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BEFORE THE PUBLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION
STATE OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE MATTER OF:
J. PAUL TAYLOR ACADEMY

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS
CHARTER SCHOOL PUBLIC INPUT HEARINGS
August 16, 2010
8:01 a.m.
Hotel Encanto, 705 South Telsor
Las Cruces, New Mexico

REPORTED BY: Sally Peters, RPR, New Mexico CCR 57
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Professional Court Reporting Service
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Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102

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A P P E A R A N C E S

COMMISSIONERS :

- MR. ANDREW GARRISON, Chair
- MR. EUGENE GANT
- MS. CAROLINE SHEARMAN
- MS. KATHRYN KRIVITZKY
- MR. VINCE BERGMAN

STAFF :

- DR. DON DURAN
- MR. SAM OBENSHAIN
- MR. MICHAEL C DE BACA
- MR. RUDOLPH ARNOLD, Attorney for PED
- MS. MARJORIE GILLESPIE

1 CHAIR GARRISON: Call the Public Education
2 hearing to order. Do the roll call.

3 MR. GANT: Commissioner Garrison.

4 CHAIR GARRISON: Here.

5 MR. GANT: Commissioner Pogna, absent.
6 Commissioner Krivitzky.

7 MS. KRIVITZKY: Here.

8 MR. GANT: Lopez is absent. Price absent.
9 Smith will be late. Commissioner Gant is here.

10 Commissioner Bergman.

11 MR. BERGMAN: Here.

12 MR. GANT: Commissioner Shearman.

13 MS. SHEARMAN: Here.

14 MR. GANT: Commissioner Carr will not be
15 here.

16 CHAIR GARRISON: Let's begin by doing the
17 Pledge of Allegiance and the salute to our state
18 flag.

19 (Pledge of Allegiance and Salute to the
20 New Mexico flag.)

21 CHAIR GARRISON: Good morning, everybody.
22 I would like to thank the City of Las Cruces and the
23 Hotel Encanto for being our host this morning for
24 this community input hearing.

25 And good memories from Las Cruces. I did

1 an internship at New Mexico State University in the
2 athletics department back in 1994, and I think it
3 was like 115 degrees that whole summer. And I had a
4 little motorcycle, so it was like 125 coming off the
5 pavement, and let me tell you, I enjoyed the indoors
6 that summer.

7 The purpose of this hearing is to solicit
8 both written and oral input on the proposed charter.
9 In accordance with the Charter Schools Act, the
10 commission shall receive applications for initial
11 chartering and renewals for charter schools that
12 want to be chartered by the state and approve or
13 disapprove those charter applications, 22-8B-16 NMSA
14 1978.

15 In addition, the Charter Schools Act
16 states that, "The chartering authority shall hold at
17 least one public hearing in the school district in
18 which the charter school is proposed to be located
19 to obtain information and community input to assist
20 in its decision whether to grant a charter school
21 application. Community input may include written or
22 oral comments in favor of, or in opposition to, the
23 application from applicant, the local community, and
24 for state-chartered charter schools, the local
25 school board and school district in whose geographic

1 boundaries the charter school is proposed to be
2 located."

3 The applicant at this time will be J. Paul
4 Taylor Academy. At this time we would like to hear
5 from the applicant. If you all would come up to the
6 front table, please. We will just start off, for
7 the record, state the name of the school, the names
8 of the founders of the school, proposed grade levels
9 to be served, and membership projection of the
10 school. And I can repeat that if you need me to.
11 You were still just sitting down.

12 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: I am Cynthia
13 Risner-Schiller and I am one of the founders of J.
14 Paul Taylor Academy.

15 CHAIR GARRISON: Good morning.

16 MS. HOOLEY: I am Anna Hooley, one of the
17 founders and council members of the academy.

18 CHAIR GARRISON: Good morning.

19 We will now request that you state for the
20 record a brief description of the school, the
21 reasons you believe this school will benefit the
22 children and citizens of this community, and any
23 other information you would like the commission to
24 know about your application.

25 You have one minute -- just kidding. We

1 have 15 minutes, so please be as precise as you can.
2 We are traveling a lot. You have 15 minutes, so
3 please be as precise as you can during this time.
4 And Vanna White called in sick, so we have Mike C de
5 Baca, and he has some signs here that he will hold
6 up. Not as esthetically pleasing as Vanna, but he's
7 a good guy.

8 MR. C DE BACA: I give it my best shot.

9 CHAIR GARRISON: You may now begin.

10 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: As I stated, I am
11 Cynthia Risner-Schiller, and I am proud to say I was
12 part of the Las Cruces Public School District for 32
13 years as a teacher, a master teacher, and the
14 director of elementary curriculum. I was also
15 principal of three schools, including Desert Hills
16 which I had the opportunity to open.

