's a safe haven for their schools as we engage in
24 educating them on a regular basis. So we continue to

1
2 want to work with the Council as well as the
3 Department and others in this important work.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Mr. Roberson, you
5 mentioned the positive learning collaborative. Can
6 you just give me a couple details? What is that
7 about exactly? And how does that apply to anti-
8 bullying?

9 STERLING ROBERSON: So, in general when
10 we think about what we've done in terms of the
11 positive collaborative, it's really about how do you
12 change the culture of a school and understanding that
13 it's not just how do you train teachers. It's how do
14 we get the entire school community to think about
15 what's in the best interest of students, and how do
16 we do that with a positive focus, and how do you deal
17 with many of the issues that students bring to
18 schools that we need to be able to address? And how
19 do we specifically address those particular issues
20 through training, through-- when I say training, I
21 don't want a boiler [sic] plate [sic], because when
22 you hear the word training, not all training's the
23 same. It's an extensive training where everyone in
24 the school community has bought into the training.
25 There's folks from a variety of fields that are

1
2 coming in to engage in this work. So, it's not just
3 an isolation where it's one person just standing up
4 and saying this is what we need to be able to do, but
5 folks are really engaged in the process in terms of
6 how do we deliver the kind of change that we want to
7 see in terms of supportive environment.

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And there's one person
9 in the school. How many schools is it in with the
10 UFT?

11 STERLING ROBERSON: In the positive
12 learning collaborative I don't have that number, but
13 it's-- we have expanded it and I know that we put
14 resources and others have put resources in it before
15 its expansion over to more schools.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And it's similar to
17 restorative practices, am I right on that?

18 STERLING ROBERSON: It is when you think
19 about the restorative practices bring all of it
20 together in terms of sociology, not just one thing--

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] And I
22 don't think I heard in your testimony any mention of
23 BRAVE. Does the BRAVE program still exist?

24 STERLING ROBERSON: BRAVE program still
25 exists. We love the program. It's one where Building

1
2 Community Charter High School. My school's a brand
3 new high school that just opened this year with an
4 inaugural class of ninth graders. I actually have
5 some of students here with me today. And in my role
6 as Executive Director I'm responsible for ensuring
7 that both the needs of my staff and students and with
8 regard to access to resources are met, and that we do
9 that in a way that helps us realize our mission of
10 improving the life outcomes of students, but
11 specifically promoting their excellence through a
12 focus on personal academic and professional skills in
13 a supportive and responsive learning environment.
14 So, South Bronx Community Charter High School serves
15 predominantly black and Latino students from the
16 neighborhood surrounding Community School District
17 Seven. Our school was inspired by work that was
18 originally undertaken under the auspices of the
19 City's Young Men's Initiative to improve the life
20 outcomes of young men of color, and though this work
21 was the catalyst for our school model, South Bronx
22 Community Charter High School and our partnering
23 district schools which include Epic [sic] North, Epic
24 South and the Nelson Mandela School for Social
25 Justice are all co-ed schools. Collectively, our

1
2 four schools are enjoying in sharing best practices
3 and really share a common vision for success for our
4 students, and jointly we provide programming for
5 students who have historically been marginalized and
6 are undeserved, and typically tend to be the students
7 who are pushed out of school due to systemic failures
8 and peer issues such as bullying. So when we look at
9 statistics from GLSEN, and I know that GLSEN was
10 cited earlier, we know very specifically that
11 bullying for LGBTQ youth is a serious program. In
12 fact, that 82 percent of those students who identify
13 in any of those categories have been-- have had
14 problems with bullying in the last year due to their
15 sexual orientation. We know that 64 percent of those
16 students feel unsafe at school due to their
17 orientation, and that 32 percent did not go to school
18 for at least one day because of feeling unsafe. So,
19 these statistics are really startling to be sure, and
20 when you couple them with the alarming statistics
21 about the success rates of our black and Latino young
22 men and women, we get a very dismal picture about how
23 LGBTQ youth of color in particular are unsupported
24 and often underserved in many schools. We believe
25 that addressing these issues is paramount to ensuring

1 students' success, and ensuring that they have the
2 opportunity to succeed. Perhaps it's most important
3 to note about our efforts to date are the ways in
4 which we've endeavored to establish and sustain a
5 school community and culture that's inclusive, anti-
6 oppressive, and provides students a strong sense of
7 belonging. By design, our school model considers the
8 intersections of race, gender and sexuality as
9 critical lived experiences that are important to the
10 part-- that are important part of students' lives,
11 and subsequently we've put into practice a number of
12 key elements that might have the potential to benefit
13 other schools. They include-- I'll wrap up rather
14 quickly. They include a weekly 90-minute class
15 reserved specifically for the critical examination,
16 exploration and discussion of issues of identity and
17 expression and that are an important part of the
18 lived experience for our students. In this
19 facilitated space, our students really do have an
20 opportunity to deconstruct and challenge definitions
21 of gender and directly confront some of the
22 prejudices that they experience. For us that's
23 really important because it serves multiple purposes.
24 It starts to create community and cultivate a sense
25

1 of belonging across the diversity of students and
2 really acknowledges the multiple identities that they
3 live and represent. And so this is more of a
4 compulsory piece, but it is scheduled as a part of a
5 school day, whereas a lot of times that sort of
6 programming is relegated to after school in many
7 communities, and is the sort of thing that you may as
8 a young person have the luck of finding, but not
9 always have the opportunity to see it respected and
10 appreciated by your teachers and staff. I mean, we've
11 also committed very deeply to professional
12 development and restorative practices as a response
13 to both prevent and respond to bullying.
14 Specifically, we look at our restorative practice
15 work at the tier two level in thinking about harm and
16 healing, and providing an opportunity for students
17 who have been harmed to maintain their integrity, for
18 those who have been the responsible to have an
19 opportunity for amends, and then to promote learning
20 that happens in the context of each of those
21 incidents when there is a breach of our norms. And
22 very-- the last two points is that for us culture
23 responsive education is a key practice as well, and
24 we deliberately focus on that work to really address
25

1
2 the interest of our students in the present moment,
3 and equip them with the knowledge and skills that
4 they need to identify and fight a range of societal
5 injustices. So we are, as a brand new school,
6 preparing for the initiation and launch and
7 sponsorship of our own GSA. The students who are
8 here with me are members of that founding group along
9 with a staff person back at the school. And in
10 closing, my experiences as a former social studies
11 teacher, nonprofit leader, school designer, and now
12 Executive Director for this charter school have
13 collectively shown me that until practices and
14 conversations shift, schools will continue to be
15 alienating places that marginalizes entire swaths of
16 students and perpetuate biases that hinder their full
17 potential and individuality. So, I appreciate the
18 opportunity to speak with you. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.
20 My question was going to be if you had a GSA, but you
21 answered that, and you're hoping to have one soon, am
22 I right?

23 HARVEY CHISM: Yes, we do.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, good. And what
25 grade do you have, ninth grade?

1
2 HARVEY CHISM: Yes, we have a ninth grade
3 class, an inaugural ninth grade.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And when will you
5 get the rest of the grades?

6 HARVEY CHISM: So, each year we're
7 enrolling a successive grade until we're full
8 enrolled grades nine to 12. So, this year, we are
9 with 110 students as our very first class.

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Good luck.
11 Thank you.

12 HARVEY CHISM: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Alright. Yes?

14 NEIL SAKAR: Gathered Council Members and
15 the public. My name is Neil Sakar, and I am an
16 eighth grade student at Eastside Middle School which
17 is in Council Member Kallos' district. Our school
18 has a strong Gender and Sexuality Alliance where we
19 actively partake on fundraisers, raise money in the
20 annual AIDS walk, as well as encourage a safe
21 environment in the school. I along with other members
22 of the Manhattan Leadership Council which is a group
23 of student leaders in District Two have written a
24 bill which states that all publicly funded middle
25 school students in the City be required to have a

1
2 Gender and Sexuality Alliance which is known as a
3 GSA. We hope that this bill passes through the City
4 Council and becomes law by the start of the next
5 school year, which is September 2017. On October
6 7th, 2016, we met with Borough President Gale Brewer
7 to present our idea. Ms. Brewer has expressed her
8 support for the bill and has promised to give us
9 feedback on it. We have also met with Council Member
10 Kallos, and he also promised to provide his support.
11 Our goal is to eliminate discrimination and
12 harassment towards lesbian, gay, bisexual,
13 transgender, queer, asexual, and pansexual students.
14 We want students to have a place where they're able
15 to express and discuss their gender identity and
16 sexual orientation freely as well as raising
17 awareness and spreading the ideas of accepting
18 differences amongst gender expression, identity and
19 sexuality. A GSA may encompass a Restorative Justice
20 Circle and the Safe Space program. A Safe Space is
21 an area where all students can fully express accounts
22 of harassment considering sex, race, sexual
23 orientation, gender identity or expression, cultural
24 background, religious affiliation, age, or physical
25 and mental state without feeling unwelcomed,

1
2 uncomfortable or unsafe. A Restorative Justice
3 Circle is where students and the instructor gather to
4 gain trust amongst themselves and discuss about their
5 sexuality, gender identity, race, etcetera. We
6 understand that there will be some controversy
7 relating to a GSA. However, we want to stress that
8 joining your school's GSA is optional and not
9 mandatory. GSA's should be implemented in all City-
10 funded schools because research has shown that such a
11 club improves grades, increases attendance, and leads
12 to less cases of harassment and bullying. For
13 example, an investigation by GLSEN found that schools
14 without a GSA reported that 66.5 percent of students
15 felt unsafe about their sexual orientation compared
16 to schools with a GSA, which reported 54.3 percent.
17 Furthermore, GLSEN found that 43.2 percent of
18 students in a school that did not have a GSA felt
19 unsafe compared to 35.7 percent of students that felt
20 unsafe because of their gender expression in a school
21 with a GSA. In schools with a GSA, GLSEN reported a
22 decrease of 7.9 percent of students missing at least
23 one day of school in a month. When students feel
24 safer and more comfortable in their academic
25 environment, they're better able to absorb the

1
2 teachings and are less likely to be absent due to
3 fear of harassment and bullying. GSA's make a
4 profound impact on students and can lower the number
5 of cases of bullying, harassment and discrimination
6 in NYC schools. We need to protect LGBTQ+ youth and
7 other vulnerable students, and I firmly believe that
8 establishing a GSA will help to stop homophobia.
9 Thank you for your time. We hope that you will take
10 our idea into consideration.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Well, thank you very
12 much, Neil, and I'm sure glad that you live in
13 Council Member Kallos' district because I wouldn't
14 want you running against me for office.

15 NEIL SAKAR: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: You are very well
17 spoken, and I could have used your statement as my
18 opening statement, actually. So, thank you for your
19 testimony, and I have some questions, but we're going
20 to get to the next person, and then we'll come back
21 to you guys, okay?

22 KATERINA CORE: City Council and members
23 of the public. My name is Katerina Core and I'm an
24 eighth grade student at Eastside Middle School as
25 well, and I am the representative in the Manhattan

1 Leadership Council. As New Yorkers we pride
2 ourselves in our diversity. Many people say that you
3 can come to New York and find every type of person,
4 and in many ways that applies to our schools, too.
5 Each and every student in a New York City public
6 school should be entitled not only to a substantial
7 education, but a place where they feel safe and
8 protected. In order to do this, it is extremely
9 important to establish a place where students can
10 express their gender or sexuality without feeling
11 persecuted. As a student, I would want to go to a
12 school where I feel safe and accepted, and with a
13 group like this we can make a step to all schools
14 having that quality. These qualities are the prime
15 focus of the Manhattan Leadership Council. This is a
16 council comprised of middle school students
17 representing their schools and its interests while
18 also determining an initiative that we should all
19 follow. This year it was acceptance. So far, we
20 have drafted a bill that we hope to pass, and
21 although we haven't determined anything for sure, we
22 would like each school to receive funding for
23 materials and for all teachers to lead the groups to
24 receive training. As a representative, we think that
25

1
2 having your fellow peers in a group rather than a
3 guidance counselor would be much more effective in
4 providing each student a personal approach to their
5 situation. Although guidance counselors can be
6 helpful, as a student, I would feel much more
7 comfortable talking to people I know have similar
8 experiences or have specific training. As a council,
9 we decided that the best group for this matter would
10 be a Gender Sexuality Alliance which would create a
11 safe space for a student regardless of their
12 sexuality, gender, race, religion, etcetera can come
13 and receive support from fellow peers and teachers
14 which would enable them to participate in events,
15 educate others and find help, but it is important to
16 note that this group is completely optional to join.
17 In my school we have a Gender Sexuality Alliance, and
18 it has been very successful. We conducted fund
19 raisers for the AIDS walk and for Ally for Needs
20 [sic] Foundation. In a study conducted by the
21 American Journal of Public Health revealed that
22 students that were questioning or were part of the
23 LGBTQ+ community were twice as likely to commit
24 suicide as heterosexual students their age, but when
25 you want a change you have to start talking about

1 people as if they are people and not statistics.
2 Middle schoolers are at a very pivotal age, and it is
3 very important for students to know that they are
4 supported. Imagine a young student who is in middle
5 school. Now, imagine that the student has come out
6 to his family as bisexual. The student's parents
7 disapprove. The student goes to tell his friends
8 hoping that he will find support, but instead he gets
9 bullied and has nowhere to go. Think about how this
10 student must be thinking. They're very own parents
11 and friends have turned on him. The students has no
12 one to talk to and no one he can trust. Imagine not
13 having anyone. The student decides to commit
14 suicide. The student has left a burden on his
15 school, on his friends and on his family. The
16 student had given up. What if we could prevent this?
17 I'm not saying that we will prevent every single
18 LGBTQ+ youth suicide with this group, but I am saying
19 that if we can save at least one life by providing
20 help like this, it is worth it. Thank you for your
21 time and consideration.

22
23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much,
24 Katerina. That was spectacular also. And I really,
25 really like the idea of you bringing up the fact of

1
2 young people coming out to their parents, because in
3 some ways, on LGBTQ issues, because in some ways it's
4 that-- it's what makes it different than other types
5 of bullying, because often times if you're bullied in
6 another way for your clothing or for your race or
7 whatever, you may be able to or most likely would be
8 able to go home and tell your parents, but often
9 times LGBT students feel that they have absolutely no
10 one that they can turn to. So, that's why I wanted
11 to-- and actually wanted to focus this hearing. We
12 put LGBTQ first, you know, but that kind of was my
13 thinking in wanting to do that so that we can draw
14 that out, and you really hit the nail on the head
15 with that. So, thank you very much for your
16 testimony. I do have some questions for the
17 students. One is when you set out to, you know, make
18 these GSA's in your schools, did you have opposition?
19 How did it work? Who did you go to? Can you tell me
20 a little bit about the process of how you go to
21 coming here today?

22 KATERINA CORE: Sure. So, both Neil and
23 I--

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] And is
25 your mic on? I just want to make sure.

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KATERINA CORE: I believe.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: The little red light
is on?

KATERINA CORE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, good.

KATERINA CORE: So, both Neil and I are
part of the Manhattan Student Leadership Council as
we've said, and so at the very beginning of the year
we worked with Superintendent Bonnie Laboy and we
decided on an initiative that we should all follow,
and this year we decided that it should be
acceptance. And so within our council we did not
have any opposition to the ideas, and so far, we have
not worked with any parents or any people that would
oppose this idea, but within our council we were
deciding between a Restorative Justice Circle or a
Safe Space, and we decided that a GSA would be the
best fit idea.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: What would be your
suggestion to parents who might have concerns about
their children joining a group like the one that
you're starting, the GSA?

NEIL SAKAR: Well, we wanted to stress
that joining it was optional. So, if the student is

1 interested, then they can come, but you-- from the
2 GSA you can learn different perspectives of other
3 people, so it is very helpful to expand your view of
4 other people and other perspectives.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, the last hearing
7 that I held I had a 14-year-old transgender female to
8 male student come in and give testimony, and he told
9 us that he had gone to seven adults in his schools
10 between middle school and high school, but that no
11 teacher or no adult in the school would help him
12 start the GSA. That was not your experience?

13 KATERINA CORE: In our school, we've had
14 a GSA. I'm not sure for how long, but I do know that
15 we've had a GSA, and we would be-- this GSA would be
16 in accordance with the Equal Access Act so that no
17 school can deny the-- can deny a request to start a
18 GSA, but if we were to propose and the bill were to
19 be passed, it would be required for all public middle
20 schools in New York City.

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And that's kind of
22 what I'm getting at, because I don't think that it's
23 fair that the burden for starting a GSA should be on
24 the students. It's my opinion that that really
25 should be on the adults in the building, and so when

1
2 I heard that story of that transgender boy, I was
3 very, very affected by it, but actually he wound up
4 doing fantastically, and he went to a school. He's
5 in Maspeth High School, and he became the President
6 of his Student Body overall. So it was really,
7 really wonderful because he finally found the support
8 that he needed, but you hit the nail on the head
9 again by saying that I think that we need to look at--
10 - I don't know that we can do a law. It's one of my
11 frustrations about being the Chair of the City
12 Council, I can't exactly tell the Department of
13 Education what to do, although sometimes I'd like to,
14 you know? But I can-- we can make recommendations to
15 them, and we may be able to pass a resolution which
16 is advisory to the Department of Education that we'd
17 like to see something like that happen. So, thank
18 you. Council Member Kallos, you have some questions?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you, Neil
20 and Katerina. Good to see you. What's it like
21 testifying here at the City Council?

22 NEIL SAKAR: Well, I better get used to
23 it, because I want to be on that end when I get--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing]
25 That's great.

[laughter]

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: On this side you just get to ask questions. You don't have to come up with the answers as often [sic].

NEIL SAKAR: Still seems fun.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: There you go.

Katerina?

KATERINA CORE: I'll admit it was kind of nerve-racking.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Well, there-- no one can see it, and just so you know, you're actually on TV, too. And so I just wanted to thank you for your leadership on the GSA and also bringing this out to District Two and working with your superintendent. Absolutely great, and the support-- and what's the best way to reach-- for folks who are watching on TV or online right now, what is the best way to reach out to your school on Twitter or Instagram? Do you know your Twitter names and things like that? What's the best way for folks to reach out if they'd like to hear from peers on how they can do this at their own schools?

NEIL SAKAR: I think the best possible way is to email our principal or to call us.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And what's the--
3 your-- is it Dgetz@schools.nyc.gov, D G E T Z?

