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BEFORE THE PUBLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION
STATE OF NEW MEXICO

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS
PUBLIC INPUT MEETING
ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES ACADEMY
August 23, 2012

1:30 p.m.
Alamogordo Family Recreation Center
1100 Oregon Avenue
Alamogordo, New Mexico

REPORTED BY: Cynthia C. Chapman, RMR-CRR, NM CCR #219
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A P P E A R A N C E S

COMMISSIONERS:

MS. CAROLYN SHEARMAN, Vice Chair
MR. EUGENE GANT, Secretary
MS. CARLA LOPEZ
MR. VINCE BERGMAN
MR. GILBERT PERALTA

STAFF:

MS. KELLY CALLAHAN, Director, Charter School Division
MS. CORDELIA CHAVEZ
MR. BRAD RICHARDSON

1 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: I call back into
2 session this hearing of the Public Education
3 Commission. Commissioner Gant, will you call the
4 roll, please?

5 COMMISSIONER GANT: Commissioner Peralta.

6 COMMISSIONER PERALTA: Here.

7 COMMISSIONER GANT: Commissioner Bergman.

8 COMMISSIONER BERGMAN: Here.

9 COMMISSIONER GANT: Commissioner Lopez.

10 COMMISSIONER LOPEZ: Here.

11 COMMISSIONER GANT: Commissioner Shearman.

12 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Here.

13 COMMISSIONER GANT: Commissioner Gant.

14 Here. We have a quorum.

15 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Thank you, sir.

16 This meeting is being conducted pursuant to
17 New Mexico Statutes Annotated, Title 22, Section
18 8B-6J, 2009. The purpose of these community input
19 hearings that will be held from August 20 through
20 August 24, 2012, is to obtain information from the
21 applicant and to receive community input to assist
22 the Public Education Commission in its decision
23 whether to grant the proposed charter application.

24 According to this section of the law, the
25 Commission may appoint a subcommittee of no fewer

1 than three members to hold a public hearing.
2 According to law, these hearings are being
3 transcribed by a professional court reporter.

4 The total time allocated to each applicant
5 is 90 minutes, which will be timed to insure an
6 equitable opportunity to present applications.
7 During the hearing, the Commission will allow for
8 community input about the charter application. The
9 time for public comments will be limited to
10 20 minutes. If you wish to speak on behalf of the
11 applicant or in opposition, please sign in at least
12 five minutes before the applicant's presentation.

13 Has everyone had an opportunity to sign in
14 that chooses to? Please be sure that you indicate
15 on the sign-up sheet whether you are here in
16 opposition or support of the charter school.

17 The Commission Chair, based on the number
18 of requests to comment, will allocate time to those
19 wishing to speak. If there are a large number of
20 supporters or opponents, they are asked to select a
21 speaker to represent common opinions. We will try
22 to allocate an equitable amount of time to represent
23 the community accurately.

24 The Commission will follow this process
25 for each community input hearing: The Commission

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1 will ask each applicant or group to present at the
2 table in front. They will be given 20 minutes to
3 present their application in the manner they deem
4 appropriate. The Commission will not accept any
5 written documentation from the applicant; but the
6 applicant may use demonstrative exhibits to -- try
7 to say that all at once -- may use demonstrative
8 exhibits to describe their school, if necessary.
9 However, the setup time for exhibits, et cetera,
10 will be included in the 20 minutes.

11 Following the applicant's presentation,
12 the local school district representative will be
13 given five minutes to comment. Subsequently, the
14 Commission will allow 20 minutes for public comment,
15 as described above. Finally, the Commission will be
16 given 45 minutes to ask questions of the applicants.

17 Commissioners, are we ready?

18 (Commissioners so indicate.)

19 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Thank you. As
20 you're already forward, I won't ask you to come
21 forward. For the record, please state the name of
22 your school, the name of the founders of the school,
23 and any other person who is here today on behalf of
24 your school. And you will have 20 minutes to
25 present information about your application.

1 Before you begin, please, this is the
2 fourth hearing that we have -- will be conducting on
3 the new charter application for Academic
4 Opportunities. That, of necessity, limits,
5 probably, the Commissioners in the number of
6 questions that they would ask, because we've asked
7 them so many times before. I would recommend that,
8 if you would like a full transcript of the first
9 hearing held in Deming on this application, that you
10 go to the PEC Web site -- in how many days, perhaps?

11 THE REPORTER: At the latest, by a week
12 from tomorrow.

13 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: A week from
14 tomorrow, the transcript of the Deming hearing shall
15 be available for a full, perhaps more complete,
16 question-and-answer session. Mr. Casavantes,
17 please.

18 MR. CASAVANTES: Yes. Good morning,
19 Commissioners. Good afternoon. I'm doing it so
20 many times, I'm not knowing night and day here.

21 My name is Mark Casavantes,
22 C-A-S-A-V-A-N-T-E-S. And I am a founder. And
23 Wes Clarkson is a founder, and he's not here right
24 now because he's having problems, after he moved,
25 with his hip and knees. He's going to be needing

1 knee and hip replacements.

2 Was there another question that I --

3 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: May I just remind
4 everyone to really speak up, because there's so much
5 noise in here.