17 This background serves me well as one of
18 the founders of the J. Paul Taylor Academy, named
19 after the southern New Mexico educator and
20 legislator known for his steadfast commitment to the
21 community and his lifelong dedication to serving the
22 children of Las Cruces and New Mexico.

23 I would like to thank you, members of the
24 Public Education Commission, for providing me this
25 opportunity to explain why I think the J. Paul

1 Taylor Academy is crucial to providing meaningful
2 choice which includes project based learning and
3 dual language for the families and students of Las
4 Cruces.

5 While originating with the highest
6 intentions of improving education for all children,
7 No Child Left Behind had the undesirable effect of
8 narrowing the curriculum and limiting opportunities
9 for children to pursue their learning interests and
10 act as creative problem solvers. Requirements of
11 Race to the Top funding also have components which
12 appear to narrow the educational focus. These two
13 programs that led administrators and teachers alike
14 to believe that lessons have to become more and more
15 homogenized while students are becoming more and
16 more diverse.

17 The genius of America, according to noted
18 educator Deborah Meier, has rested on its respect
19 for playfulness, imagination, thinking outside the
20 box, practical smarts, the taking apart and putting
21 together of objects, as well as exploring and
22 inventing. Yet, these very elements of education
23 are becoming less and less common. In contrast,
24 however, they will be the backbone of the
25 project-based learning at J. Paul Taylor Academy.

1 The morning instruction will be devoted to
2 learning the necessary skills and concepts of
3 language arts and math, providing sufficient time
4 for students to master the competencies of these
5 areas. After initial assessment, children will be
6 grouped across grade levels to meet their
7 instructional needs. These groupings will be very
8 fluid, and the children will move to different
9 groups as their needs change.

10 Children with special needs will be
11 included in our instructional groups as well.
12 According to Dr. Faye Jones, this model allows not
13 only for academic growth, but also social-emotional
14 growth for all students. She adds that students
15 with special needs in inclusion classrooms learn
16 more, score better on tests, are healthier and
17 happier, and become more productive, successful
18 adults. We will provide teachers with the staff
19 development and support they need to be successful
20 with this model.

21 The project-based learning in the
22 afternoon will allow students to apply and extend
23 their morning learning. At this time, there are no
24 schools offering project-based learning in the local
25 area. Out of necessity, the first project has been

1 planned without student input, but from that point
2 onward, the projects will be designed in response to
3 the questions and interests of the students.
4 Activities such as writing, persuasive letters to
5 congress, or using math skills to determine the
6 feasibility of implementing their plans will
7 reinforce the acquired skills and make learning more
8 meaningful. These projects will serve as the
9 vehicles through which competencies in social
10 studies, science, health, physical education, and
11 the arts are learned. More importantly, they will
12 realize our motto, "Recapturing the joy of
13 learning."

14 As I indicated previously, the first
15 project entitled, "We Have a New School," has been
16 developed. Allow me to briefly illustrate with this
17 topic how a project can span grade levels and
18 curricular areas. Kindergarten students will match
19 the number of students and chairs in their classroom
20 to determine if more chairs are needed, retell the
21 story of their first day of school, and prepare
22 classroom pictures of the state bird, flag, and
23 foods to satisfy math, language arts, and social
24 studies competencies.

25 Skipping up to third grade examples, these

1 students can estimate the number of floor tiles in
2 their room, and use arrays to determine the actual
3 number, write sentences about their new school, and
4 as a group categorize the new sentences as fact or
5 opinion, satisfying math, language arts, and science
6 competencies.

7 The highest level our first year will be
8 the sixth grade. For this same new school project,
9 they can determine how many children are in the
10 school and in various classrooms and determine their
11 related multiples and factors, gather rocks from the
12 playground and determine their characteristics such
13 as hardness, streak, color, cleavage, and resistance
14 to acid, and create brochures with important
15 information regarding their new school, satisfying
16 math, science, and language arts competencies.

17 Students will create reports, graphs,
18 displays, and PowerPoints of their learning to
19 inform parents of their progress. As you can see,
20 the projects emphasize problem solving and group
21 work, two of the major skills future workers will
22 need to be successful, according to Dr. Katz,
23 Harvard's leading labor economist.

24 To ensure that the students of J. Paul
25 Taylor Academy have the opportunity to master all

1 the standards and the benchmarks from all circular
2 areas at their grade level, we have devised forums
3 on which the teacher can record which standards and
4 benchmarks have been addressed and which standards
5 and benchmarks have been mastered by each student.
6 Staff development sessions, prior to the opening of
7 the academy and monthly throughout the school year,
8 will enable teachers to gain the expertise necessary
9 to extend projects so that no standard or benchmark
10 is left behind.