4 NEIL SAKAR: No, it's Dgetz.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Okay. And--
6 perfect. And can folks tweet you? I believe it's
7 ESMS_eagles, is that--

8 UNIDENTIFIED: [off mic comments]

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Okay. Just so
10 folks can email Dgetz@council.-- sorry,
11 Dgetz@schools.nyc.gov. And what other middle schools
12 have you been able to get to join?

13 NEIL SAKAR: So, one school which is
14 really our example is MAT. They didn't have a GSA,
15 and our GSA along with some other members at the
16 Leadership Council, we went to their school and
17 helped them institute their GSA by showing examples
18 of what our GSA did to get started, and they used
19 those examples to start their own GSA.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And what's-- what
21 have you found for other-- for children who identify
22 as LGBTQ and allies, what has-- how has their
23 experience changed at Eastside Middle School since
24 you started your GSA?

1
2 NEIL SAKAR: So, I think it really helped
3 them, like, find support from people. So, like, our
4 GSA advisor, he's really strong at working with
5 people and making them feel safe and comfortable in
6 their environment. So, I think they've found support
7 from the staff and the students.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And tell me about
9 how many kids participated in the AIDS walk. That's
10 actually something I used to do back in 1994. Still
11 kind of young, but for you, what year were you folks
12 born?

13 NEIL SAKAR: 2003.

14 KATERINA CORE: 2003.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, back in 1994
16 I used to do the AIDS walk from the Bronx High School
17 of Science. So, how many kids are participating?
18 How much are you raising through the AIDS walk?

19 KATERINA CORE: So, we have about 15 to
20 20 students in our GSA, but we have students from the
21 entire school participating in the AIDS walk, and
22 this year we had a little bit more than 30 students,
23 and we had a couple of teachers join us as well. And
24 we do fundraising in our school through bake sales,
25 and our-- and the students doing the AIDS walk they

1
2 also do-- they also do their own fundraisers, and a
3 couple of our students were actually Star Walkers,
4 which means that they raised more than a thousand
5 dollars for the AIDS walk.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And in terms of--
7 we talked a little bit about it with the
8 Superintendent, but what do you think the right
9 budget is for a school, and what would you want to
10 spend that money on at Eastside Middle School, and
11 what would you want to spend it at some of your peer-
12 - some of the other middle schools that your friends
13 go to?

14 NEIL SAKAR: So, I think we would budget
15 it for like how many students are at the school so
16 that if the teachers don't make kids go to the GSA
17 just to gain more funding for the school, so we would
18 do it by school, and that would be around 5,000
19 dollars per school. And like the Superintendent
20 touched on it, it would be on materials and then
21 sometimes like training teachers.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Okay. And I think
23 one of the conversations we had is-- and I think I
24 gave you a little bit of an answer, but I'll ask the
25

1
2 tough question anyway. Why can't we just make every
3 single school have a GSA?

4 NEIL SAKAR: Well, because there is going
5 to be some opposition against it, but you have to
6 like slow steps to gain acceptance with the parents
7 and with the students to make a GSA.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Absolutely. So,
9 hopefully folks will see you as role models.
10 Hopefully folks can reach out to your school.
11 Principals and faculty and parents can help spread it
12 to every single school. And what-- is it just for
13 middle schools or do you think high schools should do
14 it or grade schools? Where should we have GSA's?

15 KATERINA CORE: So, so far right now many
16 high schools do have GSA's, and we want to make sure
17 that middle schools have GSA's, because we feel that
18 that's a better age to start having a GSA in a
19 school, but we haven't focused or talked about yet
20 whether or not we should have it in lower grads, but
21 we feel that middle school would be a better time to
22 have one before high school.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Perfect. And
24 there's a couple of members here on this side of the
25 table who went to the Bronx High School of Science. I

1
2 went there. Council Member Chin went there. Any
3 interest from either of you in going to Bronx Science
4 for High School?

5 NEIL SAKAR: So, I'm still deciding
6 between Stuyvesant and Bronx Science.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I'll plug Bronx
8 Science, a whole bunch of Council Members from there.
9 I don't think we have any Council Members from
10 Stuyvesant right now, for what it's worth. Thank
11 you.

12 NEIL SAKAR: Thank you.

13 KATERINA CORE: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Thank you very
15 much, and thank you to this panel for coming in
16 today, and we're going to call our next panel up:
17 Jillian Weiss from the Transgender Legal Defense and
18 Education Fund, Eliza Byard from GLSEN, Doctor
19 Elizabeth Payne from Queering Education Research
20 Institute at Hunter College, and then we'll do Gena
21 Miller from Advocates for Children. Okay, so I have
22 to swear you in. If you would please raise your
23 right hand. Do you solemnly swear or affirm to tell
24 the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth
25 and to answer Council Member questions honestly?

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UNIDENTIFIED: I do.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Who would like to start?

ELIZA BYARD: Okay. Well, good afternoon, Chairman Dromm and members of the City Council and members of the public. It is an incredible honor and pleasure--

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Just before you start, I'm sorry, I meant to make an announcement. If you intend to give testimony, you have to fill out a form, so please be sure that you've done that. I know there are some people who I thought were going to give testimony, but we don't have your forms. So, if you intend to testify, please fill out that form and then they'll get it to us. Thank you. I'm sorry.

ELIZA BYARD: No problem. It is an incredible pleasure to be here today. My name is Eliza Byard, and I am the Executive Director of GLSEN. GLSEN is a national organization that champions LGBT issues in K through 12 education at the national, state and local level, and for more than 25 years now we have worked with educators, students, policy makers, parents and concerned

1 members of the community around the country to
2 improve school climate and make our nation's schools
3 safer and more affirming places for every student.
4 As a native New Yorker and a New York City public
5 school parent, I am particularly proud of our long
6 history of partnership with New York City to improve
7 its schools. I have written testimony to submit which
8 contains a number of suggestions regarding the
9 amplification of existing interventions in New York
10 City schools to continue the work happening here, to
11 truly support and affirm every student in this school
12 system, and I will just make a few points. We have
13 heard such important testify in detail here today,
14 but a couple of points that I'd like to add to those
15 that have been made to amplify a couple of points.
16 New York City is truly at the forefront of efforts
17 nationally to support and affirm LGBT youth across
18 the system, yet we all can tell from testimony here
19 today and from personal experience how much more
20 still needs to be done. To give you a sense of the
21 urgency of these issues nationally, I would simply
22 point to a couple of things. In August, the Centers
23 for Disease Control and Prevention released the first
24 ever national data from the Youth Risk Behavior
25

1 Survey regarding the experiences of lesbian, gay,
2 bisexual, and questioning students across the
3 country. Our goal is to get transgender students
4 included in the 2017 Administration. But I'd like to
5 point out two things. One is, in the national
6 sample, LGBT and Questioning students represented 11
7 percent of the national student sample. It is
8 probably an underreporting of that number, and I
9 think it's important for us to note that LGBT and
10 questioning youth probably consist, make up, about 12
11 to 13 percent of the national student body. And of
12 course, as we all know, these students represent
13 young people from every community, every rank of
14 life, every identity that makes up this great nation
15 of ours as well as their sexual orientation, gender
16 expression and gender identity. Despite-- and on top
17 of that number, the sheer numbers of students that we
18 are talking about that are affected by these issues,
19 I want to underscore how important it is that we put
20 the resources and attention on LGBT youth, because
21 when we look at the disparity of experience
22 represented in the YRBS, it is significant. LGBTQ
23 students are three times more likely than their non-
24 LGBT peers to be raped, five times more likely to be

1 using illegal drugs, and four times more likely to
2 attempt suicide. And as the national CDC talks about
3 this data, they point to the incredible importance of
4 stigma in creating these added barriers to youth
5 achievement and wellbeing. So, I would simply say
6 that here in New York City we have the elements of a
7 national model that we must build on. I am extremely
8 proud of GLSEN's role in helping the City to develop
9 the Respect for All program which was the very first
10 and still one of the only evaluated professional
11 development programs for educators to make a
12 difference in the lives of LGBT youth. We must
13 continue to build on that program. GLSEN has
14 received funds to further augment the City's work by
15 providing our Ready, Set, Respect Elementary School
16 Tool Kit on these issues produced in collaboration
17 with the National Association of Elementary School
18 Principals and the National Association for the
19 Education of Young Children free of charge to every
20 single elementary school in the City. And I also
21 hope that as New York City continues to augment its
22 data collection reporting efforts that it will
23 collaborate with the state to point out how under new
24 ESSA [sic] reporting requirements at the national
25

1
2 level, we can continue to provide leadership on LGBT
3 issues by making sure that these conditions for
4 learning are centrally understood as part of our
5 effort to make our schools truly serve every young
6 person in this country. I will submit written
7 testimony with other information about how we stand
8 ready to support the City. I thank you so much for
9 the opportunity to be here today with my esteemed
10 colleagues and everyone here doing this work. Thank
11 you.

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Next,
13 please?

14 JILLIAN WEISS: Good afternoon. My name
15 is Jillian Weiss. I am Transgender Rights Attorney
16 and Executive Director of the Transgender Legal
17 Defense and Education Fund here in New York City.
18 I've spent much of my career litigating on behalf of
19 transgender people with regards to discrimination,
20 and it's my life's work to press forward on that
21 fight to create equal protection under the law, and
22 this effort, this hearing to address what is
23 happening with students in the New York City school
24 system is extremely important to that effort. I'd
25 like to thank Council Member Dromm as the Education

1
2 Chair for bringing this together today to shed light
3 on this issue. I'm going tell you a little bit about
4 what we have learned at the Transgender Legal Defense
5 and Education Fund, which was founded in 2003. So
6 we've been around for 13 years. We're committed to
7 ending discrimination based on gender identity and
8 expression and achieving quality for trans people
9 through impact litigation, service partnerships with
10 the private sector and education initiatives to
11 ensure that transgender people, including students in
12 schools, can participate fully in the social,
13 cultural and economic life of this city and other
14 places. There's been a lot of progress here in the
15 City, but that does not mean that our task is at an
16 end. School bullying is extremely pervasive. We've
17 heard a number of statistics. We've heard testimony.
18 One statistic that stands out for me is that more
19 than 50 percent of transgender youth will have
20 attempted suicide by their 20th birthday. As a
21 former educator myself this is completely
22 intolerable. It's intolerable to see it happening.
23 We must take action. I would say that transgender
24 students probably make up one percent of your
25 population, so that means there's a lot of

1 transgender students in your schools. We heard a lot
2 about readiness factors today. We heard about
3 voluntary efforts. We heard about informing
4 students. All these things are good. We need to
5 move forward. We need to get data on how many
6 transgender students there are in schools, middle
7 schools as well as high schools. I've submitted
8 written testimony with information about some events
9 that we have taken in our intake process. People
10 call us. But I want to point out that it's not just
11 students who need to be informed, it's also teachers
12 and administrators particularly. There's a
13 reluctance to report to administrators partly because
14 there's a culture of impunity in the New York City
15 school system. I myself represented a teacher in the
16 New York City school system who was in the process of
17 planning a gender transition, and when they reached
18 out to a faculty organizer of the school's Pride
19 group, they were immediately outed. Information
20 about them was given to other students, to students,
21 to teachers, to administrators. They were called
22 weirdos, schizophrenic, fairy-- words I don't want to
23 use here. And that increased over time. As an
24 example of the kind of thing that occurred, they
25

1
2 grabbed the teacher under the crotch and physically
3 assaulted that teacher while singing a vulgar song.
4 When it was reported to the principal, the client was
5 told-- my client was told that they were over-
6 reacting and they should drop the complaint.
7 Fortunately, they did not, and ultimately that
8 resulted in a settlement of that matter and a
9 confidentiality clause. A lot of these cases are
10 getting swept under the rug because of that kind of
11 confidentiality that complainants are forced to agree
12 to. And so people are-- young people are being
13 abused every day. We hear their cries. We want to
14 make sure that the Department of Education in
15 creating the Respect for All program which is
16 wonderful moves forward to create a larger culture of
17 inclusion for trans young people and in each of our
18 1,800 schools, and that we find out how many
19 transgender and gender non-conforming students we
20 have through data gathering. And so I'd like to
21 thank you, Council Member Dromm and the other members
22 of the Council for allowing me to come here and
23 testify today. I want to make sure that we have a
24 lasting legacy of inclusion that will stay with our
25 young people for the rest of their lives as they grow

1
2 to become the citizens who will make up the fabric of
3 our lives in this great city. So, let's take action
4 now. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Next,
6 please.

7 ELIZABETHE PAYNE: I'm Doctor Elizabeth
8 Payne. I'm Director of the Queering Education and
9 Research Institute and interim of the LGBT Social
10 Science and Public Policy Center at Hunter College
11 CUNY. I was here in 2014 to testify in your hearing,
12 and much has changed around the country since 2014.
13 But there are a lot of things in our schools that
14 have not changed, and one of those is the ways we go
15 about addressing bullying. So, I want to talk about
16 that just briefly, and then I also want to talk about
17 some studies that we've done on the implementation of
18 the Dignity for All Students Act. So, QuERI has been
19 very involved in the Dignity for All Students Act
20 before it even passed in both houses, and we were on
21 implementation communities, on the taskforce,
22 Professional Development Committee, and the Diversity
23 Committee for the statewide implementation, and we've
24 also been looking at surveys and interviews around the
25 state, assessing how it is that dignity is being

1 implemented. And I will share a little bit of that
2 data with you, even though it is not concentrated
3 specifically on New York City. So, mainstream
4 educational conversations on LGBT students and
5 bullying are dominated by risk, risk management and
6 tolerance discourses. LGBTQ youth are understood as
7 easy targets, victims, and different in ways that
8 demand their peers and teachers express tolerance and
9 empathy. The students who target them, the bullies,
10 are understood as individuals who need school
11 intervention to correct their anti-social behavior.
12 This bully/victim binary dominates both cultural
13 understandings of bullying and school focus on
14 addressing it. The limitations of this mainstream
15 narrative about LGBTQ youth and their school
16 experiences are multiple, but the bottom line is the
17 problem is understood almost solely in terms of the
18 social and emotional development of individual youth,
19 the bullies and victims. Questions about how schools
20 are providing conditions in which bullying can
21 flourish are not explored, and school culture often
22 escapes examination. Additionally, there is little
23 attention paid to the persistent patterns of peer-
24 targeting over time. Students whose genders and
25

1
2 sexualities do not align with cultural expectations
3 for their biological sex are the most consistent
4 targets of bullying and harassment in schools. The
5 further youth fall from idealized forms of hetero
6 masculinity and hetero femininity, the more
7 vulnerable they are to bullying as well as more
8 severe forms of violence. LGBT youth are often the
9 most vulnerable within the system. So, for a long-
10 term change, we need-- we must move away from solely
11 focusing on individual bullies and victims. A
12 sociological framing of bullying changes the problem
13 of in-schools violence from the product of
14 pathological individuals who are ill-adjusted in
15 society to interactional reproduction of larger
16 structural inequalities. This reframing is
17 significant because it attends to the social context
18 in which bullying occurs and asks questions about the
19 meanings produced through bullying interactions. New
20 York's Dignity for All Students Act is notable
21 because it asks us to address school culture. That
22 is what we must do. However, it's up to the
23 discretion of individual districts to develop a
24 proactive strategy for this. In order to understand
25 the progress of Dignity implementation, over a two

1
2 year period we conducted a number of surveys and
3 interviews with DACs, or Dignity Act Coordinators
4 around the state. Overall, this research has
5 indicated that New York schools have focused most of
6 their attention on creating systems of reporting for
7 bullying and harassment and investigation procedures.
8 The findings do not include any meaningful engagement
9 with proactive efforts to develop positive, inclusive
10 school culture. More specific findings include:
11 Dignity Act Coordinators are receiving training on
12 codes of conduct avoiding lawsuits, the language and
13 the legislation, the definition of a bullying act,
14 how to complete forms for incident reporting, and
15 responsibilities for reporting. They are not being
16 trained on recognizing bias-based incidents or
17 working with diverse populations of students. No
18 interview respondents reported that their DASA
19 professional development focused on proactively
20 creating supportive environments or offered
21 significant education on LGBT students and families
22 and schools. When interview respondents were asked
23 about their school's proactive efforts to develop
24 positive school culture, most educators did not know
25 what a proactive approach might look like. Common

1 approaches to curriculum changes were to teach
2 tolerance or empathy. When asked about integrating
3 diversity content and particularly LGBT content into
4 to academic curriculum, most participants could not
5 share examples of that happening within their school.
6 Resistance or hesitation over explicitly recognizing
7 and addressing the needs of LGBT youth and families
8 seems to be occurring at both the state and local
9 levels. So, the Dignity Act is exceptional when we
10 compare it to other state's anti-bullying laws,
11 particularly because it does have this proactive
12 element in it. However, through our research it's
13 clear that educators did not understand what
14 proactive meant. We believe that steps need to be
15 taken to encourage education that foregrounds
16 proactive rather than reactive approaches through
17 professional development and preservice teacher
18 preparation. I just would like to briefly add as
19 well that we're seeing curricular pushes around the
20 country, most notably in California. In New York
21 State, LGBT students have been most recognized in the
22 formal curriculum through HIV education. In New York
23 State, HIV education is not required to be medically
24 accurate. We have done a recent study in 2016 on the
25

1
2 materials being used to teach HIV education in New
3 York State schools. We found that the majority of
4 the materials were outdated. The average age for
5 material being taught was 12 years, with some
6 materials currently used in the classroom dating to
7 the 1980's. So, with the sole representation of LGBT
8 students in the formal curriculum often being in HIV,
9 the fact that it's not required to be medically
10 accurate is a real problem, and we need-- we would
11 like to encourage the Council to move that New York
12 City HIV education be required to be medically
13 accurate.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Next,
15 please?