6 MR. CASAVANTES: The feedback.

7 MS. CALLAHAN: We're adjusting it.

8 MR. CASAVANTES: Thank you. So this is
9 the 20 minutes right now?

10 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Cordy, could we
11 start the 20 minutes over, please?

12 MR. CASAVANTES: That's all right. I know
13 I'm not going to use it.

14 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Okay.

15 MR. CASAVANTES: You know, I'm going to be
16 kind of summarizing our plan, because some of the
17 people have not heard it or seen it and so forth.
18 And so -- and I know that you've all heard it.

19 You know, we believe that there's some
20 students that do not succeed in the traditional
21 school environment and that they need a different
22 environment, and that we were seeking to solve --
23 solve those kind of problems with those sort of
24 students and provide an option in that regard.

25 That we plan to accept all students, but

1 we are seeking to seek out those that are in foster
2 care, those that are recent immigrants,
3 Spanish-speaking, homeless, and other pop- --
4 populations -- the American Indian population -- and
5 prepare those individuals to have a paying --
6 self-sustaining, paying career upon graduation,
7 which is not the typical case of a typical high
8 school graduate. A typical high school graduate has
9 a very difficult time being able to obtain
10 employment, much less a self-sustaining employment.

11 And -- and that was -- that's been one --
12 that's -- and when we developed this plan, we tried
13 to develop the plan trying to solve educational
14 problems in New Mexico. And we believe that there
15 are significant problems in the State of New Mexico
16 that need to be resolved and that we are strongly
17 committed to solving these educational problems.

18 And -- okay. Some of the aspects of our
19 plan is that we're going to have basically two
20 grades, an "A" for 90-or-better mastery, and an "I"
21 for "In Progress," which that we believe that you
22 cannot really improve education if 70 is all that's
23 needed to perform.

24 Many people talk about, would you like an
25 airline pilot that can land 70 percent of the time,

1 or a doctor that got a 70 in their college work, or
2 even -- I would say that if you even had somebody
3 that cooked your meal that did it 70-percent well, I
4 don't think that that's a standard that you would
5 want to have in your -- in your -- as standard.

6 We went to -- you know, we went through
7 a -- and I think our plan has lots of ideas, lots of
8 creativity. Maybe in some areas, we stretched the
9 edges and overstepped our bounds on some of the
10 things that -- that are permissible.

11 One of the things is, you know, we have a
12 finite budget. And we're looking at how to do the
13 most good with what we have. And salaries is a
14 large portion of that budget. And so one of the
15 places that I was trying to do was -- and I kind of
16 got some of this idea from the movie "Moneyball,"
17 where the baseball team was having so much trouble
18 recruiting staff from -- because the Yankees were
19 continuing to outbid them and get -- take away their
20 key players each year; so they developed a different
21 system to try to get the staffing so that -- that
22 they would be winning. And they had a huge winning
23 streak. And then other schools -- I mean, other
24 teams -- started copying their system.

25 So, you know, one of the things is I know

1 that there's a desire to have everyone -- you know,
2 if you have certified teachers, there's only a
3 certain student-teacher ratio you're going to get
4 with adults because of the budget. Even if you
5 would desire to have a one-in-ten ratio, you can't
6 do that with the current budgeting.

7 So we looked at, and we tried to
8 brainstorm, solutions. And one of them was to have
9 the tutor idea. And I know that we -- you know, we
10 learned that we'd have to have educational aides to
11 replace that, and, in our next plan, we would do
12 that. But I felt I need to address why we're doing
13 things, because you -- I think you know that there's
14 a lot of constraints that we have in try- -- and we
15 looked at trying to be as creative as we could be
16 to -- with the goal of getting as much help to our
17 students and the best system that we could develop
18 as we could. And, I think -- like I said earlier, I
19 said I think that our philosophy, our heart, our
20 desire, our interest to improve education and all
21 those sort of things were in the right place.

22 I know, in the last few meetings, I've had
23 a very, you know, good education on many aspects of
24 our plan; and we plan to revise the plan and
25 resubmit it. And -- and, you know, I've appreciated

1 all the comments that I've gotten from you all. And
2 I know what -- I believe we both -- all of us have
3 the same goals and desires of improving education in
4 New Mexico. I can tell from your comments and so on
5 that I believe that that's -- that's the case from
6 each and every one of you.

7 You know, I was thinking the other day
8 that if I had a plan that Commissioner Gant enjoyed,
9 that it would be a very outstanding plan, you know.
10 I know that probably he was one of the more, I
11 guess, critical of me. But I -- I can see where
12 he's coming from.

13 And -- and I -- and then one of the things
14 I asked just slightly before the meeting was, "You
15 know, is there anything -- like, if I was having the
16 ability to have access, because one of the things
17 is, like, I" -- and I was told, "No." But the
18 purpose was to, you know, bounce ideas off and
19 say -- you know, because I am -- I am seeking to
20 find the best solutions. And even though I've heard
21 comments that you feel our plan is, you know,
22 incomplete and insufficient, it -- I think you can
23 say that it -- it was a really an honest and good
24 attempt to try to solve the problems.