11 In addition to the project-based learning,
12 so critical to student excitement and ownership of
13 their own education, we will also implement a dual
14 language program, beginning in kindergarten the
15 first year and moving up one grade each year, a
16 necessary plan so that children are not dropped into
17 a grade and expected to function in both Spanish and
18 English.

19 Having opened the first school in Las
20 Cruces with a dual language program from the onset,
21 I have had the opportunity to see the wonderful
22 results of the program and the areas where we can
23 improve. Developing both languages in all students
24 takes advantage of early childhood development and
25 children's ability to learn a second language,

1 better prepares them for the global world of their
2 adulthood, and demonstrates the value the J. Paul
3 Taylor Academy places on the two dominant cultures
4 of Mesilla Valley.

5 These two exciting programs, project-based
6 learning and dual language, will be conducted in a
7 smaller learning environment. For our first
8 application cycle, five years, the school will serve
9 no more than 180 students, enabling the students to
10 be educated and appreciated on a more individual
11 basis, where their needs, interests, and preferences
12 can be more personally addressed.

13 To further complement our educational
14 program, we will repeatedly, and from all initial
15 inquiries into our academy, inform all parents that
16 active parental involvement is an expectation of our
17 academy. They will take part in learning during the
18 day by sharing their expertise and their careers,
19 accompanying students on field trips, listening to
20 them read, and performing a myriad of other
21 functions toward enriching the education of their
22 children.

23 Parents will also attend school in the
24 evenings to read the current writings of the
25 children, to learn about the children's latest

1 projects, and to help with the various special
2 activities. It has been my experience that parents
3 respond well to becoming partners in their
4 children's education when they are contacted one by
5 one in very specific and individual ways.

6 The smaller student body will enable staff
7 to contact parents individually and help them
8 realize how vital they are to the school. To ensure
9 that we attract diverse parents and students to our
10 school, we will recruit in fairly traditional ways,
11 using radio and newspaper advertising, as well as
12 less traditional methods, including establishing
13 booths at the farmers' market or the local flea
14 markets.

15 We are delighted with the community
16 interest demonstrated in the academy thus far. The
17 music department of NMSU plans to place future music
18 educators with the J. Paul Taylor Academy. The
19 physical education department plans to do the same
20 with future physical education teachers. These
21 future educators, along with their certified
22 supervisors, will enable the academy to increase the
23 amount of time children participate in these
24 activities, while providing a teaching laboratory
25 for future educators.

1 We recognize that hiring teachers with the
2 proper certifications will be crucial to the success
3 of this small school. The school will open with
4 grades kindergarten through sixth grade and will add
5 seven and eighth grade by its third year. From the
6 very first teacher hired, the head administrator
7 must ensure that TESOL and bilingually certified
8 teachers, as well as teachers certified through the
9 eighth grade and in multiple subject areas are
10 selected.

11 When looking at an educational program or
12 innovation, the question I always ask myself is,
13 would I like my child to have this opportunity? My
14 answer to the J. Paul Taylor Academy is an
15 unqualified yes. With the addition of our academy,
16 local elementary students will have their first
17 opportunity for choice that our area high school and
18 middle school students have had. Additionally,
19 middle school students will now have two charter
20 schools from which to choose a school. Elementary
21 and middle school students, who may not be able to
22 maximize their achievement in other settings, will
23 be able to do so at the J. Paul Taylor Academy and
24 find their educational niche.

25 One size does not fit all in education,

1 and we plan to provide another size for children.
2 This endeavor will take an incredible amount of work
3 and the selection and professional development of a
4 special staff. However, in the words of Lea Iacoca,
5 "We are continually faced by great opportunities
6 brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems." We
7 are most ready to take advantage of these great
8 opportunities.

9 Thank you for your time and attention.

10 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you very much.

11 MS. HOOLEY: My name is Anna Hooley.

12 Again, I am a J. Paul Taylor Academy and council
13 member, but I am also a parent of two children in
14 the Las Cruces public schools right now. For the
15 past four years, I have spent four mornings per week
16 in either of their classrooms, and I would like to
17 share basically the broad purpose of the academy
18 from a parental perspective.

19 I think we can all agree that our
20 education system is not what it once was. It's
21 become highly politicized and continues to
22 deteriorate, with the exception of the very
23 successful charter school movement, where there is
24 more freedom and innovation toward implementing and
25 enhancing the basic curricula.