16 GENA MILLER: Good afternoon. Thank you
17 for having me here. My name is Gena Miller. I'm an
18 Equal Justice Works Fellow in the School Justice
19 Project at Advocates for Children of New York where I
20 represent students who are bullied and accused of
21 bullying with a special focus on LGBTQ students and
22 students with disabilities. Each year, we help
23 thousands of parents navigate the education system,
24 and we receive numerous calls on our Helpline about
25 the New York City Department of Education's failure

1 to address bullying. A disproportionate number of
2 LGBTQ students and students with disabilities, as
3 well as students who fall under other vulnerable
4 categories such as national origin, religion, and
5 English Language Learner status, are the targets of
6 bullying. Federal, New York State, and New York City
7 law requires schools to intervene and prevent
8 bullying. However, the August 31st State Attorney
9 General report relating to DASA was consistent with
10 our organization's experiences fielding complaints
11 from parents and professionals from schools
12 throughout New York City. They say that schools are
13 failing to report, investigate, prevent, and address
14 bullying, harassment and discrimination. The DOE's
15 apparent non-compliance with DASA's reporting
16 requirements prevents building truly positive school
17 climates because it undermines identifying and
18 allocating resources to schools with staff and
19 students in need of intervention and support. We
20 offer several recommendations to the City Council to
21 address this significant issue. First, we request
22 that the City Council urge the DOE to better train
23 school staff and district leaders on what constitutes
24 bullying, how to prevent it, how to appropriately
25

1 investigate it and intervene to stop it, and how to
2 provide supports to students who are both bullied and
3 doing the bullying. It's critical that the DOE
4 better train school staff on school staff harassment
5 of students, too. Too often in our work we hear
6 about overburdened and under-resourced school
7 personnel who provoke, threaten, and otherwise harass
8 students with behavioral challenges and push them out
9 of school instead of providing them with the supports
10 they need to succeed. We also strongly encourage the
11 City Council and the Mayor to expand investment in
12 improving school culture and climate. Bullying is
13 sometimes due to undiagnosed and untreated mental
14 illness that must be addressed in order to curb the
15 behavior. There's peer-reviewed medical research
16 that children who were considered to be engaged in
17 bullying are more than three times as likely to
18 experience depression, anxiety and attention deficit
19 disorder. The research suggests that if schools fail
20 to appreciate that bullying is often symptom of
21 underlying mental health issues, many of our students
22 on both sides of this conflict dynamic will not be
23 protected. We ask that City Council urge the DOE to
24 recognize this reality by ensuring that schools
25

1
2 prioritize assessment of mental health issues and
3 referral for necessary services when trying to
4 resolve bullying issues. We also ask City Council
5 press the Administration to adopt and implement the
6 Mayor's Leadership Team on School Climate and
7 Discipline's recommendations on mental health.
8 Furthermore, we call on City Council to urge the
9 Mayor and the DOE to set forth a long-term strategic
10 plan to fund and scale up and implement restorative
11 practices throughout city schools. Aligned with
12 contemporary research, DASA requires school districts
13 to develop guidelines that use a progressive model,
14 not zero tolerance through automatic suspension to
15 address bullying. Strategic financial investments in
16 planning will enable the DOE to develop and implement
17 age-appropriate responses, interventions, discipline,
18 and education that varies according to the nature of
19 the behavior, the age and the particular history of
20 each student as required under DASA. Additionally,
21 we ask that City Council recommend that the DOE list
22 the name of the Respect for All Coordinator at each
23 school on the homepage of every school's website.
24 This will ensure that every school appoints a Respect
25 for All Coordinator in the first place, and it will

1
2 because it was my legislation, demographics reporting
3 legislation last Thursday. Waiting for the Mayor's
4 signature, but I do expect the Mayor to sign the
5 legislation. How important is demographic data
6 collection to understanding what's going on in our
7 schools, number one. And number two, in negotiations
8 with the Department of Education for LGBT demographic
9 reporting, we moved the age to 14. I felt it was a
10 bit of a compromise, because-- and I wonder what
11 Jillian's opinion is on this, because I do know young
12 people as young as the age of four who have
13 identified as transgender. And so I just wanted to
14 see if anybody wanted to comment on the demographics
15 piece of it.

16 JILLIAN WEISS: Yes, I'd like to say that
17 I think the demographics are extremely important
18 because if we don't know that people are there,
19 there's no way to advocate for them and to channel
20 resources. As you said, people know when they're
21 quite young about gender identity and transgender
22 issues, as well as sexual orientation. And so, if
23 those students go into school and there's no way to
24 identify they're there, and we think oh well, school
25 children of that age don't really have those feelings

1
2 or those thoughts and so on, which I think is a
3 common refrain, then we wind up ignoring what is
4 happening to those students and pretending that they
5 don't exist, and then that's when they're ripe for
6 bullying. That's when they're ripe for all kinds of
7 mistreatment both from students and administration.
8 So, I think-- you know, I understand you have to make
9 political compromises and you did what you had to do.
10 So, thank you for doing that. I think that bill's
11 extremely important. I would like to see demographic
12 collection, you know, at other levels as well.

13 ELIZA BYARD: And I really appreciate the
14 point. I think it's absolutely critical to remember
15 that what's measured is what matters, and so having
16 disaggregateable [sic] data at all levels is
17 incredibly important. The one note I would add of
18 caution with respect to this is that collecting data
19 on LGBT youth in a thoughtful way is still absolutely
20 critical, because we have to be sure that the
21 collection of the data is handled in a way that does
22 not out them to parents, friends or school personnel.
23 That is an issue that we have been in communication
24 with the Council with about the legislation and we
25 stand ready. Our research department works with the

1
2 CDC with other state agencies to help with questions
3 of data collection in a way that respects the
4 safety/privacy of the youth involved and also crafts
5 questions so as to get accurate information. I would
6 urge you also, there are other ways to collect data
7 that makes it disaggregateable in other city
8 processes. The New York City School Survey is one
9 way that we could get demographic data confidentially
10 and anonymously, and we should have questions there
11 about sexual orientation, gender expression and
12 gender identity. I would also so that I just want to
13 underscore that having that data about students, but
14 also having it about adult professionals in the
15 system is absolutely critical, and I just would like
16 to-- Doctor Weiss's point about discrimination
17 against personnel is a huge piece of this puzzle as
18 well.

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: One of the things
20 we're continuing to talk with the Administration
21 about is the student survey. So we're hopeful we'll
22 be able to make some movement on that as well. I
23 also want to say to all the advocates who are here,
24 I'm very proud to have partnered with Margaret Chin
25 on mixed-race data collection as well, and also the

1 top 30 groups in terms of nationality, ethnicities
2 and languages spoken. We passed legislation
3 together; we did that. And I was proud to partner
4 with her on that, and for the first time we'll be
5 collecting information on many of the Asian groups
6 that were not disaggregated in the past, Arab groups,
7 Dominican groups, etcetera, so forth and so on. So,
8 that legislation was comprehensive. There is though,
9 in the LGBT demographic stuff, some exclusions for
10 departments and for agencies. And so I would really
11 like to have people think through how we go about,
12 because there is a provision in the legislation for
13 all agencies including the criminal justice agencies
14 which were primarily exempted from the law, about how
15 they're going to go about doing data collection as
16 well, particularly on LGBT, and the idea was that we
17 need to put some of those safety concerns in there
18 before we do that data collection. But I do believe,
19 particularly in cases where there may be transgender
20 folks who want to go into the transgender unit at
21 Rikers Island, let's say, for their own protection,
22 early identification as being a transgender person
23 maybe even at the precinct level or certainly at the
24 receiving end of when they go into Rikers or whatever
25

1
2 might be helpful. So, I think those are the
3 discussion that we need to have moving forward about
4 how we deal with those other agencies, and that
5 should occur with the other agencies within five
6 years once this legislation is done. The other piece
7 of the demographic legislation that we did was that
8 all agencies will be trained in the collection of the
9 demographic information. So, I think that was an
10 important component in there as well, because I think
11 just by virtue of the training of staff, how to do
12 it, sends a clear message that these are important
13 groups of people to all of us. So, I want to thank
14 you for coming in, all of you on the panel today, and
15 I'm going to ask that we stop with this panel here.
16 I have a little bit of a dilemma. We-- this room
17 needs to be used at four o'clock. So I'm going to
18 ask that we move into the committee room, and we will
19 call our next panel in the committee room. And that
20 next panel will be Evan Bernstein from the ADL,
21 Jordan Greenberg from the Arab American Family
22 Support Center, Saif Shuman [sp?] from the Arab
23 American Family Support Center, Jordan Greenberg,
24 Arab American Family Support Center, and Doctor

1 Debbie Almontaser from the Muslim Community Network.

2 And we'll convene in there in about five minutes.

3 [break]

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So we are reconvening
5 this Education Committee hearing of the 19th of
6 October 2016. We are now in the Committee Room, and
7 we will start with the testimony from our panel which
8 includes Ambreen Qureshi from the Arab American
9 Family. I hope I said that right. Qureshi, I'm
10 sorry. Doctor Debbie Almontaser from the Muslim
11 Community Network, Evan Bernstein from the ADL, Anti-
12 Defamation League, Saif Shuman [sp?], okay, and
13 Jordan Greenberg. Is Jordan Greenberg here? Oh,
14 okay. Alright. Very good. Who would like to start?
15 Mr. Bernstein?

16 EVAN BERNSTEIN: Thank you, Chair Dromm.
17 It's great to be here and I'm glad to be invited to
18 be able to speak. Thank you for also any other
19 committee members that are in attendance. The ADL is
20 one of the oldest civil rights organizations in the
21 United States, founded in 1913. Many of us-- many,
22 many people think the ADL is strictly about helping
23 the Jewish community. Our mission is, actually a
24 dual mission, is stop the defamation of Jewish people
25

1 and secure justice and fair treatment for all. And
2 as an organization we take education very seriously.
3 One of the aspects of education we take very
4 seriously is anti-bullying and rights of all people.
5 Working to create safe, inclusive schools and
6 communities is a top priority for the ADL. The
7 league takes a broad, holistic approach to addressing
8 bullying and cyber bullying, tracking the nature and
9 magnitude of the problem, developing education and
10 training programs, and advocating at state and
11 federal level for policies and programs that can make
12 a difference. We believe that while laws in
13 appropriate inclusive school-based policies can be a
14 focal point for addressing bullying, educational
15 strategies, training programs, and community
16 involvement are the necessary components to any
17 effective response. Some statistics that startle us
18 and that we are working to help turn around: Number
19 one, that according to the authoritative 2013 report
20 indicators of school crime and safety, seven percent
21 of students ages 12 to 18 reported that someone at
22 school had used hate-related words against them, and
23 25 percent reported seeing hate-related graffiti at
24 schools during the school year. Those put up by the
25

1
2 US Department of Justice and the US Department of
3 Education. Secondly, bias-related harassment and
4 bullying has had a severe impact on students which
5 can last a lifetime. A report recently conducted by
6 the New York American Civil Liberties Union found
7 that as many as 40 percent of homeless youth
8 identified at LGBT, despite LGBT individuals
9 composing only 10 percent of the general population.
10 In New York City, the average age transgender youth
11 becomes homelessness is 13 and a half. In fact, anti-
12 transgender harassment in schools has been found to
13 directly correlate with homelessness, unemployment
14 and incarceration. That is why we're so proud to be
15 working with the DOE in New York City. We've been a
16 lead partner with the New York City Department of
17 Education's Respect for All initiative since its
18 inception in 2008/2009 school year delivering
19 professional development training to educators
20 throughout the City. During 2015-16 school year, we
21 delivered 21 anti-bullying workshops to students and
22 teachers, reaching a total of 531 participants. It
23 impacted 41,140 others. Also, we have a program
24 called No Place for Hate, which of 25 of the 90
25 schools that were No Place for Hate this year were in

1 New York City proper within the five boroughs. ADL
2 is a leading member of the Coalition working to
3 support the Dignity Act signed into law in 2010 which
4 empowers New York Educators to fill the
5 responsibility, provide students with a safe and
6 nurturing learning environment. As we urged in 2010
7 when the law passed, it is important to fulfil its
8 promise, the law must be effectively implemented in
9 every school district in the state, specifically New
10 York City. The Dignity Act requires school districts
11 to modify their codes of conduct to include
12 prohibitions against harassment, bullying and
13 discrimination and disseminate the updated code to
14 students and their parents, train school employees on
15 topics of bullying and harassment and discrimination,
16 designate Dignity Act Coordinators for each of their
17 school districts, and provide students with
18 instruction intended to discourage harassment,
19 bullying and discrimination. So much of what you
20 talked about in your initial testimony, Chair Dromm,
21 was about how there is not that amount of getting of
22 numbers, and you have a lot of schools that are at
23 zero, and that is something that we feel needs to be
24 rectified, and I know you're serious about that, and
25

1 we hope that that can be changed. In conclusion,
2 left unchecked, bullying can contribute to the
3 environments in which youth feel that it is
4 acceptable to express and act on feelings of
5 prejudice. In an online setting, school cruelty may
6 be a precursor to more destructive behavior,
7 including participation in gaining sites that promote
8 hate messages, involvement in hate groups and bias-
9 related violence. Name calling and bullying like
10 other bias-motivated behaviors have the potential to
11 escalate into more serious incidents of violence if
12 they are unchecked, and too frequently, educators,
13 parents and students are unsure how to respond. We
14 applaud the Committee for holding this field hearing
15 on bullying. We stand ready to assist and continue
16 assist the DOE here in New York City and the
17 Committee as you examine these initiatives and
18 promote proactive strategies to confront bullying,
19 cyberbullying and harassments in schools and in the
20 community. We're here for you.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you, and I'm
23 very grateful to the ADL for the years of support
24 that you have given, in particularly to the LGBT
25 community. I don't know if you're aware, but in the

1
2 1990's I had a demonstration in Bayside in Queens,
3 Eastern Queens, against a State Senator at the time
4 who did not support the Hate Crime Bill, and the ADL
5 was very involved in organizing that demonstration
6 along with us. And I do-- I am aware of and have
7 seen and read the curriculum that you provide to the
8 schools which is excellent. So,--

9 EVAN BERNSTEIN: [interposing] Just want
10 to do more.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I'm sorry?

12 EVAN BERNSTEIN: We wanted to be able to
13 do more, more schools, more schools.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Absolutely, and I
15 appreciate you being here and speaking on this issue.

16 EVAN BERNSTEIN: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Really do. Thank you
18 very, very much.

19 EVAN BERNSTEIN: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Next please?

21 SAIF SHUMAN: Hello, everyone. My name
22 is Saif Shuman, and I am 10 years old. I go to Math
23 and Science Exploratory School in Brooklyn. I have
24 been going to the Arab-American Family Support Center
25 my whole life. I attend the Youth Program, where they

1
2 help me with my homework and they also take us out
3 for trips. Now that I'm in Middle School, I'm part
4 of the Boys Club, where we talk about bullying. For
5 African American, Muslim, Arab, and Hispanic
6 communities, it is harder for us, especially Muslims.
7 In school kids make fun of you just because of how
8 you look, or what you wear, or how you talk, or what
9 you believe in. I think kids bully other kids
10 because they were bullied. I think bullying has
11 gotten worse in the past year because of social
12 media. There's all of these news headlines, like
13 "Muslim man crashes plane," or "Puerto Rican man drug
14 theft," or "African-American man gun violence." These
15 headlines separate groups of people and make them
16 seem dangerous. At my school, it's not really a
17 hating community, but at my old school, I had
18 experiences with bullying. In my experience, a kid
19 called me a terrorist, and I think it was really
20 because he was Puerto Rican and some kids called him
21 mean names related to that. I think he took that out
22 on me. When I told my teacher, he didn't help me, he
23 just sat me out. I went to my Assistant Principal and
24 she helped me. Most of the time, it's hard to tell a
25 teacher or a principal, but if you do, it's the right

1
2 decision because they can help you. In my
3 experience, if someone keeps saying "Terrorist,
4 terrorist, terrorist" in your ear, you're going to
5 get annoyed and you're not going to focus on your
6 school work. I think teachers should get more
7 involved in these situations. If they see two kids
8 are arguing and they are getting really upset,
9 teachers should say something. For the most part,
10 teachers don't take it seriously. They just think,
11 "Oh they're just two little kids arguing." A lot of
12 times, teachers can't believe that a kid would bully
13 another kid, or they think because that didn't happen
14 in the place where they were growing up, that it
15 can't happen. If students from these communities had
16 more opportunities to share about their cultures, I
17 think other kids would see that they aren't how the
18 media say they are. I think kids would see we are
19 actually all the same as them. We believe different
20 things, but inside we're all the same. It's
21 important to step in and stop bullying. It's
22 important to take claims of bullying seriously
23 because it affects kids' schoolwork and it might hurt
24 the kid mentally. I see in some news stories about
25 how kids try to commit suicide because they're being

1
2 bullied in school. I don't think that's just the
3 bully's fault. I think parents and teachers need to
4 step in. We need to tell kids it's not okay to bully
5 somebody else just because they believe in different
6 things. Thank you for letting me testify.

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. I think
8 you're hitting on a very good point. It's something
9 that I believe in very deeply, and that is that, you
10 know, we are all involved in this together, and that
11 discrimination against one person is discrimination
12 against another person, and that's why we wanted to
13 expand this, not just to be about LGBT students, but
14 to be about all students and protecting everybody and
15 having a safe environment in our schools. I
16 highlighted the LGBT, because sometimes that gets
17 overlooked in some of the discussions, especially at
18 the school level like you're talking about with the
19 teachers, sometimes they don't take it as seriously
20 as they should. But you know, it was for the help of
21 many of the other groups that we're going to hear
22 from now in this hearing, the Muslim, the Sikh, the
23 Hindu, the Jewish groups who held out when DASA was
24 being discussed as a state law, because I think we
25 could have passed DASA if we didn't include LGBT in

1
2 those days, but because those other groups said, "No,
3 we want to fight, we want everybody included in
4 there," that's why we got the LGBT in there. So, we
5 all have to stick together in this fight, and I thank
6 you for your testimony.