25 And -- let's see here. Okay. Our plan is

1 to -- to prepare students to have an associate's
2 degree in nursing or computer programming. And the
3 reason those two fields were selected, because we
4 felt that they were good career choices in today's
5 working world and that they would satisfy the
6 requirement of having a student self-sustaining upon
7 graduation, or they could continue their education
8 in whichever venue they desire.

9 We considered law, business, and some
10 other fields. But we thought -- and we thought that
11 one field was too many. Two fields offered a
12 choice. And with the limited budgeting and so
13 forth, three or more choices would -- would be
14 unable to be obtained, would dilute the resources to
15 a point where we would have basically a -- a bad
16 program.

17 You know, we plan to incorporate these --
18 this -- the skills and learning throughout the --
19 and coordinate it with the State standards from
20 first grade through twelfth grade so that the
21 students are basically learning the fields of
22 nursing and computer programming from a very early
23 age.

24 We plan to -- you know, some of the things
25 is, like, in the coloring books and so forth that

1 nurses have, they color the various parts of the
2 body to learn some of the vocabulary. We think that
3 that coloring and some of those sort of things would
4 be appropriate in the early grades; and some very
5 simple programming, where they may just copy code or
6 something like that until they learn the vocabulary
7 of programming and be able to do -- to do more
8 significant work.

9 You know, when you're trying to do more,
10 you know, you have the battle of time. And you
11 know, how do you do -- how do you get -- you know,
12 dual credit, particularly when you look at some of
13 these degree plans. And I think one of the degree
14 plans had, like, 175 hours. It wasn't a 60-hour
15 program. I think a nursing program and a computer
16 programming program were close to those values.

17 And so you have to look at -- you know, I
18 know that there's a challenge in a lot of schools.
19 They always say, "Okay, we're just going to have
20 juniors and seniors, and that they have two years to
21 basically complete a program." And we were looking
22 at trying to spread -- spread it out, so that it --
23 we thought that would be easier to obtain than to
24 force it all into two years.

25 Now, that was our philosophy. And, you

1 know, that you -- I know that that can be judged
2 positively or negatively on that basis. But
3 that's -- that's the intention. Because we're
4 trying to -- is it -- is it tougher to make it all
5 in two years, or just spread it out?

6 And we plan to have an extended day,
7 because we don't believe that we would -- you know,
8 when you're at -- trying do more, you've either got
9 to have a longer school year or a longer day. And
10 we felt that the longer day was a better way to do
11 that. And then also that we would capture the
12 school day so that there would be no homework
13 requirements of our students if everything was done
14 at school, because a lot of parents are not being
15 involved in their children's education. They're not
16 properly supervising their students' homework, and
17 either they are not desiring to or they are not
18 skilled in that area. And we felt that that was a
19 way to solve that particular issue.

20 We're planning to have a report-card
21 system that would provide very detailed information
22 on a student that would be available in real time to
23 staff, the student, and their parents, and that we
24 might -- plan to have it maybe in a little bit
25 different format for parents than we would maybe for

1 the students and the teachers, because we could --
2 we would have maybe a simpler version available that
3 would be easier to understand, maybe with some icons
4 instead of data, those sort of things. But we -- I
5 have seen that with feedback -- immediate feedback
6 with students, you get better performance.

7 And I -- and then also, we plan to have a
8 self-paced program, where, as a student completes a
9 subject and a grade level, the next day they would
10 be in the new grade level. And -- and then if a
11 student was going to be retained, then instead of
12 retaining them all the way back to the beginning of
13 the school year to find out where they were in the
14 continuum of that grade level, start them there, and
15 then try to catch them up, and bring them up to the
16 current grade level as quickly as possible.

17 We're looking also at trying to be --
18 since we had limited resources, to use our teaching
19 staff the best we could, to take away all the
20 administrative tasks and those sort of things from
21 them so that we could -- and have -- have clerks do
22 the grading and recording of grades and papers based
23 on their -- their answer keys. And -- and have this
24 data entered into the database, and that the
25 teachers would focus on teaching and preparing to

1 teach.

2 And that, in our pullout classes, the
3 teachers would only be teaching the students that
4 needed to learn a particular concept. And so
5 that -- because in the regular classroom, where you
6 have a certain number of students every day, there
7 are students that know the material; there are
8 students that don't know the material. And you're
9 wasting some of the students' time in that -- in
10 that environment.

11 And so we sought to eliminate that wasting
12 of time by having it in a pullout program, where the
13 teachers would pull out students based on the needs
14 of the campus and the needs of the students, and
15 teach them without a bell schedule so that they were
16 able to be able to dedicate the time necessary to
17 give these students the, you know, success.

18 And, you know, schools have tried all
19 sorts of ways to try to address this issue: Box
20 scheduling, modified block, and various time
21 elements, and so forth. And -- and this is -- this
22 is an approach that I thought would solve that
23 problem.

24 And then we also have a main education
25 space, where they -- we call it our "principal lead

1 teacher." But, basically, the administrator would
2 be in the main educational space supervising the
3 entire school. They would actually be in the center
4 of the education that's actually taking place
5 instead of being in an office, and -- and actually
6 being sort of in the -- in the classroom.