1 Just as there is no better person to tell
2 me my tonsils have been removed than the surgeon who
3 removed them, I believe there is no better resource
4 for evaluating and improving the educational system
5 than the teacher in the classroom. I'm not an
6 educator, but I have seen firsthand the results of
7 what increasing government and administrators
8 responding to that regulation have done to the
9 classroom. Unfortunately it's dampened the
10 creativity of teachers and greatly reduced their
11 ability to truly engage children in their learning.
12 Teaching to the test is the driving concept in
13 current school classrooms and it's not working.

14 In contrast, though the J. Paul Taylor
15 Academy will still adhere to standardized testing,
16 the learning will be prepared through integrated
17 project-based learning instead of isolated test
18 practice. This contrast was purposeful and based on
19 the combined personal experience of our founders and
20 extensive research on what is working across our
21 country.

22 Secondly, I believe there is a growing
23 disconnect between children and even some adults
24 from their community and their place in the outside
25 world. I believe a dynamic connection to its

1 members is just as vital to the overall health of
2 any community as the productive, engaged citizens
3 within it. With New Mexico being a constitutionally
4 sanctioned bilingual state, and Las Cruces in such
5 close proximity to Mexico, it seems that all our
6 public schools should have a dual language program.

7 The J. Paul Taylor Academy understands
8 what influences a border community and appreciates
9 the historic Mexican-American cultures of our area.
10 With this understanding and with Cynthia's previous
11 experience to guide us, we can ensure that the
12 academy will create a viable equal access
13 opportunity for all ethnic and socioeconomic
14 students in our area.

15 The J. Paul Taylor Academy, in my opinion,
16 can have a positive and profound effect on the
17 education of our children by restoring teachers'
18 accountability to the students and their families,
19 restoring the teachers' influence on the children at
20 critical times of their development, and restoring
21 basically teachers' overall passion for teaching,
22 while at the same time strengthening a child's
23 personal responsibility toward becoming an active
24 participant in his or her learning, perhaps even
25 more importantly helping children to become vital,

1 productive citizens of their community.

2 In conclusion, I know that the concept of
3 the academy as we have designed it will be an
4 exceptional example, not just an example, an
5 exceptional example of what can be done to improve
6 the future of our children, our community, and
7 perhaps our nation.

8 We would like to thank you for listening
9 to us today. We took your criticism of our
10 application last year, and hope that our reapplying
11 this year, incorporating many of your
12 recommendations, will show that we are committed to
13 this school and we are determined to succeed.

14 We also appreciate the opportunity to
15 share our vision and commitment with Las Cruces, so
16 thank you for being here.

17 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you.

18 At this time we would like to hear from
19 the local school board and district representatives.

20 Please state your name and title for the
21 record.

22 MR. SANCHEZ: Good morning, Mr. Chairman.
23 My name is Steven Sanchez. I am the associate
24 superintendent for Learning, Teaching, and Research,
25 Las Cruces Public Schools.

1 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you.

2 MR. SANCHEZ: Chairman Garrison and
3 members of the commission, I would like to take this
4 opportunity to compliment the founders of this
5 charter on the overall quality of the application.
6 In general, we have no negative commentary on the
7 application, and all of my comments are intended to
8 be informative to the charter founders and hopefully
9 to the Public Education Commission who has to make
10 these tough decisions.

11 The instructional program proposed is well
12 developed and based on good research. The overall
13 approach to provide students with an education that
14 is focused on project-based learning emerges from
15 the broad based literature on constructivist
16 methodologies. Currently these methodologies are
17 used in many schools across the country and in the
18 state of New Mexico and are showing good results, as
19 long as the methodology is implemented with a high
20 degree of fidelity.

21 The focus on the development of a
22 bilingual education program is commendable, given
23 the diverse population that we serve in the greater
24 Las Cruces area. The application is attentive to
25 the learning needs of students most importantly,

1 and, of course, the staff. This is commendable.

2 However, given the severe conditions of
3 the public school education budget that we are
4 experiencing in the state, the charter proposes to
5 provide a 197 day contract calendar, and the
6 contract day being eight hours for staff. Given the
7 tight budgets that all of us are facing, we would
8 just advise the Public Education Commission and the
9 PED to take a look at this budget and whether they
10 have planned for an alternative if the SEG is
11 further reduced as it has been over the past couple
12 of years.

13 The application proposes a balanced
14 calendar schedule of 185 instructional days. In
15 addition, the application proposes to include
16 monthly staff development in either half day or full
17 day increments, and this is noted on page 45 of the
18 application. While the application appears to
19 address the 2011, 2012 requirement for a 180 day
20 uninterrupted instruction, and the requirement for
21 length of school day is noted in 22-2-8 NMSA 1978,
22 the PED should examine the calendar to ensure that
23 the instructional day is not reduced by scheduled
24 release time for professional development.