7 AMBREEN QURESHI: Good afternoon, Council
8 Member Dromm and esteemed audience members. My name
9 is Ambreen Qureshi. I am the Deputy Executive
10 Director of the Arab American Family Support Center,
11 and my testimony will dovetail that of my wonderful
12 colleague, Saif. Established in 1994, AAFSC is a
13 nonprofit secular organization, and we're the oldest
14 and largest Arabic-speaking social service agency in
15 New York City. As a settlement house we provide
16 culturally and linguistically competent services to
17 Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian, AMEMSA
18 immigrant communities. AAFSC's mission is to empower
19 new immigrants with the tools they need to successful
20 acclimate to the world around them and become active
21 participants in their communities. Our youth program
22 is truly the heart of our organization. The program
23 encourages students to succeed academically, prepare
24 for college, develop positive leadership skills,
25 express themselves creatively, participate in the

1
2 community and work with students of other
3 nationalities to learn to embrace diversity,
4 tolerance and peace. One of our main objectives is
5 to empower our students to confront and dismantle the
6 pervasive and increasingly dangerous environment of
7 harassment and discrimination targeted as Muslims and
8 those perceived as such. Despite the rapidly growing
9 AMEMSA immigrant population in New York City, the
10 youth we serve face the challenge of fully engaging
11 in their newly found neighborhoods and communities
12 due to a myriad of intersectional challenges, and
13 bullying and harassment at schools marks a major
14 concern. In addition to the stress of flight,
15 migration and resettlement in a new place as well as
16 the challenges low-income individuals face on a daily
17 basis, our students must now cope with growing anti-
18 Muslim bigotry. A recent report from the Center for
19 the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State
20 University San Bernardino found that hate crimes
21 against Muslims and those perceived as Muslims
22 increased over 78 percent from 2014 to 2015 in the
23 US, and now at levels not seen since the aftermath of
24 9/11. Due to these varied obstacles, many of our
25 students suffer from toxic stress which can have

1 long-lasting negative psychological and physical
2 effects. Moreover, researchers now argue that
3 pervasive anti-Arabism in our current sociopolitical
4 environment has intensified the effects of stress
5 related to cultural adjustment for immigrant youth.
6 In January 2016, researchers from the University of
7 Pennsylvania reported that discrimination functions
8 as a risk factor for significant levels of clinical
9 depression in Muslims, and also found that being
10 called offensive names such as "terrorist" has the
11 strongest effect in developing depression. These
12 disturbing trends have directly impacted the AAFSC
13 community. One of AAFSC's students was recently
14 called "ISIS" by a teacher for wearing their
15 keffiyeh, a traditional Middle Eastern scarf in
16 class, and a 19-year-old man was recently attacked in
17 Astoria, Queens by three young men who yelled "ISIS"
18 and "Arab." We would like to see the schools, all
19 schools in New York City, especially the schools that
20 our students attend, adopt more accepting practices
21 towards the immigrant community. We find that many
22 of our students are subjected to a severe lack of
23 cultural competence at their schools. For example,
24 we have seen a number of girls and young women end up
25

1
2 failing their gym classes because of dress code
3 policies that they are uncomfortable with for
4 personal, cultural and religious reasons. They are
5 then required to attend summer school purely to make
6 up these gym classes. Our students must deal with
7 ingrained structural racism at their schools. In
8 fact, the majority of our middle school students
9 attend a school that has a long history of racial
10 discrimination. In 2012, the principal was fired for
11 anti-Arab and anti-Muslim discrimination. Regardless
12 of these great actions and policy changes, we see
13 evidence of our students not receiving the care they
14 need. AAFSC advocates on behalf of our students and
15 all those who are made to feel unsafe due to their
16 state of homelessness, their gender identity, sexual
17 preference, disability status, ethnicity, religious
18 belief or any other aspect of their identity, and we
19 appreciate your support. Thank you for this
20 opportunity.

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Doctor
22 Almontaser?

23 DEBBIE ALMONTASER: Good afternoon
24 everyone. Peace and greetings. My name is Doctor
25 Debbie Almontaser, and I'm here as the Board

1
2 President of the Muslim Community Network, a
3 nonprofit organization seeking to empower Muslim New
4 Yorkers and their neighbors through civic engagement
5 and youth leadership development and community
6 education. Thank you for inviting the Muslim
7 Community Network to offer testimony on the bullying,
8 harassment and discrimination in New York City
9 schools, which protects LGBTQ, and as stated in the
10 title, "other vulnerable students." The harassment
11 and discrimination that the LGBT community has
12 experienced in schools and in society cannot be
13 dismissed. My organization and I stand for their
14 right to live free of harassment and discrimination
15 in schools and in our great city. Upon being
16 requested to offer testimony for this hearing and
17 lending my support of the LGBTQ community, I also
18 want to present to the Council the importance of
19 defining the other vulnerable students, and more
20 detail to capture the pain and suffering of all
21 students, and I'd like to highlight that Arab,
22 Muslim, and South Asian students, specifically Sikhs,
23 who since the aftermath of 9/11 have also been at the
24 receiving end of bullying, harassment and
25 discrimination. Over the last few months, hate

1 crimes against Muslims and those perceived to be
2 Muslims have dramatically increased, including the
3 deaths of three members of the Muslim community. It
4 is incumbent on all of us to make sure we protect
5 each and every child in our school system. On
6 October 26th, 2006, Abdella [sp?] Mohammed was bound
7 and gagged with tape and locked in a closet where two
8 classmates battered him with racial and ethnic slurs
9 for about eight minutes. It happened in his fourth
10 grade classroom at Rider Elementary School in
11 Brooklyn. It happened with a substitute teacher
12 present. Abdella who was nine years old at the time
13 of the assault was born in Yemen. His assailants
14 shouted slurs to the effect of, "Go back to your
15 country, we don't want you here." The incident only
16 ended after another classmate asked the substitute
17 teacher to intervene. It left Mohammed emotionally
18 and mentally scared. More recently, Nadine, an Arab
19 and Muslim daughter of a NYPD captain in the Bronx
20 was bullied by a peer in support of Donald Trump's
21 Muslim ban where she was told Muslims are ISIS, and
22 Trump was going to get rid of all Muslims because
23 they are all terrorists. Nadine went to her teacher
24 who told her she'll speak to him at the end of class,
25

1 but that never happened. Nadine went to the Dean and
2 nothing happened. Her parents went up to the school,
3 and they did not get the courtesy as parents to speak
4 to the Administration, leaving us to bring this case
5 to the Mayor's Office to address. Since the
6 beginning of 2016 there have been five additional
7 bullying cases of Muslim students that the Council on
8 Islamic-- the Council on American Islamic Relations,
9 CAIR, has represented students and their families.
10 I'd like to just give you these cases quickly.
11 First, there was a girl in hijab where her hijab was
12 snatched off her head, and she was put in a head lock
13 and punched. Another middle school student girl who
14 wanted to go into law enforcement as a career draws a
15 picture of an investigation investigating a crime
16 scene, which gets interpreted as doing-- as wanting
17 her to do something to harm others. Another student,
18 a high school boy, was constantly called Bin Laden
19 because his first name was Osama. Another young high
20 school Muslim girl is told her religion is dumb by
21 her gym teacher because she can't wear shorts to gym
22 class. And lastly, young Muslim girl who had her
23 books thrown on the ground and pushed, and her hijab
24 was pulled off while also using derogatory terms
25

1
2 towards her. So, these are all things that have just
3 happened recently. I'd also like to bring to your
4 attention the importance of what is happening with
5 the Sikh community. Jahunmin Sing Premi [sp?] had
6 his cheekbone fractured in class, the result of a
7 vicious blow from a classmate. The attacker had a
8 key wedged between his knuckles. Following the
9 punch, he tugged Jahunmin's [sp?] beard and struck in
10 him the chest all for no good reason, and all as a
11 teacher watched helplessly. The attacker had made a
12 past time of harassing Jahunmin, a shy young man of
13 Sikh faith. He would mock Jahunmin's stutter and
14 call him dirty and a terrorist during their English
15 class as a second language class in Richmond Hill
16 High School in Queens. He would pull Jahunmin's
17 jacket over his head and throw things at this Sikh
18 student. A report released by the Sikh Coalition in
19 April 2008 found that more than half of Sikh students
20 in their city's public schools have been harassed
21 because of their religion or national origin. We ask
22 that the definition of "other vulnerable students" be
23 expanded, and we work to protect LGBTQ, Arab, Muslim,
24 and South Asian students among other students, and
25 includes the following recommendations: We ask that

1
2 het Education Committee hold a hearing requesting
3 that the Department of Education share the OORS
4 reports that are entered by schools across the City.
5 Upon review of these reports, provide sensitivity
6 training in schools with high number of incidents.
7 We ask the Education Committee to encourage the
8 Department of Education to partner with LGBTQ
9 organizations, which we already know they do, the
10 Arab and Muslim South Asian Organizations, as well as
11 the Commission for Human Rights to devise K-12
12 sensitivity curriculum. We ask that the Public
13 Safety Committee to request the NYPD school safety
14 incorporate sensitivity training specifically on
15 Arab, Muslim and South Asian students in order to
16 serve and protect their rights, not see them from a
17 security lens. We ask that the Committee on Cultural
18 Affairs allocate funding for public schools and Arab,
19 Muslim and South Asian cultural arts organizations to
20 educate about these cultures through the arts. When
21 the Mayor and the Chancellor announced the Muslim
22 holidays in 2014, Chancellor Farina stated the
23 holiday as a teachable moment, highlighting the
24 diverse cultures of Muslim New Yorkers. Let's make
25 it a priority to work with her to make it happen.

1
2 And finally, we ask each Committee to have a quality
3 assurance mechanism to monitor the work and evaluate
4 its effectiveness. Thank you very much.

5 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you, Doctor
6 Almontaser and everybody else for coming in on this
7 panel today. All very good suggestions, and the OORS
8 report, we'll follow up on that with them as well,
9 and part of the purpose of the hearing today was to
10 begin to get to the bottom of how they're going about
11 training in schools where they have found incidents.
12 I did ask that question earlier, and they said that
13 they have sent out some response teams, but we'll
14 follow up with them on that. And then before I
15 release this panel, I just want to say also, I too am
16 very concerned about the effect of what's going on
17 with Donald Trump in the Presidential election and
18 its effect on particularly Muslim/Mexican immigrant
19 communities, and we have seen the result of some of
20 that already as you've indicated in all of your
21 testimony, but it was even there before. And I do
22 remember when I was teaching, one of the first Sikh
23 children that I had in my class at PS199Q-- this is
24 going back 20 years-- was harassed and teased and had
25 his turban pulled off, and it was terrible. So, we

1
2 are very interested in all of those incidents as
3 well, and we're going to follow up on that. This is
4 a major concern to me. So, thank you very much for
5 raising those issues to us. Thank you for coming in
6 everybody. Thank you.

7 DEBBIE ALMONTASER: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Alright, our next
9 panel-- okay. So, Ms. Paulette Johnson, Charlotte
10 Pope, Children's Defense Fund New York, Elvis Miguel
11 from NYCLU, Jose Abrigo [sp?], Legal Services New
12 York City, Amy Leipziger, I'm sorry, NYCLA Education
13 Committee-- representing two organizations, and also
14 representing Legal Services.

15 UNIDENTIFIED: [off mic comments]

16 Actually, Jose unfortunately had to leave early, so--

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Okay, so
18 he's not here?

19 UNIDENTIFIED: [off mic comments]

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Alright, so I
21 have to swear everybody in. If you would just raise
22 your right hand? And do you solemnly swear or affirm
23 to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but
24 the truth and to answer Council Member questions
25

1
2 honestly? Okay, thank you very much. Let's start
3 over here.

4 CHARLOTTE POPE: My name is Charlotte
5 Pope. I'm with the Children's Defense Fund New York.
6 Thank you for holding this hearing and for the
7 opportunity to testify. Our testimony focuses on the
8 intent of incident reporting to foster schools that
9 preserve the dignity of all students and as to what
10 end reporting can be prioritized in reaching that
11 goal. A proactive plan for creating welcoming,
12 restorative schools is one that looks beyond counting
13 over acts of harm and addresses the role of school
14 culture and discouraging bullying, harassment and
15 discrimination. When we rely on reporting as an
16 indicator of a safe or inclusive school, we miss the
17 diversity of ways bullying, harassment and
18 discrimination present themselves, including through
19 discipline practices that punish or exclude
20 inadequate curriculum and low expectations for
21 students, a shortage in appropriate supports such as
22 guidance counselors or social workers, and a reliance
23 on law enforcement tactics to control student
24 behavior. The most recent data released pursuant to
25 the Council's Student Safety Act illustrates the need

1 for the City to address significant racial
2 disparities in students arrested, issued summonses
3 and handcuffed in school. In that data, we see that
4 black and Latino youth represent 68 percent of the
5 DOE student population, but account for 93 percent of
6 all police interactions in schools. Racial
7 disparities are mirrored and reported suspensions
8 across the city where black students represent 53
9 percent of the over 44,000 suspensions in school year
10 2014 while representing 26 percent of the student
11 population. In an increasing number of schools,
12 communities are working to implement evidence-based
13 strategies like Restorative Justice that reduce the
14 demand for exclusionary discipline and police
15 intervention. Restorative practices have the
16 capacity to transform the culture of New York City
17 schools and offer holistic solutions to bullying,
18 harassment and discrimination that value learning
19 diversity and meet the needs of youth. It is our
20 hope that the Council continue dialogue with the
21 Department of Education on the value of sustainable
22 investment and Restorative Justice and ending
23 disparities in school push-outs. Thank you.
24
25

1
2 AMY LEIPZIGER: Good afternoon. My name
3 is Amy Leipziger. On behalf of the education
4 advocates and the LGBT advocates at Legal Services
5 New York City, we'd like to thank the Committee for
6 putting together this hearing and providing the
7 public an opportunity to participate and testify
8 about bullying, harassment and discrimination in New
9 York City schools. Our education and LGBTQ advocates
10 are working to reverse the effects of bullying on
11 children and youth in our schools. Legal Services
12 NYC is the largest nonprofit provider of free civil
13 legal services in New York City. For our local
14 offices, legal services provides assistance to
15 hundreds of families every year with education
16 matters. Over 80 percent of our students or clients
17 are children of color and/or immigrants ranging in
18 ages from age three to 21. According to a statewide
19 survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight
20 Education Network, which has been cited many times
21 today, most LGBT students in New York report being
22 victimized in school, and the majority of these
23 incidents are not reported to adult authorities.
24 Furthermore, many LGBT students find themselves the
25 subject of unfair suspensions when they stand up to

1
2 homophobic and transphobic bullies. This problem is
3 compounded for students of color who are already
4 disproportionately subjected to discipline by school
5 officials. In our work with New York City students
6 and their families, we encounter numerous instances
7 where students report that they've experienced
8 harassment or bias-based bullying. While DASA and the
9 DOE campaign of Respect for All are important steps
10 in curbing this discrimination, we believe there's a
11 need for reform and further oversight to ensure that
12 they and the DOE is properly implementing these
13 programs and taking all necessary steps to help these
14 families. These children are experiencing bullying
15 in the schools, often on a daily basis. As you know,
16 DASA requires annual reporting to New York State
17 Education Department of the material incidents, and
18 as everybody on this committee and I'm sure this room
19 knows, there's been a lot in the newspapers about the
20 failure of the DOE to timely and adequately report
21 these incidences. More than the statistics, we
22 believe that it's our client's stories that are most
23 telling of how bullying is continuing to effect these
24 students. One of our clients, "KB", was an 11-year-
25 old boy who attends a sixth grade middle school in

1 the Bronx. At the elementary school where he
2 previously attended he was bullied on a near daily
3 basis. The students called him names and threatened
4 to hurt him regularly. He was bullied in
5 particularly by one student named Jay who would
6 message him through social media calling him "dick
7 sucker, dick rider, bitch, a dick-head with gray
8 hair," and threatening him saying he better be on-
9 guard on school and that he would get "fucked up."
10 In one particularly egregious incident, this student
11 Jay hit KB so hard in the head that he was
12 hospitalized. When KB approached his teacher about
13 the incident, the teachers response was, "Don't come
14 crying to me, because I'm not going to help you."
15 When KB's mother, Ms. B, went to the school to try
16 and get help for her son, she was not provided copies
17 of an incident report or witness statements or even
18 given any indication that there was in fact an
19 occurrence report created. This is just one example
20 of the egregious nature of bullying which we believe
21 the DASA reform necessitates. We offer several
22 recommendations to the Council to address this issue.
23 As has been previously mentioned today, oversight
24 mechanisms must be enacted to ensure that the
25

1 Department of Education enforces regulations
2 requiring school staff to take affirmative steps when
3 they are aware that bullying or harassment has
4 occurred. We believe that there should institute a
5 uniform reporting system statewide to avoid confusion
6 when reporting differences between the OORS reports,
7 the VATA [sic] report, the DASA report, and clarify
8 for all teachers, facilities and administrators the
9 difference between each particular kind of reporting,
10 ensure reports that are made directly to an oversight
11 body rather than being filtered through the school
12 administration. We believe in ombudsman person
13 position should be created to take bullying
14 complaints from parents if they feel their child's
15 school is failing to properly investigate or document
16 the harassment and discrimination. We believe school
17 administration should be trained to assess and
18 recognize whether deficiencies in a student's school
19 performance, attendance, discipline, or placement is
20 the result of an LGBT discrimination, racism or other
21 form of illegal bias. We believe that one of the
22 most important things is to fund data collection as
23 Councilman Dromm previously mentioned to ensure that
24 DASA continues to report and is being complied with.
25

1
2 It should ensure that schools are not under-reporting
3 bullying incidences as well as demographic data.

4 Students should also be reassured that any reports
5 that they make of bullying should be kept
6 confidential, and school administrators should enact
7 policies so that no two students are unintentionally
8 outed to their families or their school and that no
9 actions are taken on the report unless authorized by
10 the student. Thank you very much.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Next,
12 please?