7 And that -- that in this room, we would
8 have our educational aides. Then students would be
9 completing their various assignments. We plan to
10 have where the students get a choice of assignments,
11 and based on -- on the students' interests, you
12 know, some -- some activities are more interested --
13 are more interesting for boys, and some are for
14 girls. And then also dealing with the different
15 learning styles, that the students could pick the
16 assignment that they desire to work on that complied
17 with the particular State standards.

18 And -- and then our classrooms were going
19 to be conference-room-style classrooms instead of
20 the traditional classrooms. And we'd have about
21 12 students in a class. And -- and the teacher
22 could release part of the students at any time if
23 they felt that they were in a position to -- to move
24 on and keep the rest of the students as necessary.

25 We've even considered things where they

1 could be called back at a later time with the
2 interruption for lunch or those sort of things. And
3 that we plan to use the concepts of Six Sigma to
4 study every aspect of our school and to continually
5 improve each aspect and to study what is occurring.

6 Let's see here. I ran out of time. So --
7 also, we are planning to have a variety in our fine
8 arts program to include a variety of things,
9 including orchestra, band, and art and so forth.
10 Most of the programs just have one or the other.
11 And so, in our plan, we were -- it's basically a
12 very -- it would cover lots of different aspects;
13 maybe not a master of any, but definitely an
14 exposure to a lot. Thank you.

15 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Thank you.

16 MR. CASAVANTES: Appreciate it.

17 COMMISSIONER LOPEZ: Thank you.

18 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: If the Alamogordo
19 School District will please come forward, if you
20 would like to say -- for the record, please state
21 your name and the role you play at the local school
22 district. And you will have five minutes.

23 MR. STRAFACE: Hi, Madame Chair, members
24 of the Commission. Thank for you this opportunity.

25 My name is George Straface,

1 S-T-R-A-F-A-C-E. I serve as Superintendent of
2 Schools for the Alamogordo Public Schools.

3 I'm going to go on record as saying we are
4 a district that supports choice. That's commonsense
5 choice. Please know that. We have some specific
6 concerns about this application. First, there's
7 been no communication between the applicant and our
8 school district, that I'm aware of, where we could
9 help understand needs that they present as needs
10 that they may or may not be needs.

11 Another is some simple things. For
12 example, misspelling "Alamogordo" on an application
13 was not too pleasing to us. But when you understand
14 what they're proposing, I think it's important for
15 you to know that we don't believe that the specifics
16 they are proposing is needed in Alamogordo. And
17 here is why:

18 First, we have an outstanding relation
19 with NMSU-A. Dual credit is really up and running.
20 We have an ability for students to gain an AA in
21 nursing and computer science, along with several
22 other AAs. It's almost a seamless flow-through in
23 our system. I don't think that's -- that presents
24 a -- really no need.

25 Another area we have an outstanding

1 relationship, with our military base, Holloman
2 Air Force Base. And we work closely with them. And
3 I'll give you an example of three things. They have
4 assisted us in gaining three grants that really are
5 addressing student learning. One was through PED,
6 which was the Significant Improvement Grant; it's
7 High Schools That Work. We're in our second year.
8 It's over a million two in funding to us to reform
9 our high schools; things like the use of time,
10 extending the day, different kinds of schedules,
11 modular schedules, block schedules, et cetera. And
12 we're in the middle of that.

13 Secondly, a grant to improve our advanced
14 placement programs, grades six through twelve, which
15 is over \$600,000, and which we are now actively
16 engaged in implementing.

17 A third is a grant called "Connections,"
18 which has allowed us to open this fall, for the
19 first time in this school district, an online
20 academy, where kids can come and either take
21 enrichment activities; or, for example,
22 home-schoolers. We're starting to pull a lot of
23 home-schoolers this fall into the program because of
24 the online. They have 80 course offerings at this
25 point and more.

1 We are utilizing IDEAL-New Mexico, as well
2 as Advanced Academics. I just had a student sign up
3 for Mandarin Chinese. So I think there's plenty of
4 opportunities here.

5 District concerns summarized, then, would
6 be really not necessary at this point in time. We
7 are embracing standards-based education, and you
8 could walk through any of our classrooms and see
9 evidence of that. We are training our principals in
10 this process in evaluation of that. And we're right
11 in the middle of it.

12 Financially, it becomes a big concern. We
13 are a district, over the last few years, who has
14 lost enrollment for a variety of reasons. What that
15 has done for us is a loss in revenue. Over the last
16 four years, we've lost almost \$4 million in revenue
17 to us, and we've maintained our programs. I think
18 an addition to the drain on our ability would really
19 impact our financial sustainability over time.

20 And I think that's what this would do, and
21 really hurt all kids in Alamogordo to benefit a few,
22 and I don't think that's fair.

23 We also are a district that's performing
24 very well in SBE. We're one of the large -- one of
25 the larger school districts. We're in the top

1 9 percent of our students' performance. We just
2 recently passed a \$20 million bond to build a new
3 elementary, and we have planning in place to utilize
4 the school that will be closed for a science
5 technology magnet, a literacy academy for students,
6 and we're looking at expanding our alternative high
7 school. So we have two high schools, Alamogordo
8 High and Academy Del Sol. Academy Del Sol is an
9 alternative school that really catches the kids that
10 are not making it at Alamogordo High.