25 It is our understanding that 22-2-8 does

1 not allow a day to count as an instructional day if
2 the day allows for a reduction in required
3 instructional hours. However, if staff is working
4 an eight-hour day, professional development may be
5 intended to be scheduled after students leave for
6 the day, so that point may not be germane. I bring
7 it up, because as I was reading the application,
8 that occurred to me.

9 Las Cruces Public Schools is also pleased
10 to note that the application addresses the use of
11 short cycle assessments that are currently in use in
12 the district. If this charter application is
13 approved and the school opens, this will ensure that
14 student data is consistent as students move from the
15 charter school back to the district or move from the
16 district to the charter school.

17 However, while the measures of academic
18 achievement is referenced in the narrative of the
19 application, it is not addressed in the formative
20 assessment description on page 48 and should
21 probably be included.

22 The district notes the reference to the
23 response to intervention, the RTI process as
24 established by the Public Education Department,
25 their interpretation aligns to the process in place

1 in the district, and this will be useful as students
2 potentially move from one system to the other.

3 The budget narrative notes that there will
4 be \$98,000 -- and this is on page 55 -- available to
5 secure a building for the school. However, the
6 application does not include a market analysis to
7 ensure that this amount will be sufficient to secure
8 a suitable building to house the school. While page
9 97 of the application notes that the school is
10 currently working on securing a private school that
11 will need minor modifications, we caution that they
12 should look very carefully at what the market can
13 provide if this arrangement with the private school,
14 the current private school, does not materialize.

15 The only reason why I bring this up is
16 because one of our charter schools that we work
17 very, very closely with in Las Cruces is having a
18 difficult time finding a suitable building that
19 meets all the required codes. The PED may want to
20 ask for such a market analysis prior to final
21 approval.

22 The salaries schedule on page 90, 91 does
23 not address the schedules for other personnel,
24 including the head administrator, and the
25 application on page 99 notes that if transportation

1 services for students are required, they will
2 coordinate services with the district. While this
3 is certainly a possibility, as we coordinate
4 transportation with one of our other charter
5 schools, the application does not show how
6 modification to a student's schedule might be
7 impacted.

8 In addition, the language of the
9 application should be amended to dictate the charter
10 school may enter into contract negotiations with the
11 district for transportation services. Currently the
12 district is providing services on a contract basis
13 with one of our charter schools. The school had to
14 adjust its hours of operation due to the limited
15 number of buses available and potential problems
16 with getting students to school at the appointed
17 time based on routes and schedules.

18 The district is concerned about the hot
19 lunch program, noted in the chapter, and this is the
20 one thing we are concerned about. If the school
21 facility does not have a cafeteria or other space
22 where students can be provided a good lunch, this
23 section of the application should be carefully
24 reviewed, as the provisions for breakfast and lunch
25 is a critical component of a child's day. These are

1 noted on page 99. In many instances, school
2 breakfast and lunch are the only healthy meal of the
3 day for many of our children. We would recommend an
4 amendment to include language of how breakfast and
5 lunch services will be provided to all students.
6 This will certainly place an additional requirement
7 to ensure the facility selected allows for the
8 provision of food services, and that could be in the
9 classrooms as well.

10 Thank you for the opportunity to comment
11 on this application. Since today is the first day
12 of school in our district, I am respectfully
13 requesting that I be allowed to leave the hearing so
14 I can start my visits of schools in the district.

15 CHAIR GARRISON: We are known for our
16 impeccable scheduling capabilities. The first day
17 of school, excellent.

18 Thank you, Mr. Sanchez.

19 MR. SANCHEZ: I hope my comments were
20 helpful.

21 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you, they were.

22 We are up to the community input section.
23 Public comments and observations regarding the
24 application will be heard at this time. There will
25 be a four minute time limit per presenter or people

1 from the same group and having similar viewpoints.

2 I'm sorry. This is not typed correctly.

3 There will be a four minute time limit per
4 presenter. Persons from the same group and having
5 similar viewpoints are asked to select a
6 spokesperson to speak on their behalf. Multiple and
7 repetitious presentations of the same view will be
8 discouraged.

9 Any community members for input? Okay.
10 We had, right here, just you stood up, so come on
11 forward. Then we had the lady in the green and the
12 gentleman in the pink next and then right here and
13 here.