13 ELVIS MIGUEL: Good afternoon. My name is
14 Elvis Miguel. I am a senior at High School for
15 Environmental Studies. I am a member of the New York
16 Civil Liberties Union Teen Activist Project, and also
17 I'm a member of the LGBT community. As a senior who
18 has been enrolled in two separate New York City
19 public high schools, I can attest to firsthand how
20 the Department of Education handles matters related
21 to LGBTQ students. I can honestly say that I have
22 seen an improvement in their attempts to make school
23 safer and more welcoming for LGBT students. However,
24 I do feel like there are things that can be improved.
25 With policies such as the Dignity for All Students

1 Act, or DASA, schools are required to have a DASA
2 coordinator on campus that they can report instances
3 of bullying and harassment when it occurs. Even
4 though these are policies in place-- there are
5 policies in place like DASA, not every student is
6 given this information. This makes it harder for
7 students to report bullying and harassment. There
8 are many steps the DOE can take to make school
9 environments more welcoming and accepting for LGBTQ
10 students. For example, having schools open up more
11 gender neutral bathrooms would be a step in the right
12 direction. However, schools should not stop there.
13 These restrooms should be easily accessible to
14 transgender and gender non-conforming students.
15 Also, these students should be allowed to use the
16 locker room or restroom that corresponds to their
17 gender identity or expression. Even though this is
18 required by law, many students don't know it is their
19 right. This information should be shared with all
20 students. Through my time in the New York Civil
21 Liberties Union Teen Activist Project, I learned the
22 teachers must respect students' gender pronouns, but
23 this sort of thing isn't talked about in schools.
24 Even the basics of gender identity or expression are
25

1 rarely or not all covered in my classes. I would feel
2 more comfortable in school if issues facing LGBT
3 students were discussed openly. When it comes to
4 handling situations of bullying towards LGBTQ
5 students, the DOE has made changes to existing
6 policies, but there is more work to do. Let me start
7 off by saying that I am not a supporter of zero
8 tolerance policies. Instead of shutting down
9 conversations about LGBTQ issues, teachers should
10 open up more dialogue with their students. The first
11 step in doing so is incorporating LGBT issues in
12 health class. Students learn mostly about
13 heterosexual relationships, which leaves LGBTQ
14 students excluded from the curriculum and feeling as
15 if their identity or sexual orientation is abnormal.
16 By providing all students the opportunity to learn
17 more about LGBTQ people, you will see students become
18 more accepting of their LGBTQ peers which in turn
19 leads to less bullying on campus. These are just a
20 couple things to take into consideration that will
21 really benefit LGBTQ students and make it a safe
22 learning environment for them to excel in their
23 academics without the fear of being excluded or
24

1
2 harassed for their identity. I appreciate you all for
3 hearing me out, and thank you for your time.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. And Elvis,
5 were you here for the whole hearing?

6 ELVIS MIGUEL: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Wow, I didn't know
8 that you were here. I'm just curious to know, I
9 think your testimony you said, "Even the basics of
10 gender identity and expression are not rarely-- or
11 are rarely or not covered in my classes." Did you
12 ever hear anything about LGBT, any, either the L, the
13 G, the B, or the T in your classes?

14 ELVIS MIGUEL: Yes, only in my US History
15 class. My teacher, her name is Erica Brooks [sic],
16 she's like an advocate and an ally for LGBTQ
17 students. So she brought-- she sometimes brings up
18 issues that-- like current events like when the Pulse
19 shooting happened in Orlando, she brought it up, but
20 other than that, like, I never see like-- even in
21 both schools, I-- like, teachers never, like, discuss
22 issues involving LGBTQ.

23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Did anybody ever teach
24 anything about LGBT history?

25 ELVIS MIGUEL: No.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Did you ever hear
3 about Harvey Milk?

4 ELVIS MIGUEL: No. Not through school,
5 but through--

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] But you
7 know.

8 ELVIS MIGUEL: Yeah.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Did you ever hear
10 about Bayard Ruston [sic]?

11 ELVIS MIGUEL: Not through school.

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Do you know
13 who Bayard Ruston is?

14 ELVIS MIGUEL: Yeah, he's the help [sic]
15 for Martin Luther King, right?

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yes, you're very
17 smart.

18 ELVIS MIGUEL: Yeah.

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: This wasn't meant to
20 be a quiz. It was just meant to be--

21 ELVIS MIGUEL: [interposing] It's okay.
22 Yeah, I saw a documentary about him.

23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: That's great.
24 Brother Outsider?

25 ELVIS MIGUEL: Yeah.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Oh, great. No, it's
3 just meant to be a question because, you know, one of
4 the things that I meant to ask the DOE more about but
5 didn't really get too deep into is that a great way
6 to teach tolerance is by teaching LGBT history.

7 ELVIS MIGUEL: Yeah, for sure.

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Right? I mean, and
9 that's good for all students, not only for LGBT
10 students, but all students should know about LGBT
11 history. So, that's where I was going with that
12 question.

13 ELVIS MIGUEL: No, I completely agree,
14 and I think like for the most part LGBT issues and
15 like their history is basically, like, erased from
16 the curriculum, and I think that's, like, a huge
17 injustice to not just LGBT students--

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] And what
19 do you mean by erased?

20 ELVIS MIGUEL: Like, it's not discussed
21 at all. Like, it's like if it never happened. Like,
22 Stonewall, it's never discussed in, like, history
23 classes, which I think is a really important
24 movement, especially considering that it happened in
25 New York City.

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2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Is marriage equality
3 discussed?

4 ELVIS MIGUEL: No. Well, not in my
5 experience.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, it's really
7 interesting to me, because probably the biggest
8 societal change in the last 25 years has been
9 marriage equality, but in your high school experience
10 you've never had an opportunity to discuss that in
11 class.

12 ELVIS MIGUEL: Not-- I haven't had an
13 opportunity to discuss it in class, but once again,
14 my US teacher did bring it up.

15 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: She did, oh, okay.

16 ELVIS MIGUEL: Yeah.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: But you would think
18 most students don't.

19 ELVIS MIGUEL: I think students know,
20 because like it was all over the news. I'm pretty
21 sure everybody knows.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: But not in class.

23 ELVIS MIGUEL: No, no, unfortunately.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: It's amazing that
25 there's no discussions of that going on in our

1 schools. You know, it really, really is when you
2 think about it. Alright, well thank you.

3
4 ELVIS MIGUEL: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. And next we
6 have-- yep, Paulette Johnson.

7 PAULETTE JOHNSON: Good afternoon.

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Good afternoon.

9 PAULETTE JOHNSON: Can you hear me?

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yes, I can.

11 PAULETTE JOHNSON: Okay. My name is
12 Paulette Johnson. September made 43 years I was
13 elected in as a PTA President, and I've been a parent
14 leader all those years through my grand and now my
15 great grand. Early this year on two occasions my
16 great grandson Thomas came home with a black eye, and
17 which the first time he was able to identify who the
18 child was. The school got annoyed because I waited
19 patiently to speak with them to find out how were
20 they going to deal with it through the Code of
21 Conduct Book, which I know that you're all aware of
22 that gives discipline to children that are bullies
23 and cause harm to other children. They ignored me
24 and became very angry when I contacted Carmen Farina,
25 and I spoke to her on the level that I would as a

1
2 grandparent, which she made and I was spoken many
3 times and heard many of her discussions how much
4 Charlie meant when he was born. And so I explained
5 to her how I felt as a great grandmother that this
6 little boy-- stand up, Thomas, and say hello. Now,
7 who could harm a little boy like that? And then the
8 school, not only did the school aids weren't able
9 there-- who-- they were somewhere in the corner
10 gossiping with each other to protect these children.
11 Two other children were hurt the first time. the
12 second time he couldn't even see who did it, because
13 when he hit him that quick he couldn't even recognize
14 them, but the teacher at the lunch-- he's sitting in
15 a classroom as you are here, and she didn't notice al
16 little boy that she'd been teaching all day, all
17 year, that this black eye was something new? And the
18 parents weren't contacted. I wasn't contacted. No
19 one was contacted. They gave the excuse they didn't
20 know. He didn't even get medical attention. Then I
21 was labeled as, well-- told his mother, "Your
22 grandmother's like a nightmare." Because evidently
23 Jesse Mohigo [sp?] who works with Ms. Carmen Farina
24 who knows me and how serious I am about New York
25 public school children, and when it comes to my own

1 coming home with a black eye, it's not acceptable.
2 So, he must have called the school, and they became
3 angry. But how do you think I'd feel if he had lost
4 his eye. This was other children that were injured.
5 I hold the school administration accountable. I think
6 that what should happen is like we have a 311 link to
7 the Mayor's Office with complaints that he's aware
8 of. There should be a link that the parents can get
9 through to you guys here at City Council, because you
10 guys here are the ones that make laws. I've sat here
11 in this Council room a many years on different
12 testimonies, when there was one over the toilet paper
13 not being in the school bathrooms. I go way back.
14 But to think that children are in school, coming home
15 injured, afraid to speak, the principal's making the
16 teachers instruct the children don't defend
17 themselves. So when he gets a punch coming at him,
18 he's afraid to block it, because he thinks that he's
19 doing something that the teachers don't want him to
20 do. These are children. They're human beings. Not
21 one should ever have to feel in a classroom that
22 there life is at jeopardy. And Thomas, does he look
23 like he deserved to be attack. And I brought him
24 here today because now we have other issues. He came

1 home with little scratches on his face. He now
2 doesn't want me to make the school mad at him again
3 because I called through to Carmen. He said he did it
4 himself, but I know better, and that's dangerous.
5 That's how one of my neighbors lost their daughter
6 nearly, because she tried to commit suicide because
7 of bullying. UFT has a very good program called the
8 BRAVE program. I used to invite them out to community
9 centers I was dealing with, and Mr. Amir Devoe [sp?]
10 has excellent-- he would come out and talk to the
11 kids and give them information and tell them where to
12 call. That has not been introduced really as widely
13 as it should be. Anthony Harmon now has taken over
14 that. Mr. Amir is not there anymore. But these
15 schools have to have a way to be disciplined behind
16 children not being able to get their education, not
17 doing anything about any attacks. I'm sitting here
18 listening to teachers telling the children, "Don't
19 tell me anything, because I don't care." But we care.
20 We should do something. Those teachers don't need to
21 be there.

23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Well, thank you. I
24 really appreciate you coming in and bringing your--
25 grandson?

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PAULETTE JOHNSON: Great.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Great grandson.

Congratulations on that, too.

PAULETTE JOHNSON: Thank you. Twenty--

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] I really appreciate it.

PAULETTE JOHNSON: Twenty-five grand. I only have eight great grand.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Wow.

PAULETTE JOHNSON: Yeah, nine of my own.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Amazing.

PAULETTE JOHNSON: But he got two black eyes, two.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: No, and that's terrible, and I take that very, very seriously. And I want to tell you something, it hurts me very much to hear that a victim of bullying gets revictimized by the system when people don't believe that they have been a victim of bullying. That is the purpose of this hearing today, is to draw that out, to let the public know that we're not going to tolerate that, and to push the DOE in the direction that you're talking about. Fortunately, we've been able to make some changes. More work is needed to be

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2 done, and hopefully, one day like you said, it will
3 be system wide, even the UFT program or other
4 programs. Something will be in every single school
5 to prevent this type of situation from occurring
6 again.

7 PAULETTE JOHNSON: And I'm not the
8 nightmare that they think I am, because I contacted
9 the right people.

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Well, I think you're
11 a strong advocate.

12 PAULETTE JOHNSON: It's just that-- thank
13 you.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And I think that your
15 being a strong advocate sometimes gets you called
16 names also, because I was a strong advocate on LGBTQ
17 stuff, and they wanted to get me fired from my job in
18 my school district. So, just simply because I came
19 out. This is 1992, but still, I mean, times are a
20 little different now, but I know, I know how I was
21 labeled. So, don't let that worry you. Keep
22 advocating is my message to you.

23 PAULETTE JOHNSON: Thank you very much.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you, and thank
25 you to the whole panel. Thank you for all coming in

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2 today. I really deeply appreciate it. Thank you
3 very much. I'm going to call my next panel.

4 PAULETTE JOHNSON: Say thank you, Thomas.

5 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: James Clementi who is
6 here from the Tyler Clementi Foundation. Professor
7 Marla Brassard from Born This Way. Lillian Rivera
8 from Hetrick-Martin. Paul De Sena from the Council
9 for Unity, and Harjot Kaur from the Sikh Coalition.
10 [off mic comments] Oh, sorry. If I said Paul De
11 Sena, I apologize, Robert De Sena. Okay, I apologize
12 about that. Alright, I have to swear you in. So,
13 can you raise your right hand, please? Do you
14 solemnly swear or affirm to tell the truth, the whole
15 truth and nothing but the truth and to answer Council
16 Member questions honestly? Okay, who'd like to
17 start? You ready to start over there? Okay.

18 JAMES CLEMENTI: Now, I think it's on.

19 Hi, thank you so much. I'm James Clementi. I'm here
20 from the Tyler Clementi Foundation. It's an honor to
21 be able to address the members of the Council. Thank
22 you. So, today, I didn't want to share statistics
23 with you guys. I wanted to just share a personal
24 story. My brother, Tyler Clementi, was a freshman at
25 Rutgers University in the fall of 2010. He had

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2 recently come out as gay to our family and to a few
3 friends from high school and was not really out in a
4 bigger sense at school. Two weeks into his freshman
5 year, his roommate set up a webcam and spied on him
6 in a sexual encounter with another man, invading his
7 privacy, outing him to his new classmates and
8 humiliating him on social media. Shortly after that
9 and a few days after that happened, my brother took
10 his life, and my life and my families' lives were
11 permanently and profoundly impacted by suicide. You
12 know, I think that what we've experienced with Tyler,
13 we've heard a lot of other young people come up to
14 our family and reach out with similar stories of
15 being victims of cyber bullying, and cyber bullying
16 in particular is so devastating for victims. It's
17 not only targeted against the LGBT community, but
18 we've seen that it disproportionately affects LGBTQ
19 people as well as women, especially in terms of the
20 emotional damage that's caused by cyber bullying.
21 Victims don't only experience bullying at school when
22 they're there, you know, in the morning to the
23 afternoon, and they come home and can be safe from
24 the bully. They live with that, the threat of that
25 happening to them 24/7, weekends, summer vacation.

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2 They can never be free from it. As well as the
3 audience, it's not just the other students that are
4 in the cafeteria or the hallway, but potentially
5 hundreds or thousands of people online can be
6 witnessing the humiliation. So, we definitely think
7 that it really just puts a magnifying glass on the
8 impact of bullying. So, I just really appreciate
9 hearing the other young people that have shared their
10 stories today, and I'm very glad to be able to add
11 our voice. I definitely echo the comments about
12 GSA's. I think that that's an amazing way to build
13 community and resources for students and young
14 people, and we-- I thank you for having us here
15 today.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you, and I'm
17 very familiar with the work of the Tyler Clementi
18 Foundation. I've met your mother and father on a
19 number of occasions. And didn't your organization
20 just win an award?

21 JAMES CLEMENTI: I'm sorry, you can say--

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Didn't
23 your organization just win an award?

24 JAMES CLEMENTI: We have won a few.
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I thought I saw
3 something about your mother getting an award.

4 JAMES CLEMENTI: My mom was recently
5 given the Pride of Essex Award from Essex County in
6 New Jersey honoring the impact that she has had in
7 the community, and she's become an incredible
8 advocate for the LGBT community, which is definitely
9 something I didn't expect to see when I was a young
10 person, but she's come such a long way through her
11 grief and done a lot for other people.

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: You know, I think that
13 that whole issue which was-- you know, I don't know
14 if you were here in the beginning, of PFLAG--

15 JAMES CLEMENTI: [interposing] Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: coming into schools,
17 you know. They did a whole freshman class I guess at
18 Stuyvesant, maybe it was, if I'm not mistaken. Is
19 really important too because I think, you know, I was
20 very friendly with Jeanne Manford who was the founder
21 of PFLAG. And I think parents can speak to people in
22 a way that LGBT people or other bullied people really
23 can't either. Just to know the effect of your
24 brother's tragedy, for example, had on everybody
25 else.

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JAMES CLEMENTI: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you for coming
in.

JAMES CLEMENTI: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Much appreciated.
Hi.

LILLIAN RIVERA: Hi. Good afternoon,
Chair Dromm. My name's Lillian Rivera. I'm Director
of Advocacy Capacity Building at the Hetrick-Martin
Institute, the nation's oldest and largest LGBTQ
youth serving agency. I thank the Chair and the
Committee for their keen leadership and moving
towards addressing the issues impacting climate
within New York City schools. My comments this
afternoon will focus on LGBTQ youth and the context
of the larger system where bullying, harassment,
discrimination remain a persistent challenge and
life-threatening crisis for many LGBTQ youth. All
young people deserve an education. All young people
deserve to receive their education in an environment
that is safe, supportive and nurturing. The
Department of Education strives to provide this to
1.1 million students every day. Good intentions are
not enough, and our students deserve equity, a safe

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2 and supportive environment in which to learn, grow
3 and thrive. We realize that systems don't change
4 overnight. They change with diligent commitment and
5 resources aimed at the change. We recognize the
6 efforts already made in addressing the all-too-real
7 unsafe environments still existing for LGBTQ youth.
8 With great strides forward made, case in point, the
9 hiring of Jared Fox as the LGBT community liaison.
10 In the last year with his partnership HMI has
11 successfully worked alongside him and other staff at
12 the Department of Education to develop and implement
13 an innovative training which supports the expansion
14 of schools, the skills that school leaders need to
15 create safe and supportive environments for
16 transgender and gender liberated students. The
17 training thus far has been well-received, and we've
18 been able to reach lots of school leaders, but that's
19 not enough. We continue this effort during this
20 school year with an extensive training calendar, and
21 it continues to not be enough. Training alone will
22 not shift the culture. A serious commitment from the
23 DOE leadership with clear directives will make an
24 impact and shift the culture. We know that the field
25 of organizational psychology has taught us that

1 culture is set by the leadership, and it is modeled
2 through action. We know it starts at the top. Our
3 work with the DOE has taught us that not only
4 students experience unsafe environments, and you just
5 mentioned this, but that faculty and staff do not
6 feel safe and supported in living their true
7 identity. It has often been expressed to HMI
8 leadership and staff that teachers and administrators
9 within schools still do not feel safe, and what is
10 missing is a bold and emphatic statement repeated
11 with clarity and consistency by our Chancellor and
12 the DOE leadership that all adults such as school
13 teachers, administrators and support personnel are as
14 equally safe and supported as their students, that
15 the commitment to a safer, more supportive
16 environment extends to all of the school community.
17 If the adults in the environment, if the-- if the
18 adults in the environment cannot feel safe to be out
19 as part of the LGBT community, the message is clear
20 to the young people that their safety is not worthy.
21 Systemic change requires shift within various areas
22 of the organization, and it can only happen when the
23 entire system is willing to open and honestly
24 consider where the gaps are. I implore the City
25

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2 Council to support this growth within the DOE in any
3 way you see fit, because if the village cannot rally
4 around the young people, we will continue to see
5 disparities in educational outcomes, health
6 disparities and overall community wellbeing. HMI
7 continues to be committed to the success of every
8 student in New York City, and we offer ourselves as
9 partner to ensuring that DOE leadership also has the
10 support and guidance as the Chancellor and her team
11 continues to grow and navigate new areas ensuring
12 LGBT inclusion and safety.