11 Our planning is to go one step further.
12 We anticipate next fall to implement street
13 academies for kids that aren't successful at Academy
14 Del Sol. We're looking carefully at that.

15 I think when you look at Alamogordo Public
16 Schools, you would say, with our new strategic plan,
17 as well as all the endeavors we have going, it
18 should be sustained and supported. And I would
19 answer any questions. I thank you for that.
20 Obviously, we're in opposition to this application.

21 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Thank you.

22 MR. STRAFACE: Questions?

23 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: No, thank you, sir.

24 We're now to the point of public comment. The first
25 name, and only name I have on the list, is Carlos

1 Hernandez. Let's go for four minutes. Will that
2 suffice? Thank you.

3 MR. HERNANDEZ: Good afternoon, ladies and
4 gentlemen. One of my educational colleagues
5 couldn't be here today, and she has a signed letter,
6 and she respectfully asks if I could read this.

7 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Sure.

8 MR. HERNANDEZ: It's dated today, the
9 23rd. It's a letter of endorsement. It states:

10 "Dear Sirs and Madames: As a Native
11 American enrolled member of the Navajo Nation, I
12 fully endorse the Academic Opportunities Academy in
13 seeking charter school status in the State of New
14 Mexico. I was enthusiastic with the abstract that
15 Academic Opportunities Academy will offer,
16 especially in the area of Alamogordo."

17 "There will be much-needed [inaudible]
18 option for those who live on the reservation or
19 nearby. Because on the reservation, a 90-percent
20 failure rate is there, there's a major opportunity
21 for Native American students to choose a new charter
22 school for their education. It is time for the
23 State of New Mexico to allow these types of charter
24 schools seeking approval to thrive and assist all
25 students."

1 "Again, I fully endorse Academic
2 Opportunities Academy and support their endeavors to
3 assist all children in the state."

4 "Sincerely, Claudia Edgewater-Lors,
5 Special Educational Consultant."

6 And that will be my brief speech. Thank
7 you.

8 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: You're still in that
9 formula, so --

10 MR. HERNANDEZ: Who do I give the copy of
11 the letter for the record?

12 COMMISSIONER LOPEZ: You have to mail it.

13 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Let me -- at the end
14 of this presentation, I'll tell you how you can get
15 that to us.

16 MR. HERNANDEZ: Thank you.

17 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Okay, thank you.
18 That was the only name I had on the list. Is there
19 anyone else that would like to speak?

20 All right. We're now at the point of
21 Public Education Commission's question period.
22 We'll have 45 minutes. Does anyone have questions?

23 COMMISSIONER GANT: I do.

24 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Did you say "yes"?

25 COMMISSIONER GANT: (Indicates.)

1 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Commissioner Gant.

2 COMMISSIONER GANT: I guess the first
3 question I'm going to ask the applicant is, based
4 upon the letter that was just read, and considering
5 the distance from here to that location, are you
6 going to be serving the Native Americans on the
7 Mescalero Reservation, which is up in the canyon?

8 MR. CASAVANTES: Well, this is somewhat of
9 a new development for me. I just recently learned
10 about that. I am -- I would gladly serve that
11 community, and if it was acceptable to everybody
12 involved, I -- you know, I don't know how much of
13 it -- you know, if it's considered within the
14 Alamogordo area to move to the Mescalero area, I
15 would gladly -- and desire to serve that community.

16 COMMISSIONER GANT: Sir, I think the last
17 time I heard what it's -- I'm getting a little old.
18 I believe that actually the Mescalero Reservation
19 falls under the -- under the school district for
20 Tularosa, which is north of here. So it would not
21 be in what you've been talking about, Alamogordo.

22 MR. CASAVANTES: Okay. Yes, sir.

23 COMMISSIONER GANT: Next question. The
24 applicant is planning to open charter schools in
25 five different communities in New Mexico at the same

1 time. I have laid all five applications out side by
2 side, and to find them exactly -- written exactly
3 with the same words on the same paragraph on the
4 same line. Example, on the Alamogordo application
5 and the Deming application, it all says -- or words
6 to the effect -- that five families have stated they
7 have intention of -- have strong intentions and
8 interest in having their children attend this --
9 it's on Page 64. The only thing you changed was the
10 name of the community.

11 My question, do you not believe each
12 community is different, and all -- and all deserve a
13 charter school application that is written for the
14 individual needs of the community, not the same one
15 for all five communities?

16 MR. CASAVANTES: We believe that we were
17 going to have some -- some -- you know, through the
18 community advisory groups, areas where we could
19 incorporate each individual community. But as far
20 as the plan, they were the same for each -- each
21 community.

22 COMMISSIONER GANT: But don't you
23 realize -- or didn't you realize -- did you study
24 the demographics, the locations, the cultures, the
25 business communities, the -- Alamogordo is linked to

1 Holloman; it's linked to White Sands Missile Range,
2 as is Cruces is linked to White Sands Missile Range
3 and to Fort Bliss in El Paso. Deming, they go west.
4 Carlsbad, they've got their federal program --
5 federal companies out there. It's all different.