14 Please state your full name for our record
15 keeper.

16 MS. HAPPE: Shar Happe, S-H-A-R H-A-P-P-E.

17 CHAIR GARRISON: Good morning.

18 MS. HAPPE: I will be reading a letter
19 from J. Paul Taylor himself.

20 "Dear Mr. Garrison and Members of the
21 Public Education Commission:

22 "This letter is written to seek approval
23 of an elementary charter school for which a proposal
24 has been written by Cynthia Risner-Schiller and
25 Beatrice Jenkins. Both of these individuals have

1 worked diligently to present a proposal which
2 represents the best effort for the inclusion of
3 children of diverse backgrounds and abilities by
4 using the best practices and innovative processes
5 resulting in the best learning environment for
6 children.

7 "I have known Cynthia Schiller since she
8 was a first grade student when I was the principal
9 of Alameda Elementary School in Las Cruces. I
10 watched her progress through high school and New
11 Mexico State University. She was and is an
12 outstanding teacher. An example of her involvement
13 with other teachers was a carefully planned field
14 trip to Mesilla, which she then had to replan to
15 include other first grade teachers from Loma Heights
16 School. This is one of the most instructionally
17 based field trips of which I was ever involved.
18 This gives you an idea of the soundness and success
19 of her planning.

20 "Cynthia was assigned a principalship in
21 Desert Hills, a new school which she opened. There
22 she worked with a very demanding parent group where
23 she was most successful. Cynthia then became
24 elementary coordinator for the Las Cruces Public
25 Schools. She then transferred to Hermosa Heights

1 School, a low income school, from which she recently
2 retired and had a successful improvement in test
3 scores.

4 "Beatrice Jenkins has had an optimal
5 teaching career. She and Cynthia Schiller have
6 worked as a team to develop an excellent charter
7 school proposal.

8 "As a former public school teacher and
9 administrator, I am an ardent backer of public
10 school education. However, charter schools now have
11 their place as an alternative when the leadership
12 for them and mission for the school is well
13 developed and properly administered. This was the
14 object of the legislature when I was a member and
15 voted for the provisions of the initial five charter
16 schools.

17 "Both Cynthia and Beatrice have the
18 ability to create an environment which is right for
19 children, and for this reason I am recommending to
20 the Public Education Commission that their idea be
21 allowed to be placed into practice in a new charter
22 school bearing my name.

23 "Sincerely, J. Paul Taylor.

24 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you very much.

25 Good morning.

1 DR. LEVINE: Good morning, Mr. Chairman
2 and members of the Public Education Commission, my
3 name is Dr. Elaine Levine. I am a college professor
4 in the department of counseling and educational
5 psychology, New Mexico State University, and a
6 psychologist in private practice specializing in
7 child and family therapy for many, many years in Las
8 Cruces.

9 I come forward in strong support of this
10 charter school. I know I don't need to tell the
11 members of this committee, who are experts, that
12 children have different learning styles. And over
13 the years, as I was responsible for placing
14 counselors in the schools and as a psychologist in
15 private practice, I have seen so many children who
16 just didn't fit into the mainstream education. They
17 weren't really emotionally disturbed. They were
18 just different.

19 But over time, because there was no place
20 for them to go to get the education they needed,
21 they developed some significant problems. And some
22 of them dropped out, some of them ended up in the
23 juvenile probation, juvenile system with drug
24 problems, and over the years, I have looked for ways
25 to help these children who just needed a different

1 way of learning.

2 I think this charter school, based upon
3 experiential kind of learning approaches, will meet
4 that need. We have no other way to meet that need
5 in this community, and we have desperately needed it
6 for a very, very long time.

7 I would like to also say that over my
8 years of work, I have had the honor of working with
9 Cynthia Risner-Schiller for a number of individual
10 children. She has already put into practice what
11 she has talked about today. And this charter school
12 will give an opportunity for one of our most
13 talented educators in the state to bring together
14 her very creative way of assisting children, and I
15 am quite certain that if you support it, it will be
16 a model for other charter schools in the state.

17 Thank you very much.

18 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you.

19 Good morning, sir.

20 DR. BROWN: Good morning. I appreciate
21 the opportunity to speak with you. My name is
22 Dr. Douglas Brown. I am a retired scientist and
23 manager with the Department of Defense. I have been
24 involved with public education issues, in Las Cruces
25 in particular, since the early nineties with the

1 SIAD program, that originally came out of the
2 Department of Energy, Sandia labs, was propagated
3 here, and I have been involved with that program on
4 an almost unbroken basis for over 20 years. I am
5 currently the president of the board of the
6 organization that manages that program, and the goal
7 of that was to put scientists in the classroom to
8 assist with science and math education in the public
9 schools.