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you, because
14 you bring up a really important issue which we also
15 did not get to too much today, and that is the number
16 of "out" LGBT teachers. Now, there may be teachers
17 who think they're out because they go to a gay bar.
18 There may be teachers who think they're out because
19 they go to the Center. But I think there may be less
20 than 10 teachers in the system who are out to their
21 students. I certainly don't know any of them right
22 now. It's not uncommon, and a matter of fact, in
23 every elementary classroom that I was in in my school
24 for 25 years, most teachers had a picture of
25 themselves with their husband and their family on

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2 their desk. I've never seen a gay couple have a
3 picture on their desk, even though marriage is legal.
4 And often times, what teachers would day to me is
5 that I don't feel safe coming out for a few reasons.
6 One, for the younger kids because parents would think
7 that somehow they were trying to "recruit" like they
8 did with Harvey Milk in the days when they talked
9 about being able to recruit, but that still is in
10 some people's minds prevalent. And then I think the
11 other thing for the high school level, for the higher
12 grades level, was a fear of losing control of the
13 classroom and that the Administration wouldn't be
14 there to support them. those fears are still very
15 real for teachers, and I think one of the things that
16 we need to do moving forward, and I'm going to work
17 on the DOE on this, and hopefully with Hetrick as
18 well, is to come up with some type of a program to
19 encourage teachers to come out and provide that type
20 of support for them so that they can come out,
21 because LGBT youth need positive role models. They
22 need to know that there are LGBT people in their
23 schools, and that's a really important piece of this,
24 and that's what's being left out. The Chancellor did
25 put out a letter in the Principal's Weekly as a

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2 result of the last hearing that I did in February of
3 14, but-- and it was good, but I think we do need
4 even a stronger response, because I fought for 25
5 years to get that letter from the Chancellor. In
6 2014, no other chancellor would do it. But I still
7 think that we need more support from the top down, as
8 you said, in order for teachers to feel comfortable
9 about coming out. So, thank you.

10 LILLIAN RIVERA: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Next, please?

12 MARLA BRASSARD: Good afternoon. I'm
13 Marla Brassard. I'm a professor in the School
14 Psychology Program at Teachers College Columbia
15 University. It's been a pleasure to listen to
16 everybody this afternoon and to find such a
17 collective effort on the part of marginalized
18 communities and such a receptive governmental
19 response. I have just a few brief remarks to make on
20 behalf of the Born This Way Foundation. I am on the
21 Research Advisory Board. Born This Way was founded
22 by Lady Gaga and her mother Cynthia Germanotta, and a
23 major focus of that information is to create
24 inclusive environments for the LGBT community,
25 individuals with disabilities, etcetera. Her tack is

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2 to partner with groups like those here, but also to
3 have a major focus on changing youth themselves and
4 empowering them to change their own cultures. And
5 the major focuses are on doing high-quality research
6 and partnering with all groups that are involved in
7 any way possible using the unique resources that she
8 has, as someone who can send a tweet and get
9 responses from thousands of young people at any point
10 in time. Current foci are on improved mental health
11 resources and more positive school climates,
12 including kinder communities online and offline.
13 Right now, she's working-- the foundation is working
14 primarily on creating Channel Kindness which is a
15 program to recruit youth reporters to report on
16 positive events like many of those we've seen-- heard
17 about here today where young people have stood up
18 with supportive adults and have provided wonderful
19 role models that can be used around the country.
20 Other key things are the launch of the latest phase
21 of the Born Brave Experiences Study which gets
22 information from young people on things that allow
23 them to stand up, to be resilient [sic], to be kinder
24 and braver to others, and be able to use that
25 research not only for academic publications that very

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2 few people read, but to get out to the youth
3 themselves, to help them as they try to cope with
4 their lives and to help those others in their
5 community do so as well. And finally, she's working-
6 - the foundation is working with Intel, Vox Media,
7 and Recode [sic] to launch Hack Harassment which is
8 an initiative dedicated to making the internet safer
9 and more inclusive. The initiative is calling on
10 young people around the country to get involved by
11 being campus ambassadors to support the effort and
12 the movement on local colleagues and universities,
13 and they have also developed an app so young people
14 themselves can assess their social media content and
15 see the degree to which they are being kind and brave
16 and supportive of others. The foundation looks
17 forward to working with all of the different groups
18 represented here. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you also, and I
20 had the opportunity to meet Cynthia, and I also had
21 the opportunity to meet Lady Gaga through Cynthia,
22 which was fantastic and very excited, and I applaud
23 the work that Cynthia is doing with the Born This Way
24 Foundation that you're all doing there. And in many
25 ways because of Lady Gaga's celebrity, it can have an

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2 even greater impact on this type of work than much of
3 the work that we're doing, because of the level of
4 contact that Lady Gaga makes because of the media.
5 And I remember when I was younger Madonna was kind of
6 in the same league in terms of those of us who loved
7 Madonna, and yes-- she had that similar impact, and
8 it seems to me that Lady Gaga through her foundation
9 and the work that Cynthia and you all have done is
10 taking us to the next step. And so thank you for the
11 work that you do. Thank you. Yes?

12 ROBERT DE SENA: Hi, my name's Robert--

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Do you
14 have-- did everybody on the panel-- if you have
15 written testimony, make sure you give it to the
16 Sergeant at Arms. If you didn't and you want to
17 submit it, you can give that to us electronically and
18 we'll get you the information about that. I'm sorry.

19 ROBERT DE SENA: That's okay. My name is
20 Robert De Sena. I'm the Founder and President of
21 Council for Unity. The Council was born out of
22 racial violence and intolerance in 1975 in
23 Bensonhurst, Brooklyn at John Dewy High School. I was
24 asked as an English teacher who had a similar
25 background, to recruit the six gang leaders who were

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2 fostering all of the conflict and all the
3 intolerance, and see if there wasn't some way to get
4 them out of this pit. Within a year a miracle
5 happened. Six racists and six enemies transformed
6 into a band of brothers, and the impact on them for
7 that change drove them to create a legacy for other
8 kids. Their basic response was if we can come to this
9 level of tolerance, anybody can. And out of that the
10 Council for Unity was born in a very unique
11 curriculum that met the same needs in kids like gangs
12 did, the need for family, the need for unity, which
13 promotes safety, the need for self-esteem, and the
14 need for empowerment. What we experienced early on I
15 wat you've been talking about today in trying to
16 create change in the educational system. It's crystal
17 clear and I've been a teacher for over 35 years.
18 Classrooms today are driven by promotion and
19 graduation rates. Teachers have to move syllabus
20 because they're going to lose their job if they can't
21 get those rates in reading and math levels up. So,
22 the conversations that we need to be having in the
23 classroom very rarely are allowed because everything
24 is driven towards academics. And the issues that are
25 killing our kids every day are not being addressed.

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2 So, around 1987 the Department of Education
3 discovered Council for Unity and began a long history
4 which existed to fund this program in order to make
5 these changes. And the philosophy's really simple.
6 If you bring-- if a model that brings everybody
7 together, there's nobody left to fight and there's
8 nobody left to make fun of. So, the Council is a
9 course for credit on a high school level. It served
10 as credit on the middle and elementary school level,
11 and the focus of our curriculum is to really help
12 kids learn probably the most important thing in their
13 life, and that is how to make relationships work, and
14 so what happens, when we look at the demographics in
15 the building, which covers everything from culture,
16 religion, sexual orientation, the council recruits so
17 that it becomes a microcosm of who's in that
18 building, and then those kids are put in that class,
19 and their goal really is to guarantee each other
20 safety and tolerance, and because it's so
21 experimentally based, the best teachers in the world
22 when it comes to tolerance are other kids. So, I
23 would like to share one experience with you that I
24 thought was profound. It was the first time a gay
25 kid wanted to join Council for Unity. He asked me if

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2 he could become a part of this because it was all
3 over the school. I said sure. I brought him down to
4 the Council class, and here we had African-American,
5 Italians, Latinos, Asians, every other group. when I
6 walked in-- thank God I had the sense to mention that
7 this kid was gay, and every single of one of them
8 said, "You can't bring him in here." I said why? You
9 have name. It's called Council for Unity. You
10 better to change it to council for Hypocrisy. He
11 asked me to leave. I stepped out of the classroom
12 and this kid's looking at me like, "here it goes
13 again, another rejection, another slap in the face."
14 Five minutes went by. The door opened up. They
15 looked at me and they said, "Bring him in." There
16 was an empty chair in the circle, and they said to
17 this kid, "That's your seat." And that was the
18 beginning of the values that his program espouses.
19 We are incredibly proud of our impact on the LGBT
20 community. You mentioned the Hetrick-Martin
21 Institute, well, one of my students from 1983 who's
22 been in the Council, God [sic] knows [sic] how many
23 years, and became a Vice President in Council a few
24 years. It's Thomas Grover [sic] who's your boss.
25 He's my student and my other son. Justine Margo [sic]

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2 who was the supervising attorney for the Legal Aid
3 Society was also a Vice President in Council for
4 Unit. And Joey Presley, Melissa Mark-Viverito's
5 Deputy Chief of Staff is a counsel for the alum and
6 is very active in our program. So, I come in here
7 with a request other than this, because we are funded
8 by the City Council. This program is exploding not
9 only all over the City, but all over the state and
10 beyond. It's in school systems. Communities adopt
11 it. We integrate Police Departments into our model,
12 and we're in prison. Somebody before mentioned about
13 being in Rikers Island. We are in two houses in
14 Rikers Island, and we could play a major role in
15 safeguarding LGBTQ youth if we were invited to do so.
16 So, my only request to you really is to encourage the
17 chancellor and the Department of Ed to expand the
18 program that gives kids reform, creates tolerance,
19 and let me tell you something, this is the last thing
20 I'm going to say, if you don't have a peer pressure
21 model that's going to inhibit bullies, you're going
22 to fail. The Council creates a phalanx of peer
23 pressure that rubs the bully of an environment. And
24 the second thing, and it's equally critical,
25 everybody's talked about bullies today. If you don't

1
2 have a program that transforms a bully into a
3 guardian, you're going to fail, and that's exactly
4 what we do. Our curriculum is unique because bullies
5 have been bullied. They have as many psychological
6 problems as victims, and so if bringing the victim to
7 sanctuary and transforming the bully into a guardian
8 is to me I think a unique strategy that has had--
9 we've been doing this for 41 years. So, I thank you
10 for inviting us here, and invite you to encourage the
11 expansion of this model in the school system.

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And thank you for the
13 statement on the bullies, because you're absolutely
14 right. I did mention a little bit in my opening
15 statement, and we find out that the bullies
16 themselves often are in special education or they
17 wind up in jail or something else, because they are
18 acting out based on something that happened to them,
19 and so it's really an important point that you
20 brought up.

21 ROBERT DE SENA: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you to this
23 panel, and we will call up our next panel is Harjot
24 Kaur here? Okay, come on up. Yeah. And DeJohn
25 Jones, Parent Action Committee, is DeJohn here?

1
2 Yeah, okay. Am I saying it right? Karen-- is Karen
3 here? Karen Marter [sp?], okay. And Jeff Ervine?
4 Okay, so this seems to be-- will be our last panel,
5 unless there's somebody in the audience who has not
6 signed a paper and wants to say. Did you want to
7 speak? Yes? Oh, okay, alright. So we'll hold for
8 Drum [sic]. We're hold for Drum. Okay, I need to
9 swear you all in. So if you'd raise your right hand.
10 Do you solemnly swear or affirm to tell the truth,
11 the whole truth and nothing but the truth and to
12 answer Council Member questions honestly? Okay.
13 Let's start on my left, the right side over here.

14 DEJOHN JONES: [off mic]

15 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Oh, yeah, is your mic
16 on?

17 DEJOHN JONES: Yes. Hi, my name is DeJohn
18 Jones. I'm from Parent Action Committee. I'm here
19 just to give testimony today in support of students
20 who face bullying in the public school system, and
21 just to give a little bit of what I know and
22 experienced myself when I was a student 20 years ago,
23 or more. So, thank you, Council Members for the
24 opportunity to give testimony on this dire issue in
25 our public schools. I'm here today to talk about the

1
2 systemic bullying and how it exists in our education
3 system. I would know because I'm a person who have
4 been bullied all of my life, as a student, as an
5 adult. I went to school in Brooklyn. Never found my
6 education experience enjoyable, supportive or safe. I
7 was a place in which my peers humiliated and
8 physically hurt me. Teachers turned deaf ears and
9 did not intervene on my behalf. Each day of my
10 education experience I feared for my own life. That
11 was through elementary through middle. Today, I
12 stand as a gay black woman with no hair. I'm a
13 target of more acts of bullying to come. This
14 sustains [sic] to a society that does not value
15 conversations on race, gender or sexuality. The act
16 of bullying, that derives from a place of insecurity
17 and of fear. It is a tactic use to bring people down
18 who have great potential to become great leaders. We
19 as parents and with our years of experience and
20 wisdom have to be accountable for our own actions and
21 model for our children, of course, and students on
22 how to-- excuse me, how to treat each other with full
23 human dignity. Our children are watching us attack
24 each other on television. They are watching the
25 elections, from police terror to the torment of our

1 inmates in America and the lack of real investment in
2 restorative programs in our public schools. We have
3 to end systemic bullying based on race, class,
4 gender, sexuality in America by taking, of course,
5 accountability and as parents, as education, police
6 makers, and administrators we have to know-- excuse
7 me. I'm kind of running on. Excuse me. We have to
8 know that the State Education Department data from
9 2013 to 2014 year found that 71 percent of the
10 schools reported zero incidents of harassment or
11 bullying or discrimination-- it all ties in-- of
12 students for that entire year. And 98 percent of
13 schools reported 10 or fewer incidents, and it's not
14 accurate. It's not an accurate portrayal of our
15 schools. I as a parent know firsthand what it's like
16 to mediate with students who are faced with conflict.
17 Training for parents and as well as student in
18 restorative justice, excuse me, can transform our
19 schools in our communities. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.
22 Next, please?

23 JEFF ERVINE: Good afternoon, Councilman
24 Dromm. It's been a couple of years since we met.

25 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yes.

1
2 JEFF ERVINE: my name is Jeff Ervine. I'm
3 the President and Founder of Bridg-it School, and I'd
4 like to thank City Council's Education Committee for
5 convening this hearing about abusive behaviors in New
6 York City schools and how we can protect the LGBTQ
7 community as well as other vulnerable communities.
8 My background and expertise is in risk management and
9 creating data-driven solutions. In 2008, I was
10 severely cyber bullied. As a result of my painful
11 experience I was forced to become an expert in
12 bullying, harassment and defamation. The past seven
13 years I've worked with New York City students,
14 teachers, principals, parents, social workers, safety
15 officers, police chiefs, insurance underwriters, and
16 the leading researchers on bullying, cyber bullying,
17 harassment, sexual harassment in the US to create
18 Bidg-it School. Bridg-it School is a revolutionary
19 school safety and wellness platform which integrates
20 all members of the school community, parents,
21 teachers, students, staff. Any member can use their
22 phone or any device to confidentially report any
23 bullying, threatening behaviors which are immediately
24 received by the administrators responsible for
25 addressing and resolving those issues. Currently,

1 reporting can be done in six languages. It is icon-
2 driven to meet the needs of students with
3 disabilities. Bridg-it was created to identify risk
4 behaviors immediately before they become patterns of
5 abuse. Bridg-it School was beta tested in the 2014-15
6 school year at a diverse middle school in Brooklyn,
7 and in the first year, year over year, there was a 67
8 percent reduction in bullying incidents and a 50
9 percent decrease in year over year suspensions. In
10 the following year, which is this year, we launched
11 again. We ran a whole program at the beginning of
12 the year with all the parents at orientation. So far
13 this year, this school has over 1,400 students, very
14 diverse community. They speak six languages. So far
15 this year they've had zero suspensions. Last year,
16 they had over 70 incidents by this time of the year
17 within, you know, 30 days into the school year. This
18 year, they have 15. Bridg-it School provides school
19 leaders with data-driven risk management and
20 compliance system which efficiently identifies
21 students' social problems and also highlights
22 students' social accomplishments. Another crucial
23 component to the platform is our resource center.
24 It's smart. It includes resources such as help
25

1
2 lines, restorative techniques, solutions and
3 curricula, videos, articles, music, and community
4 programs. Resources from all five boroughs are
5 included in the digital resource library so that our
6 youth can easily access services and resources in
7 their schools and communities, including health,
8 education, counseling, support groups, and after
9 school programs. Since the system uses push
10 technology, resources are made available immediately
11 to anybody who is searching for topics or resource or
12 anyone who's in need. I'll just take another few
13 seconds. Importantly, the data is live and available
14 every day for review and analysis by any school
15 administrator, the principal, the deans. Bridg-it's
16 platform combines restorative solutions for bullying,
17 cyber bullying and harassment with smart technology
18 to immediately improve school climate and student
19 safety for all students, especially the most
20 vulnerable. We're launching in over 20 schools this
21 fall across the country. Principals have said this
22 about it, right? What makes our approach unique is
23 that it empowers the students to easily engage
24 through using their smart phones which are their
25 primary communication tools today. It includes

1
2 parents in both the communication and education
3 around social/emotional learning, and it tracks the
4 follow-up. The truth is we have no idea how many
5 times a principal, dean, coach, teacher solves or
6 attempts to solve a student's social or emotional
7 problem, and we have no hard numbers on how many
8 incidents go unreported in total or by school
9 community. Bridg-it offers the easiest way and the
10 fastest way for members of the community to
11 communicate issues it gives-- and it gives leadership
12 the control of the resolution process in a way never
13 before possible.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And Jeff, were you
15 here for the 14 LG-- the 2014 hearing that I held?

16 JEFF ERVINE: I was not on the 2014
17 hearing. I've been working LSVD. I sit with
18 principals in the Bronx and all over the City. I'm
19 launching in charter schools, middle and high school
20 as well as the public schools. I lobbied just
21 recently in California to keep the climate survey in.
22 That was me with a number of members from the Aspen
23 Institute and so measuring the whole student--

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] With
25 the Acromen [sic] Institute?