6 Would not that have driven you to have
7 written separate -- to ID different concepts for
8 each community?

9 MR. CASAVANTES: Well, we -- I
10 understand -- I understand your point. I think
11 that, since we're dealing with about 300 students in
12 each community, that the plan would -- would be able
13 to serve the type of students that would be --
14 desire that plan. You know, we're not doing a
15 district-wide plan. We're not doing the -- you
16 know, I think for 300 students, our plan would be a
17 suitable option for all five areas.

18 COMMISSIONER GANT: Well, you say you're
19 not writing a plan district-wide. But you're
20 bringing it in -- you'd like to bring it into the
21 Alamogordo district, where all the children come
22 from. So it is a district-wide application, is it
23 not?

24 MR. CASAVANTES: Well, we're only serving
25 300 students. So --

1 COMMISSIONER GANT: They're coming from
2 across the district.

3 MR. CASAVANTES: I understand. But when
4 you're offering a choice, you're offering a -- you
5 know, we're not being all things for all people.
6 And that we are -- that this option, I believe,
7 would work in each -- in each community, and that
8 the -- since we're serving 300 students, it's not
9 like, if I was involved with the entire district, I
10 would have to modify for each community.

11 But for 300 students, I think there are
12 300 students that would have an interest in the
13 nursing or computer programming field from each
14 area, and that the self-paced and all the other
15 components that we have, that it is -- it is -- that
16 it is a suitable option in each community.

17 COMMISSIONER GANT: Sir, you talked about
18 the grading sheets, and you would have clerks
19 grading the work of the students using grading
20 sheets or whatever you want to call them. We used
21 to call them "bubbles." But are they not going to
22 be doing written work, where the teacher who has the
23 direct knowledge of the student should be grading
24 those papers?

25 MR. CASAVANTES: Yes, there would be some

1 work that would require the teacher to grade that.
2 But in -- there are -- there is work that can be
3 graded by a clerk. And to the extent that it would
4 be possible for the clerk to do that, we would have
5 the clerks do that. Work like writing, like
6 composition -- writing composition and so forth,
7 that needs a teacher to read it and to -- but -- you
8 know, some of the -- some of the -- a lot of the
9 work can be provided on an answer key, and somebody
10 could grade that and record that.

11 COMMISSIONER GANT: The applications, as
12 we've read them and as you have stated, covers the
13 grades one through twelve; is that correct?

14 MR. CASAVANTES: Yes, sir.

15 COMMISSIONER GANT: Can you explain to the
16 Commissioners and the community why you did not
17 include kindergarten?

18 MR. CASAVANTES: Because when we looked at
19 the facility plan, you have to have a small bathroom
20 in the classroom and -- and when we looked at that
21 component, and we looked at that most of the
22 communities had lots of day-cares and lots of
23 kindergarten programs and so forth, and we felt that
24 our program at the kindergarten level really
25 couldn't add anything significant; so we felt it was

1 best to just start at the first grade.

2 COMMISSIONER GANT: All right. Sir, it's
3 an unusual -- you have a concept for your school,
4 pullout and all that.

5 MR. CASAVANTES: Yes, sir.

6 COMMISSIONER GANT: Can you inform the
7 Commissioners and the community what specific
8 research did you use -- and your fellow applicant --
9 to come up with the concept that you're using in
10 your school for your application?

11 MR. CASAVANTES: Basically, it came from
12 experience that I had. I -- I -- I worked with
13 Premier High School. And they are the Responsive
14 Education Solutions; they're the largest
15 charter-school system in Texas. And though I
16 think -- and I used some of the aspects from that
17 plan, which -- which they use. And I have
18 supplemented it, added to it; and I think our plan
19 is much superior to what they are offering.

20 But they are using the pullout program for
21 their classrooms. And that's where we got that
22 idea.

23 COMMISSIONER GANT: Madame Chair, I might
24 come back later.

25 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Thank you. Any

1 other Commissioners? Commissioner Bergman?

2 COMMISSIONER BERGMAN: Thank you, Madame
3 Chair. To kind of expand on what Commissioner Gant
4 said on the research and knowing the communities,
5 now, the German Air Force, for instance, here in
6 Alamogordo, has trained out at Holloman for many,
7 many years, and they may even maintain a permanent
8 presence out there. I don't know about that.

9 I learned something else new as I came
10 into town. I passed two school buses that said
11 "Deutsche School, Alamogordo." They apparently have
12 a German school here. That could have been
13 something different when you considered your
14 application, because you have talked repeatedly
15 about a dual-language program. Here in Alamogordo,
16 perhaps German could be something that the local
17 students -- I don't know how much.

18 There's probably not a lot of interaction.
19 But it's just something that suggested itself to me.
20 And I would like to tell the audience that even
21 though the minutes aren't going to be on the Web
22 site, his application is on the Web site right now.
23 Public Education Commission Applications, 2012, all
24 14 of them are there. Actually, if you want to read
25 his application so you know more about what we're

1 talking about, it's there. You can do that as soon
2 as we leave here.

3 Carlsbad, for instance, where we're headed
4 next, revolves around the Caverns and the oilfields.
5 They're heavily in the oilfields.

6 So each of these five cities, it is --
7 they're different needs. As you just saw in Anthony
8 this morning, there are different demographics in
9 each one of these cities, different audiences. So a
10 one-size-fits-all application probably needs a
11 little work, at least.