10 I am also a member of the Las Cruces
11 Public School Foundation, where we work to provide
12 supplemental resources to the schools in this
13 district, my focus being on the scientific aspects
14 of education. I was also a member during the last
15 year of the PED's Math Science Advisory Council and
16 met periodically during the year to create issues
17 and responses for the PED in association with the
18 math science program. So I have a long background
19 in supporting math science education in the local
20 community.

21 One of the reasons that I am here this
22 morning to speak with you is because, in response to
23 what I believe was an inevitable result of the No
24 Child Left Behind legislation, which I, at the time
25 it passed, thought was a real mistake, at least in

1 the way it was implemented. And what we have seen
2 is the fact that testing requirements have created
3 an environment in the schools where sciences and
4 subjects that are not an explicit part of the test
5 have basically been dropped, particularly from the
6 elementary school curriculum. We have seen that
7 through our program with the science advisors, fewer
8 and fewer classrooms either teaching or even making
9 use of supplemental materials for science in the
10 classroom.

11 I think this is a real mistake.
12 Scientists are generated in elementary school, not
13 in middle and high schools. You get the spark of
14 being a scientist when you are exposed to scientific
15 methodology and principles when you are in
16 elementary school. You have lost many of the
17 opportunities you have had if you don't take that
18 opportunity.

19 And I think, while the public schools in
20 Las Cruces are working on the issue, I think it's
21 very important to provide alternative methodologies
22 that, at the very beginning, recognize the
23 importance of this broad based educational
24 environment, including science, as an intrinsic
25 part. And there is no reason why you can't teach

1 literacy as a scientific area using science, not
2 just using literature for literacy. Literacy
3 crosses all boundaries, and unfortunately that's not
4 taken advantage of in the normal schools.

5 I also think that the focus of this school
6 on socioeconomic issues is also commendable, because
7 my wife was a teacher and educational assistant in
8 the Las Cruces Public Schools for many years. Her
9 greatest accomplishments were achieved in multi-age
10 classrooms, where the ability to move students
11 between groups, ordinarily separated by the
12 boundaries of classrooms and class designations --
13 first, second, third -- broke down. These students
14 are allowed to progress very rapidly in areas they
15 can and without stigma get the additional support in
16 areas that they need it.

17 And I think the school is based on that
18 model, or at least an implication of that model,
19 which I think is a very valid one and a very
20 important one for achieving this. In consequence to
21 that, I think it's very important that this kind of
22 opportunity be made available, and at least the
23 experience tested, and if as successful as I believe
24 they will be, given the opportunity to propagate
25 them into other classrooms and other schools in the

1 Las Cruces district.

2 Thank you very much.

3 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you.

4 Good morning.

5 MS. LEWIS: Good morning. Mr. Chair,
6 Commissioners, PED staff, my name is Irene Oliver
7 Lewis. I am a founder of a charter school here in
8 Las Cruces, and currently their artistic producer of
9 Unlimited Art in a Charter High School, the first
10 charter high school in Las Cruces and a former board
11 member of the New Mexico Coalition for Charter
12 Schools. So I am here representing the charter
13 school movement.

14 I am aware, when we were in a charter
15 school coalition, we were looking at quality charter
16 schools. And granting charter schools, we knew
17 there were many issues to look at in what made a
18 quality charter school.

19 I was at the hearing last year for this
20 particular charter school when they called it Organ
21 Mountain. It is now the J. Paul Taylor Academy. I,
22 at that particular time, thought that they needed
23 some more work on the school. I was very pleased to
24 know that they took steps backward to go forward,
25 and that's what they have done in their current

1 application to you.

2 I have read their application in depth,
3 and believe that if we are talking about quality
4 charter schools, this is, indeed, the example of
5 what can be a quality charter school. I also, from
6 the movement standpoint, believe that this would be
7 an excellent addition to the charter school movement
8 in Las Cruces, because it would be the first
9 elementary charter school in our district and in our
10 community here in Doña Ana County.

11 You have seen and you have heard the
12 excellence of the people. I looked very carefully
13 who was their governance council, because we know
14 that governance councils are primarily important in
15 the governing of the policy and the making of what
16 goes into a charter school. I saw the diversity of
17 who is making up the governance council, and who are
18 the founders in the wisdom and the knowledge that
19 Cynthia Risner brings to this school as one of the
20 founders of this school. So everything is in place.