1
2 JEFF ERVINE: What? The Aspen Institute.
3 The whole goal now is to be able to measure the whole
4 students, the positive, the negative, and find out
5 what's missing, because every student can learn
6 equally. There's always some support that's missing,
7 and we want to give these tools to everybody, and we
8 beta tested long enough, and the response from
9 superintendent to the heads of schools is, "Wow, this
10 is incredible." I met with David Hockman in Albany.
11 He's like, "This is the most incredible thing I've
12 ever seen, most comprehensive product ever created.
13 Go ahead and do whatever you have to do."

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. And
15 DeJohn also. We're going to hear from Karen next,
16 and I know some of the testimony she's going to give
17 about her experiences in the school also. So, I
18 didn't want you to not think that I didn't hear what
19 you had said, but I'm going to combine my remarks
20 when we hear from Karen.

21 KAREN MARTER: Hi, my name is Karen
22 Marter. I'm a Junior High School teacher in Astoria,
23 Queens. And before I begin, I just would like to
24 note if there is or are people from the DOE present?

25 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: There are.

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KAREN MARTER: Okay, good.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And you're on camera.

KAREN MARTER: That's fine with me.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yeah.

KAREN MARTER: So, I am--

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] And it's official hearing, so--

KAREN MARTER: I'm not here to present any solutions, but if I knew who you DOE people were, I'd be looking right at you. Where is that person? Oh, perfect. I'm here to relay-- and also, because I'm excited to see there are young people here. I have a message to share with you, too. I'm here to tell a story about something that happened in my school last year at the end of June. I was sitting in a meeting with some of my teachers. We were grading some exams, and our supervisor walked in and dropped these papers on the table. I don't know if you guys have access to them. I brought copies, but I'll describe it to you so you can see what I'm talking about. This was a internet meme that you printed out--

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Karen,
3 just to tell you, I don't know that the DOE
4 representative is allowed to respond to this point.

5 KAREN MARTER: That's fine. I just want,
6 I--

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] But just
8 to explain to you also--

9 KAREN MARTER: [interposing] I just know I
10 told you, so I want to, you know.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: No, you have every
12 right to do it.

13 KAREN MARTER: right.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: It's just I don't know
15 that he can respond directly right now.

16 KAREN MARTER: That's fine. I'm not
17 expecting a response.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I will tell you right
19 off that I have put it in for investigation, so we'll
20 talk a little bit about that, too.

21 KAREN MARTER: Okay.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: But I want you to go
23 ahead and describe it.

24 KAREN MARTER: Okay. So, the top part of
25 the meme is a picture of the traditional male symbol

1 that you would see for a bathroom, and it says, "If
2 you belong in this bathroom." And then the second
3 picture-- thank yo-- says-- is a picture of a female
4 symbol that you would normally see on a bathroom, and
5 it says, "And you follow my daughter or my wife into
6 this bathroom." And then the third symbol is a
7 symbol of a wheelchair, and it says, "You're going to
8 need this bathroom." At the top of this paper that
9 he handed out was the administrator's email showing
10 that this came from DOE email. This was not
11 personal. He received this on our email server at
12 work. He dropped this on the desk and our staff
13 looked at it. It was pretty quiet in the room. A
14 couple people made some comments not really related
15 to this, but to sort of some other silly kind of
16 stories, and I took this with me, and made some
17 complaints. I'm here today to say that if we want to
18 see any changes in this system, we can't have
19 administrators and people higher up handing things
20 like this out to staff. This is-- upset me greatly.
21 It was shocking. And I'm hearing, you know, I've
22 been here since three o'clock. There's stories and
23 stories about students being bullied and children
24 being harassed and teachers being harassed, and I
25

1 wonder how will we ever get to the bottom of this if
2 this is what's at the top of a school? I work in an
3 extremely diverse neighborhood. Six languages,
4 that's small compared to our school. My one class
5 has 12 languages. A very diverse school in every
6 way, and this is the culture of my school right now,
7 this fear, this transphobia, this homophobia. The
8 student that was speaking before when you asked,
9 "Have you ever heard any LGBT or Q things in the
10 classroom?" and the answer was no. When I brought
11 this to my principal and my AP, I said-- I demanded
12 an apology. I was told, "No, you're not getting an
13 apology. It's your fault you're offended." I asked
14 for training on these issues because I'd been at that
15 school since 2002, and I've been in the DOE since
16 1997, and in all those years I have not had one
17 training on LGBTQ issues, and I have had 17 trainings
18 on Danielson, which is how we are rated. I asked for
19 it to be investigated. Where did this email come
20 from? And I was told, "No, that's none of your
21 business." So, if the DOE wants to see some changes
22 and we want to see some changes, we can't keep
23 pushing issues like this under the rug. We can't
24 take two years. I put in my formal complaint, and
25

1
2 I've been told this can take 18 months to
3 investigate. This man is going to retire, and this
4 is going to be forgotten. I am being pushed out of
5 that school now. I've gotten my first ever
6 evaluation as a 17-year veteran. Suddenly, I've gone
7 from highly effective to ineffective. Suddenly, I
8 can no longer teach. I'm going to be pushed out of
9 this job or they're going to make me leave because
10 they don't want to address these issues. And so I'm
11 here today just to testify that this stuff is real.
12 It's coming from the top. It's coming from the
13 sides. How can we expect kids not to bully if our
14 administration bullies us, and the DOE doesn't take a
15 stand and say we won't tolerate. We're going to
16 quickly and efficiently get rid of people who do
17 things like this. Thank you so very much for your
18 time. It was really great to be in a room with my
19 allies today. Thank you for having me.

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Well, thank you, and
21 thank you for coming in and reporting this incident
22 to me. I was infuriated. I could not believe what I
23 saw when you presented this material to me. I have
24 referred it to the DOE for investigation. They are
25 assuring me that it will be investigated. I have

1
2 asked for training to go on the school. I've been
3 assured that that is going to happen, also. So, we
4 should see that happening rather soon. If you are
5 having other issues as I guaranteed you, I will not
6 let you be harassed for exposing this, and I will
7 support you in that.

8 KAREN MARTER: Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And I will also come
10 to visit your school, and I may come soon to do that.
11 So, you will see me there, okay, at some point. We
12 will figure that out, how I do that, but I do not in
13 any way, shape or form want you harassed because you
14 blew the whistle on what was occurring in your
15 school. I'm deeply, deeply, deeply concerned about
16 it. It will not happen again. Thank you.

17 KAREN MARTER: Thank you.

18 HARJOT KAUR: Hello. Thank you for
19 having me. My name is Harjot Kaur. I'm here with
20 the Sikh Coalition. I'm here basically to just add
21 weight to everything that has already been said
22 before me, to be in partnership with all the other
23 orgs, testifying members, community members, and to
24 also speak on behalf of the Sikh community. We've
25 already kind of alluded a little bit to some of the

1 incidents, the bias-based discrimination that's been
2 happening against Sikh American students. So, on
3 behalf of that, I just-- you know, before, sir, you
4 had said, you know, the DOE and all these changes and
5 everything will happen only by data. Though I agree
6 with that statement, at the same time the data seems
7 to just kind of sit on people's desks for too long,
8 and then all of a sudden a few years later there's a
9 need for new data, and it's back to the CBO's to go
10 and collect all that data and to demonstrate the
11 under-reporting, the lack of accountability and what
12 not. You know, the Sikh Coalition has put out
13 several reports over the last 10 years. The bias-
14 based discrimination against Sikh students, Muslim
15 students, Asian-American students, etcetera, you
16 know, in another few years we're going to have to go
17 do it again, because it just keeps on, you know-- it
18 cycles out. Just two years ago we released "Go Home
19 Terrorist" and we did a national report on Sikh
20 American students and that was following a New York
21 Centric [sic] report that we had done, and the data's
22 the same. I mean, for Sikh- American students it's
23 over two-thirds of turban wearing students are
24 constantly bullied, of all ages. So, I just wanted
25

1
2 to add that bit that, you know, the data is there,
3 but then it also kind of transitions to why there's
4 less reporting now from the students, and it's
5 because they don't-- they mock the system, because
6 they know it's not effective. They see there's no
7 follow-through. They're obviously very acute, and
8 you know, we had OCR visit our youth program just
9 last year during their round of bullying listening
10 sessions, and the OCR was so shocked to hear all
11 these stories and there's-- the gentleman is saying,
12 "You know, how come of none of you have reported?
13 And the kids, they're high school students, they're
14 laughing. They're like, "Who are we going to report
15 it to? Like, no one listens, no one cares." We care
16 for our daily life, right? Like we're trying to get
17 through a very hard time as is, and there's great
18 expectations of students in general with college
19 applications, jobs, internships, etcetera. So, for
20 them to have to go in and investigate what's the
21 proper procedure, do I have enough documentation? Is
22 this happening, and do I have the email records,
23 etcetera, etcetera. That onus should not be on the
24 students. They've done their part. They'll tell
25 their teacher, and often it has-- you know, it's off-

1 hand, like, "Hey, I just want to let you know," and
2 that itself takes a huge amount of courage just to
3 get them to do that. And they say it off hand like,
4 "Hey, just want to let you know this happened." It's
5 the teacher's job to follow through. And that also
6 brings me to the point of it's very unrealistic to
7 ask the parents of these students who come from
8 immigrant families, Sikh's and others, to expect that
9 the parents are going to step in and they're going to
10 intervene, and they're going to speak on behalf and
11 do the follow-through. These parents aren't going to
12 do it, not just because of all these other-- they
13 don't even have the language access that, you know,--
14 and that goes-- that's for another hearing, but at
15 the same time, you know, this is a multi-prong
16 approach. And if all these pieces aren't out of
17 place at the very least when we're talking about
18 bullying, we cannot be unrealistic with expectations.
19 It can't come from the kids. It can't come from the
20 parents all the time. It need to come from the
21 officials who are put into the schools and whatnot.
22 And what-- may it be training. May it be public
23 pressure, whatnot. And then the last point I'll
24 bring to the floor is, I mean, we've been conducting
25

1 a lot of informal surveys over the past few months.
2 Our youth program does a lot of anti-bullying
3 workshops, and this year we've been doing a round of
4 these informal surveys that ask, you know, "Have you
5 been bullied? What's been the effect?" etcetera,
6 etcetera. And a lot of what's been apparent has been
7 the raw data that shows that at least two-thirds of
8 those who said that they were bullied which is the
9 majority of respondents have said that they've been
10 mentally affected by this. And we, you know, New
11 York City has a huge mental health campaign going on.
12 It's a dire issue. This should not be a place that
13 mental health is further aggregated. You know,
14 there's definitely a lack of support for mental
15 health within school systems at the moment and
16 whatnot, but that is also what's fueling this vicious
17 cycle of bullying where the victim and the bully are
18 also treated one in the same and whatnot. So, I just
19 wanted to-- and my recommendations kind of are what
20 everyone's already added, and what the Sikh Coalition
21 has formerly also presented to the DOE when we did a
22 round of letters to every Department of Education
23 across the country. So, yeah.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Earlier in the
3 hearing I mentioned the Sikh Coalition or I said Sikh
4 folks, maybe not the Sikh Coalition about their role
5 in terms of the passage of DASA and their involvement
6 in that. And I really do believe that without their
7 input and their support that we wouldn't have really
8 gotten that done. So, I'm very grateful for the Sikh
9 Coalition.

10 HARJOT KAUR: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: For that, we hear
12 your recommendations. We agree with them, and we
13 will continue to work on them as well. So, thank
14 you. Thank you for coming in and for giving some
15 testimony. Thank you. And now we do have an
16 additional panel of students who are here, and I'm
17 going to ask them to come up as a group. Kian
18 Anilao, and I hope that I say your name right. If I
19 mispronounce it, please forgive me. And I'm going
20 to-- Ugnayan Youth for Justice and Social Change in
21 Jackson Heights. Athena Arielle Magno, come on up.
22 Camilla Bacolod, Ivan Kristhiane Daquial, Terrance
23 Manitone [sp?], I'm sorry, and Khushu Ignas [sic],
24 Igas? How do you say it? And the last name? Ijas
25 [sic]. Very good. I'm sorry. You want to start with

1 us, Kushu? Oh, I have to swear you in, yeah.

2 Alright. Going to do a video, okay. So, can you
3 raise your right hand all of you? Do you solemnly
4 swear or affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth
5 and nothing but the truth and to answer Council
6 Member questions honestly? Okay, very good. And
7 what's going to happen, the video's coming up?

8
9 RISHI SINGH: So, I could-- thank you,
10 Council Member Dromm. My name is Rishi. I'm--

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Rishi,
12 why don't you speak into the mic? And is the red
13 light on? Yeah, just hit that, yep.

14 RISHI SINGH: Okay, thank you Council
15 Member Dromm and the Education Committee for putting
16 together this hearing. My name is Rishi. I'm an
17 organizer with, DRUM, Desis Rising Up and Moving, and
18 we're here today basically to talk about a campaign
19 that we've been working on over the past year,
20 particularly around understanding bullying, but on an
21 institutional level. So, what we're going to be
22 basically doing, we have prepared a statement that
23 DRUM and Ugnayan has prepared. Then we'll hear from
24 some of our youth members, and we have a video that's

1
2 on-- that our youth members have created over the
3 past year. It's a compilation of different videos.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, Sounds good.
5 So we're going to start here then?

6 RISHI SINGH: Yeah.

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, so let's start.
8 Yeah, and speak right into the microphone so we can
9 get it recorded.

10 CAMILLA BACOLOD: Hello. My name is
11 Camilla Bacolod, and I'm an intern for Ugnayan Youth
12 for Justice and Social Change. When most people hear
13 the term bullying they think about several things at
14 once, school, classmates, school fights, name-
15 calling, relentless harassment, and many other
16 unpleasant memories. However, how many people think
17 about why the bullying behavior exists in the first
18 place? We expect our education system to develop
19 young people as human beings, but instead we have an
20 education system that enduringly [sic] damages young
21 people, seeing them as needing to be controlled and
22 dominated instead of being already fully capable and
23 intelligent. This is called "young people's
24 oppression," and it's normalized in our schools. It
25 is young people's oppression that upholds an

1
2 environment where teachers, school staff, security,
3 school security agents, or NYPD officers dehumanize
4 and harm students. When adults who are authorities
5 in the school system and enact young people's
6 oppression on students, we do not usually think of
7 this as a form of bullying, but it is
8 institutionalized bullying because it's embedded in
9 the very fabric of the education system.

10 Institutionalized bullying affects all young people
11 in the educational system, but it impacts students
12 differently based on race, class, gender, sexual
13 orientation, nationality, race, ethnicity, religion,
14 language, and disability among other things. You may
15 be familiar with one particularly violent way
16 institutionalized bullying impacts primarily black
17 and Latino young people, the school to prison
18 pipeline. In another version [sic], the school to
19 low wage jobs pipeline. As DRUM and Ugnayan Youth
20 members, we believe that the presence of law
21 enforcement and use of harsh zero tolerance
22 discipline policies actively promote and condone
23 institutionalized bullying of youth of color in the
24 NYC public schools by pushing them into the school to
25 prison and low wage jobs pipeline.

1
2 TERRENZE RIENTON: My name is Terrenze.

3 I'm the Youth Organizer for Ugnayan Youth for Justice
4 and Social Change. Currently, the NYC Schools
5 Discipline Code is based on zero tolerance, where the
6 root causes or the why behind a student's behavior is
7 never asked or addressed. It is simply responded to
8 with punishment. Rather than nurturing young people
9 to learn and grow from mistakes, youth of color are
10 simply removed and isolated with use of harsh
11 discipline, and yet, zero tolerance discipline does
12 not apply to adults if they bully students. We often
13 think of bullying as a harmful interpersonal
14 encounter between students, and the way to reduce it
15 is to implement more disciplinary policies. However,
16 if we think of bullying as something that is a part
17 of the educational system and enacted by authority
18 figures and police officers and youth of color, the
19 solution can't be to implement more of the same
20 policies of institutionalized bullying. We have to
21 look more closely at what's happening to our young
22 people in the school system. As Asian students of
23 Pilipino and South Asian descent, DRUM and Ugnayan
24 Youth understand how we're used as a wedge to
25 criminalize black and Latino students and push them

1
2 harmful system, and adults need to learn the ways
3 they are trained to be agents of young people's
4 oppression. The first step to doing this is ending
5 zero tolerance policies like B21 and implementing
6 restorative justice programs in our schools which
7 addresses and repair harm in a way that gets to the
8 root of bullying behavior. We need to allocate
9 resources towards these sorts of alternatives to
10 punitive policies and place young people at the
11 center of their own transformation and empowerment so
12 they can take the lead in the development as human
13 beings and begin to create a model for what healthy
14 schools and communities should be like. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Is
16 anybody else giving testimony, or that's it? Did you
17 want to give testimony? You know, maybe before,
18 because I'll forget what I want to say if I don't say
19 it now. So, I deeply appreciate your testimony.
20 I've worked closely with DRUM on some of these
21 issues. I have fought to eliminate the B21
22 regulation. We haven't gotten there yet, although
23 the DOE did make some changes to it. I don't think it
24 is changed enough and I'm not really 100 percent
25 satisfied, but I do want to say that your advocacy on

1
2 behalf of this issue, in particular DRUM's advocacy
3 on this issue, has been instrumental in getting some
4 of the changes that we've accomplished so far done.
5 So I want to encourage you to continue to do what it
6 is that you're doing and to continue to come to these
7 hearings, because it's very informative and I think
8 you are being effective.

9 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you.