12 We've asked a lot of questions about a lot
13 of things in here, and I know you've taken great
14 notes. I see your notes there. But it's something
15 that should be considered, that each city in this
16 state -- we all look like we're desert-dwellers here
17 in New Mexico. But every city in this state is a
18 little bit different.

19 That's all I wanted to say, Madame
20 Chairman. Thank you.

21 MR. CASAVANTES: I understand. It's a
22 point well taken. One of the things, too, that --
23 you know, it gets -- the other thing --

24 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: I'm sorry. This is
25 not a discussion.

1 MR. CASAVANTES: Oh, okay. I'm sorry.

2 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Unless you're
3 responding to a question. Did you have a question,
4 sir?

5 COMMISSIONER BERGMAN: I didn't really ask
6 a question.

7 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Are there other
8 questions? Mr. Gant.

9 COMMISSIONER GANT: You made a statement
10 early on in your presentation today that the typical
11 high-school student finds it hard to find a job.
12 Isn't that kind of a generalization of high-school
13 students?

14 MR. CASAVANTES: Yes, sir.

15 COMMISSIONER GANT: So you're putting all
16 high-school students -- well, did you --

17 MR. CASAVANTES: Okay.

18 COMMISSIONER GANT: -- define what you
19 mean by "typical"?

20 MR. CASAVANTES: Well, I think that the
21 unemployment rate is somewhere -- I think 20-percent
22 range or something like that. I mean -- and a lot
23 of students are -- they graduate from high school --
24 are not self-sustaining. They may be able to get a
25 job, but they're not self sustaining. They may have

1 some -- many of them are -- and, you know, when you
2 make a statement, you know, in a limited time frame
3 that you can't go and say, well, every -- break it
4 down into all the different components.

5 But it was a generalization that I feel
6 that students that graduate from high school -- and
7 then I think that the schools need to be looking
8 more at being able to generate a career field that
9 they can enter upon graduation. Some schools do
10 have those sort of components. But I think it's an
11 area that needs to be expanded, because a lot of
12 students are either unable or don't continue into
13 the college area and that they need employment
14 skills.

15 COMMISSIONER GANT: I think I've mentioned
16 this the other day. Deming, or wherever, or -- that
17 when a student comes out of high school, a student's
18 either going to college or higher ed, or to a tech
19 school, or to the workforce. And you just keep
20 leaning towards preparing kids to go to college.
21 That's what I keep hearing when you -- when I talk
22 about your application and you talk about your
23 school.

24 It -- you're leaning yourself towards --
25 you want the kids -- you're interested in starting

1 children that are capable of starting college
2 programs online. So you're leaning the school
3 towards college prep. Is that what it is?

4 MR. CASAVANTES: Let me try to think about
5 that. You know, in a charter school, you have to
6 pick kind of a niche, I believe. I mean -- because,
7 like I said, I couldn't go into -- I couldn't have
8 an auto shop and a -- and a -- you know, all
9 those -- or various other trades, or be, let's say,
10 a trade school. And even if we were to pick a
11 couple of trades, we'd only be able to pick maybe a
12 couple with the resources that are allocated to a
13 charter.

14 We looked at -- at, you know, the
15 continuum, and we thought that these were the two
16 best to pick to help our -- help the students that
17 would attend our school. You know, like I said, we
18 tri- -- you know, it wasn't that we were intending
19 to do college, as such. But when we look at the
20 higher-paying fields, and we're thinking about
21 trying to get someone to be self-sustaining upon
22 graduation, these -- it was a development from
23 looking at the job statistics compared to -- to
24 something else.

25 So it wasn't necessarily we were looking

1 for a college prep. We were looking for a certain
2 niche. And -- and we thought that this was a
3 good -- these two fields was a good area to focus
4 on. It's not -- like I say, you know, as my
5 impression of a charter is, we are -- we're not -- I
6 don't see us as trying to solve everyone's needs or
7 desires. For those that don't want to go this area
8 or whatever, they -- they don't have to attend our
9 school.

10 But we have to have something that enough
11 people would want to attend our school. And so it
12 came to be that that's how we chose our two fields.
13 But it wasn't that we said, "We're going to be a" --
14 I mean, I know schools used to have things like
15 machine shop and auto shop and a lot of those sort
16 of things. And because of student injuries and
17 different things -- I don't know -- they just
18 disappeared. They're not in the schools like they
19 used to be.

20 There's not a job preparation program in a
21 sustainable field where they can make a living and
22 pay their rent and buy their car and take care of
23 themselves upon graduation. It's very difficult for
24 a student that graduates from school to be
25 self-sustaining.

1 COMMISSIONER GANT: Well, I would beg to
2 differ, but that's not for this. Because I think if
3 had you gone around to the five districts you talked
4 about, you would find career pathways in there. And
5 I know many districts have auto mechanics; they have
6 agriculture; they have horticulture; they have all
7 these pathways. And I know of one school where the
8 student steps out and the employer is waiting for
9 him to graduate. It's auto mechanics.

10 All right. My last question, Mr. --
11 Madame Chair. You're planning -- per yesterday and
12 the preceding days, you're planning on trying to
13 open charter schools in Indianapolis and New Mexico,
14 and, as you said yesterday, Texas. I guess the one
15 thing I need to ask, are you and your fellow founder
16 considering to work yourself into being a charter
17 corporate, like K12, Inc., and Connections -- that's
18 listed in Baltimore, and K12, Inc. is in D.C -- and
19 spread yourself out across the United States? Is
20 that where you're going?

21 MR. CASAVANTES: No, I don't see us going
22 that far, no.

23 COMMISSIONER GANT: So how far do you plan
24 to go? We need to know. You say you're coming back
25 next year if this isn't approved this year. So we

1 need to kind of know who we're dealing with if you
2 come back next year.

3 MR. CASAVANTES: Well, I'm very strongly
4 interested in Southern New Mexico. That's the area
5 where I think there's -- there has not been a
6 charter school. And then Western Texas.

7 COMMISSIONER GANT: And Indiana.

8 MR. CASAVANTES: No. We -- we -- we --
9 we -- you know, one of the things is we -- we did
10 apply there. It was a -- you know, an experience
11 and so forth. But I'm not going to ever reapply in
12 Indiana.

13 COMMISSIONER GANT: Thank you, Madame
14 Chair.

15 COMMISSIONER LOPEZ: I do have a question,
16 Madame Chair.

17 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Yes.

18 COMMISSIONER LOPEZ: At the meeting this
19 morning, you described some successes as a teacher.
20 And, you know, you sounded like you're a passionate
21 teacher, clearly. But in this situation, you're
22 ultimately not going to be teaching. And the kinds
23 of students that you propose for these schools, how
24 are you going to pass on those skills to -- to the
25 teachers that are going to be there, you know, those

1 skills for dealing with the hardest kids, the ones
2 that are -- you know, come in with the most
3 challenges?

4 MR. CASAVANTES: We were believing, in the
5 first year, to be in the schools, to model things,
6 to teach and present and show what were the kind of
7 things that I've done. And, I mean, some of the
8 things are not -- that are effective are -- are
9 available, not -- you know, that I've -- just like
10 one of the things is a puzzle called "Simon Says,"
11 that you can find in the grocery stores. I don't
12 know if you're familiar with it. But it starts with
13 a phrase or a word at the top of the page, and then
14 it has a bunch of instructions. And you get to the
15 bottom of the page and it spells something else.

16 Well, if you find -- a lot of students
17 have such -- they do sloppy work. They jump to
18 conclusions. They -- they don't methodically go
19 step by step through something. And that affects
20 their math skills and many other areas, where
21 they -- reading skills, where they're not reading
22 critically enough to get full comprehension.

23 And you give an assignment like that, and
24 to do it successfully, you -- you -- you learn --
25 you learn to read carefully and do quality work.

1 And I've seen huge improvements.

2 I mean, there's lots of little tricks that
3 I've done that is -- teaching the distributive
4 property using some grocery bags and different
5 items. And that, you know, basically the items can
6 all be placed in one bag after -- and then the same
7 number of items are there. But you show the
8 grouping of the distributive property, and they can
9 see it visually, using things like grocery bags and
10 fruit or whatever you choose to pick.

11 There's ways to do a lot of things that
12 communicate to students success that you could show
13 somebody to do and they could carry it further from
14 there.

15 COMMISSIONER LOPEZ: Thank you.

16 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Are there other
17 questions by Commissioners? I will go last. And I
18 will repeat the statement I made at the earlier
19 meeting. As you will recall at the Deming meeting,
20 and somewhat at the next meeting, I asked you
21 extensive questions about your educational plan, the
22 goals. We got into the business plan and the
23 budget.

24 And we both agreed that there were some
25 significant problems, areas that were not

1 sufficiently complete. And so I said this this
2 morning, and I will say it again now. Because of
3 the incompleteness and the insufficiencies I see in
4 your budget and your application, I cannot support
5 your application.

6 MR. CASAVANTES: (Indicates.)

7 VICE CHAIR SHEARMAN: Is there anything
8 else from Commissioners? All right.

9 In closing, any member of the public,
10 including the applicant, may submit written input
11 following this hearing. Written comments can be
12 sent to the Commission via the PED main Web site at
13 www.ped.state.nm.us, through the Calendar listing on
14 the front PED Web page, through the Public Comments
15 section on the front PED Web page, or by using the
16 link, www.ped.state.nm.us/comments. You will be
17 directed to an e-mail format -- format in which to
18 write your comments. Make sure you identify the
19 school you're commenting on in the drop-down menu.

20 Please note that any written input must be
21 received by no later than close of business on the
22 third business day following the hearing on the
23 application you wish to comment on.

24 Thank you for your presentation and your
25 hard work in preparing this application. The

1 Commission will now recess the hearing until
2 8:00 a.m., where it will resume in Carlsbad. Thank
3 you all for attending.

4 (Proceedings in recess at 2:30 p.m.)
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1 REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

2 I, Cynthia C. Chapman, RMR, CCR #219, Certified
3 Court Reporter in the State of New Mexico, do hereby
4 certify that the foregoing pages constitute a true
5 transcript of proceedings had before the said
6 NEW MEXICO PUBLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION, held in the
7 State of New Mexico, County of Otero, in the matter
8 therein stated.

9 In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my
10 hand on September 4, 2012.

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