11 KHUSHU BIJAZ: Hi, my name is Khushu
12 Bijaz [sp?]. I'm 14 years old. I'm also a member of
13 DRUM, Desis Rising Up and Moving which organizing
14 South Asian immigrant communities for immigrant
15 racial education and worker rights. I'm here because
16 bullying can involve and impact all people in the
17 school system. It is not just a student to student
18 interaction, but it is also institutionalized. The
19 institutionalized bullying which includes bullying by
20 building positions of power in the school system have
21 hurt me and the people around me. I have witnessed
22 the impacts of institutionalized bullying many times
23 as a student. There was this one situation when I
24 was in eighth grade last year and my friend who is
25 also Muslim was silently praying with her head down

1 while sitting on her chair. It was something she has
2 done before, except that the teacher had noticed this
3 time. Instead of letting her finish or calming
4 asking her to hurry it up and focus back on the
5 lesson, it was made into a huge deal. He yelled
6 across the room and said, "You can't do that here."
7 She asked for just one more minute, but all he kept
8 doing was asking her questions like, "What are you
9 praying for? Is something bad to happen? Or is
10 something bad to happen to us?" She didn't respond
11 to that question because it was clear that she felt
12 attacked and hurt. She was sent to the dean's office
13 and was suspended for the rest of the week. I don't
14 know about you, but that should not have happened.
15 She was basically bullied because of her religion as
16 if she was a threat to all the people around her.
17 When she came back to school after serving the
18 suspension, she wasn't herself anymore. She wouldn't
19 [sic] speak in her classes anymore because she felt
20 scared. I'm also Muslim, and seeing how my teacher
21 acted towards my friend made me feel uncomfortable
22 and intimidated. That experience also impacted how I
23 did in the class. This is just one example of how
24 institutionalized bullying can impact young people
25

1
2 and those around them. Many times we do not know how
3 to address the situation. Schools try to address
4 bullying by hanging posters, signs and holding a
5 couple of assemblies each year to let the students
6 know that bullying is wrong and that you will get
7 punished if you bully someone based on race, gender,
8 sexuality, religion, ethnicity, among other things.
9 But in cases where school employees are the ones
10 bullying students, it is not known how to get about
11 addressing the situation. It was not until I
12 mentioned it to my older sister that a complaint was
13 filed which resulted in the teacher no longer working
14 in the school. The Dignity for All Students Act has
15 helped to make bullying more visible. However, if
16 our differences and diversity are not included in
17 everyday culture and climate of the school, policies
18 like DASA will not have much of an impact. Also our
19 schools do not know how to address bullying
20 effectively, and doesn't acknowledge that adults also
21 bully students in the school. They just punish
22 students by suspending them when the situations
23 escalate which does not address the problem. What we
24 really need is more restorative practices and
25

1
2 guidance interventions in our school, which can
3 really repair harm caused by bullying.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Anyone else?

5 KIAN ANILAO: My name is Kian Anilao. I
6 am of Filipino descent, born in the Philippines. I'm
7 currently 15 years old. I'm giving this testimony on
8 behalf of not only our organizations, Ugnayan Youth
9 for Justice and Social Change, but for my fellow
10 friends whom experience institutionalized bullying
11 within the school system. I am a transfer student,
12 transfer sophomore from Francis Lewis High School.
13 Here today to showcase my experiences on
14 institutionalized bullying. First, I'd like to share
15 an event which occurred on September 29th of 2016
16 around by the end of the day at that time. I'm not
17 disclosing the name of the person enacting the
18 bullying action towards me upon my request, and he or
19 she will remain anonymous. The time was
20 approximately 1:08 p.m. to 2:50 p.m. around ninth
21 period in English class. I can be very forgetful and
22 clumsy when it comes to my studies and overall in
23 general, but I'm trying my hardest, and I discipline
24 myself. However, during this time of the event this
25 trait has become a burden to me. The teacher

1
2 requested to take out our homework, one in which
3 particular incidence I forgot. It was the first
4 homework within the marking period I forgot within
5 the class. I began to panic to thought of
6 forgetting, and once she got to me I told her I
7 forgot. She then started to scold me and say, "Why
8 didn't you write this down? You should be better than
9 that. Didn't you learn how to record the stuff last
10 year?" I told her that I just transferred here. She
11 didn't listen. Later on in class she wouldn't stop
12 letting it go, as when she checked to look at another
13 student's, she looked at her planner and shoved it
14 right in my face, "See, like this." I thought it was
15 10 minutes ago that this happened. Why is she
16 holding a grudge on this issue? Why is she making a
17 big deal out of this? She then went to do this for
18 the rest of class-- excuse me-- the rest of class. I
19 was trying to finish my classwork. I didn't know she
20 was putting up the next homework that was due
21 tomorrow, because classwork was my main priority.
22 She yelled out loud, "Kian, did you write the
23 homework?" All I could do is just stare because I
24 was caught up in doing my classwork that I didn't'
25 know, but before I can say anything, she said, "You

1
2 didn't write the homework yet. Oh, you're not--
3 you're going to remember just like how you remembered
4 to do your homework last time." At this point I had
5 enough of this humiliation. The bell ran two minutes
6 afterward. I was left with an awful feeling. How
7 could a teacher do this? I felt so belittled. I sat
8 wondering for the rest of the day on what I did wrong
9 to deserve this humiliation. I already have trouble
10 coping with my inability to sometimes recollect past
11 events, but this does not excuse and justify the need
12 to humiliate someone like this, not even an adult. It
13 made me sickened and angry, but deep inside I felt
14 sadness. Just one misstep I get punished with
15 ridicule for a minor mistake. It was just
16 debilitating seeing that and since it was an honors
17 class standards were much higher, as well as the
18 students. Was I only put through this class by luck?
19 Do I even belong in this class? Am I not intelligent
20 and competent as my fellow classmates? I started to
21 question if I really did deserve these punishments
22 and that I'm not part with these other people. Do to
23 the events that transpired, I'm currently testifying
24 on this day, this current time, to showcase evidence
25 to Council Members of the City of New York of the

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2 existence of institutionalized bullying in our school
3 system. My fellow members in our organization have
4 identified our burdensome experience that is
5 institutionalized bullying. I have heard other
6 fellow students who have been dehumanized and
7 humiliated by teachers. Therefore, if thereby take
8 into considerations the given testimonies and give a
9 clear confirmation of action. We, as an
10 organization, would state and discuss our disputes,
11 demands and any other matter regarding
12 institutionalized bullying and the school to prison
13 pipeline. The first thing that comes up to mind is
14 to work with the New York-- well, continue working
15 with the New York City Department of Education to
16 work and do something of the matter. The first step
17 I propose to continue revising or amend certain rules
18 within the school code that gives teachers,
19 administrators, school safety agents and other adults
20 in the school system who are unreal [sic] using their
21 power to maintain an environment of institutionalized
22 bullying. In addition, I encourage spending funds to
23 develop school through peer counseling, restorative
24 justice, clubs and extracurriculars rather than
25 security cameras and guards. All in all, this

1
2 concludes my testimony and disputes concerning the
3 matter of institutionalized bullying and its overall
4 impact and how we can come to an arrangement that
5 will both mutually benefit all of us, the young
6 people and adults who are responsible for the school
7 system, including the honorable Council Members.
8 Thank you, your honors.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.
10 Did you have testimony? Next, yeah. So, let's go to
11 the next and then we'll make some comments and then
12 we'll go to the video. Go ahead, yep.

13 ATHENA MAGNO: Hi. I'm Athena Magno--

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Yeah, is
15 your mic on? Pull that mic closer to you.

16 ATHENA MAGNO: I'm Athena Magno. I'm a
17 22-year-old college student who is also part of the
18 LGBTQ community. I previously attended Long Island
19 City High School in Queens. It has been a few years
20 since I graduated high school, but the experience I
21 faced stay with me to this day. There were so many
22 instances of me being made to feel uncomfortable and
23 degraded by school officials, but these experiences
24 still stand out in my mind. One incident occurred
25 during my sophomore year with my Algebra teacher. We

1
2 spent the first semester preparing for the Algebra
3 Regents, and we were expecting to take it at the end
4 of January. We worked and studies as hard as we
5 could. When Regents week in January came, our class
6 had found out that we were not on the list to take
7 the Regents test. We confronted our teacher about
8 it, and he told us that we were too stupid to take
9 the test. I was completely taken aback by this. He
10 continued to add insult to injury. He explained that
11 if this class couldn't pass the Algebra Regents in
12 our freshman year, what made us think we'll pass it
13 this year? I was so humiliated. This came from a
14 man who's supposed to teach us, someone we're
15 supposed to trust, an adult, a teacher calling his--
16 excuse me-- calling the students stupid. In my
17 junior year I was being bullied by a classmate for my
18 sexual identity. It took so much courage to come out
19 to my classmates, but it amounted to nothing. I was
20 only bullied, and one student even threatened my
21 life. When I went to my guidance counselor and asked
22 for help, she asked me what I expected her to do.
23 She said that I should have thought of the
24 consequences of expressing my identity so freely. It
25 was so humiliating. Growing up I thought that

1
2 guidance counselors were there to listen to you and
3 help you fix your problems. She could have done
4 something. She could have talked to the faculty or
5 parents, but she just turned me away. I felt so
6 unsafe that I stopped going to school. I ended up
7 transferring and graduating late. In my senior year
8 of high school, my girlfriend at the time and I were
9 planning on going to the prom. I wanted to wear a
10 suit rather than a dress. We were all excited about
11 going, but when the principal asked me what I was
12 planning to wear to the prom, she was disgusted. She
13 told me that I was a girl and that I shouldn't be-- I
14 should be wearing a dress. She did not even bother
15 to say this to me privately. She yelled at me in
16 front of everyone. My school was supposed to stand
17 for equality and to have my principal degrade me for
18 my sexuality was so humiliating and degrading. LSC
19 was full of people with different sexualities and
20 hearing this hurt me and made me feel bad about my
21 identity. Long Island City had a system where you
22 were placed in an academy based on your grades. The
23 academy that had the lowest grades were full of
24 minorities while the academy that had the highest
25 grades were full Caucasians. As a freshman I was

1 placed in the academy with the lowest grades. It was
2 the first week of school and we haven't even begun to
3 know what our grades would be at. Those in the
4 lowest academy were ridiculed by faculty and mocked
5 by fellow students. Institutionalized bullying exists
6 within schools and education system. My experiences
7 in high school are just a few examples of how
8 institutionalized bullying shaped my entire
9 education. The youth in today's society are put
10 through gendered and racially structured classes.
11 The education system is not designed to develop
12 students in a positive way. The stigma that young
13 people are not fully capable and not intelligent
14 enough needs to be abolished. The youth today are
15 here to be educated and are here to grow as human
16 beings. This all can be resolved and together we can
17 make the steps that help our youth and strengthen our
18 communities. I suggest training every teacher and
19 school safety agent extensively, changing the
20 school's disciplinary code, diminishing the unfair
21 suspension system like B21. Making the school
22 environment a safe space for students is a very
23 crucial point that is needed in order for them to
24 develop. I implore you to not take this lightly and
25

1
2 consider changing the school system and favor the
3 safety and welfare of the youth. I ask you that you
4 use the public resources including those contributed
5 by-- oh, sorry-- contributed by my parents and my
6 community towards reinvesting it back into our young
7 people, investing in peer counseling, restorative
8 justice and ending institutionalized bullying. Young
9 people need schools to be a safe and nurturing place
10 where they can be fully human. Thank you for your
11 time.

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: How long ago did you
13 go to LIC?

14 ATHENA MAGNO: I started in 2008.

15 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: 2008--

16 ATHENA MAGNO: [interposing] And I was
17 supposed to graduate in 2012.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And is that principal
19 still there?

20 ATHENA MAGNO: I don't know.

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: That's a very
22 compelling story. Thank you. Yes?

23 : I have a testimony.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yep, and just make
25 sure your mic's on, and speak up, okay?

1
2 IVAN DAQUIAL: Hi, my name is Ivan
3 Daquial and I'm a Youth Leader in Ugnayan Youth for
4 Justice and Social Change. I am a new immigrant in
5 this country arriving last May, and I am studying at
6 Francis Lewis High School in Fresh Meadow, Queens. I
7 am 17 years old, and I live in Bellerose, Queens. My
8 world is quite peaceful. A few weeks prior to the
9 first day of school, I also delivered a testimony to
10 the City Council about my concerns and fears
11 regarding the New York City public school system. I
12 regret to tell that a lot of the concerns I had
13 turned out to be true, and there are some other
14 things that I did not expect. On my first day of
15 school everything seems so fascinating to new people.
16 I see rushing in and out of classrooms does [sic] of
17 me. But not long after I noticed the crookedness of
18 the system I have to deal with. Everything is just
19 so fast. I felt so suffocated and constrained, as if
20 I can't move in the hallways, especially without
21 being stopped by the SSA's. This bothered me, but I
22 thought of it as something as a thing here. I joked
23 about it with my fellow Gline [sic] leader that goes
24 to my school, and I said, "Oh, school to prison
25 pipeline at it again." Two of my teachers stood out

1
2 the most and honestly makes me just want to go home
3 and never go back to school. My teacher, a Caucasian
4 man, as he calls on names for attendance, butchered
5 my whole name. He pronounced it as Daqueel [sic]
6 Evon [sic], which is actually quite understandable,
7 but when I tried to correct him, he walked near me--
8 I was scared of course-- and he said, "It's just
9 business. It's nothing personal. I'm just making
10 sure that you know who calls the shots. Only the DOE
11 chairman can change your grade when I give you a bad
12 one." Then, he mispronounced other people's names,
13 and quite a lot of us got really offended. He also
14 made rather insensitive instructions during our class
15 saying, "If you're financially challenged, and that
16 is a good way to go if you are poor or broke or
17 whatever, put into writing and we will give you old
18 uniforms." This is not okay. It's really offensive
19 and insensitive. Another teacher would be my science
20 teacher I got transferred to for honors class, and
21 when I asked her how I could cope [sic] up with their
22 lesson, she answered, "I do not look into the past.
23 I focus on the future." And a lot of things that I
24 honestly did not comprehend because of the fact that
25 English is my second language, and she was talking

1
2 really fast, and her accent was-- well, I can't
3 understand it that much. I explained that I was
4 confused, and she said out loud during our class that
5 I may not belong to an honor's class. We as a class
6 is terrified to ask questions because she would
7 scream at us and embarrass us. I was here when she
8 embarrassed me and in front of all those people.
9 Both of my experiences are institutionalized
10 bullying. Who is of so little faith in the capacity
11 of a learner gives insults and derogatory words for
12 their amusement or whatever? I'm disgusted to say
13 that the New York City public school system is
14 crooked. I was excited to be here. I heard it would
15 be something to brag about with my friends back home.
16 Turns out it was something horrific-- something of a
17 horrific narrative than a brag-worthy one, because we
18 are the future of the great nation-- of this great
19 nation. We do not deserve this maltreatment. We ask
20 that you deepen the understanding and investigation
21 of our experiences in institutionalized bullying.
22 Allocate resources for restorative justice, peer
23 counseling and widespread improvement of this broken
24 education system. We all withstand to benefit from a

1
2 safe, healthy and nurturing school system, and we
3 deserve dignity. Hear us [sic]. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. What
5 school were you in?

6 IVAN DAQUIAL: Francis Lewis High School.

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And you stayed there
8 the whole four years?

9 IVAN DAQUIAL: It's my first year this
10 year.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Oh, this is your first
12 year.

13 IVAN DAQUIAL: Yeah.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And this happened at
15 Francis Lewis?

16 IVAN DAQUIAL: Yeah.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Wow. Okay, now did--
18 let me ask, did any of you report this to the
19 principal of the school, or-- well, the principal in
20 your case was the problem, right, at LIC? So you
21 couldn't go to the principal right? Did you know how
22 to go about reporting it beyond the principal?

23 ATHENA MAGNO: No.
24
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Did anybody else who
3 experienced discrimination report it to the
4 principal? Can you put the mic on?

5 UNIDENTIFIED: I didn't report it to the
6 principal, but I did report to my assistant principal
7 and there was a detective that did come in and
8 question each of us separately.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, they did-- they
10 did an investigation?

11 UNIDENTIFIED: Yeah.

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Do you know what the
13 outcome of the investigation was?

14 UNIDENTIFIED: I don't go there anymore,
15 but my friends do tell me that he doesn't work there
16 anymore. So--

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And where did you go
18 to school?

19 UNIDENTIFIED: IS61 Leonardo Da Vinci.

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Oh yes, IS61. Okay,
21 and that's where that incident occurred? That's
22 where these inc-- the bullying occurred, right?

23 UNIDENTIFIED: Yeah.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Good. You make
25 a very good point, all of you, about the idea of

1
2 institutionalized bullying. I actually hadn't thought
3 about it that way, so you've opened my eyes in a lot
4 of ways today, but it's a really good way to put it.
5 So, let's go to the video, and then we'll follow up.

6 [video presentation]

7 [applause]

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Well, that was really
9 very, very good, and your testimony was excellent. A
10 couple of questions that I have. I'm wondering how
11 many of you guys are in school right now? But not--
12 you're in college now, right? How many are in public
13 school right now. Do teachers ever talk about Eid?
14 Eid, the Muslim holiday? Yeah.

15 UNIDENTIFIED: It's not discussed.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: It's never been
17 talked about? Do teachers in your school ever talk
18 about Diwali?

19 UNIDENTIFIED: No.

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Do teachers in your
21 school ever talk about Dashane [sic]?

22 UNIDENTIFIED: No.

23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Do teachers in your
24 school ever talk about holidays other than Christmas?

25 UNIDENTIFIED: No.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: See right there,
3 that's a problem, and you know, the Chancellor said
4 that now that we do have Eid as a holiday in the
5 school system, it's a teachable moment. And that
6 should be taught. I have to say, in previous
7 testimony today as well, you know, one of the things
8 that I heard was that teachers don't do these things,
9 and that's why I asked because I think that by
10 talking about different holidays and different
11 cultures and different religions, we can also reduce
12 bullying in the schools, you know, and so if that's
13 not happening in any of your schools, it should be
14 happening. But one of the biggest problems was that
15 teachers don't even really know about it, because
16 they were never taught about it. I'm not trying to
17 excuse teachers, but I, for example, had to go out
18 and learn. I took it on my own to go out and learn
19 about those holidays, like what does Eid mean and
20 what is Diwali, probably because I lived in Jackson
21 Heights, and I wonder. I said what's going on in this
22 neighborhood, you know. I wanted to know what was
23 going on, but I know that not everybody does that.
24 And so to me, that's also another example of
25 institutionalized-- I don't know if it'd be racism,

1
2 but institutionalized-- Islamophobia maybe or South
3 Asian phobia, whatever it may be, because teachers
4 don't do those things. And so that's very
5 interesting as well. Okay, I think that's about all
6 that I have at this point. I look forward to
7 continuing to work with DRUM. I thank you very much
8 for coming in, and actually you're last panel, but
9 you're probably most important because you're the
10 students who we serve and you're the people who we
11 want to make sure feel comfortable in our school
12 system. So thank you for having the courage to come
13 out and to testify today. Thank you very, very much.
14 And with that--

15 [applause]

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: this hearing is
17 adjourned at 6:43-- excuse me, 5:43.

18 [gavel]

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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date November 1, 2016