21 I am a theater artist by profession, and
22 it just so happens that on my way here, I happened
23 to pass the building that they are looking at as the
24 site of their charter school. It indeed was an
25 elementary private school. It has the facilities,

1 with probably some minor renovations, that it can go
2 into. But what was very interesting is that here
3 was the site of the future charter school and here
4 was Valley View Elementary, with a bus that was
5 coming into the main street. And I said, how
6 wonderful to be going to speak for a charter school
7 representing the diversity that our educational
8 system represents by the very nature of who you are
9 as a public commission, a public education
10 commission.

11 I encourage you. I support this and
12 encourage you to also support this, because it will
13 be adding to the choice of parents and community to
14 have an excellent elementary charter school in our
15 system in Las Cruces.

16 Thank you very much for the hard work that
17 you do for all of us in our state.

18 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you very much.

19 We had this gentleman, and then I lost
20 track, so maybe raise your hands again, whoever --
21 okay.

22 DR. BORCHERT: Good morning.

23 CHAIR GARRISON: Good morning.

24 DR. BORCHERT: My name is Dr. Laroy
25 Borchert, and I am representing the music department

1 from New Mexico State University. L-A-R-O-Y
2 B-O-R-C-H-E-R-T.

3 I am involved also with teaching at
4 Cottonwood Prep, so I have had some experience with
5 that. I have had two children who have graduated
6 from the Las Cruces Public Schools, and three more
7 enrolled right now, two in a dual language program,
8 so I am well acquainted with the problems and the
9 really good things that are happening in our public
10 schools here in Las Cruces.

11 As representing the music department, we
12 were really thrilled to be able to support this. I
13 think it's a great opportunity for the department.
14 Often the arts get short shrift, and I can almost
15 take what Dr. Brown said about science, and
16 substitute in humanities for those comments. They
17 often get short shrift in elementary in particular.

18 I mean, you can read all you want about
19 Shakespeare, but actually being able to put it on,
20 or read about painting, and without being able to
21 create it yourself -- to be able to create it
22 yourself is a really great advantage. And we think
23 this is a good opportunity for the music department
24 to be involved with this charter school and placing
25 our students to get the experience so that when they

1 go out to teach, they will be much better prepared
2 for that. Thank you.

3 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you.

4 DR. BORCHERT: Any questions?

5 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you.

6 Let's go right here. Good morning.

7 DR. GRAYSHIELD: Good morning. I am
8 Dr. Lisa Grayshield. I'm a professor at New Mexico
9 State University in the department of counseling and
10 educational psychology. I came here about four
11 years ago, particularly interested in the diversity
12 of this area. So I was excited about my placement,
13 and immediately I was connected up with Cynthia and
14 her staff at Hermosa Heights Elementary School where
15 I brought counseling students in to do work within
16 the school.

17 There are two reasons that I really
18 support this charter school. One is alternative
19 options. For parents, I think it's absolutely
20 critically important. Also Cynthia's dedication to
21 the environment of the children has impressed me to
22 the point that I have been able to do a couple of
23 publications, looking at children and their ability
24 to perceive their environment that they are in and
25 assist them with ownership in that environment. So

1 I have had numerous conversations over the last four
2 years with Cynthia regarding children and classroom
3 behavior, children's classroom behavior and their
4 needs culturally, as well as socially and
5 emotionally.

6 So I am here really in support of this
7 vision and what Cynthia is doing, and look forward
8 to partnering and continuing to partner with Cynthia
9 and bringing counseling students in to assist with
10 working with the children. So I am offering my
11 support here and encouragement in allowing this to
12 take place. So thank you very much.

13 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you.

14 Start from that side and go that way.

15 MS. AGUIRRE: My name is Isabel Aguirre,
16 and I am here with Mr. Johnny Flores, and we are
17 very happy to hear about this charter school and
18 very excited about all the options it offers.

19 We are not -- I'm not a speaker, but we
20 have been with a lot of schools here in the district
21 of Las Cruces, and we have been with small children
22 in the daycares to grade school. We are volunteers
23 for the music. We teach with the dual language,
24 bilingual songs, and I think our children in Las
25 Cruces will benefit from this charter school, and I

1 encourage that as a citizen. Because as I tell you,
2 I am not a speaker. I'm not a doctor. I'm not, but
3 I have worked a lot of years with children in
4 different schools here in Las Cruces, and I wish to
5 continue doing it whenever we are needed.

6 We are very happy to volunteer for
7 wherever children are involved. They love us and we
8 love them. And we are very happy to have you here
9 and to, you know, well, consider the schools and the
10 dual language too, because we are so close to the
11 border. And this has been, the language has been
12 going on for so long. I remember my school years,
13 and it was almost the same thing: Talk English,
14 learn English, and all that. So much so that I
15 forgot a little of my Spanish.

16 But I communicate in Spanish, and
17 everything I do legally, in paperwork and
18 everything, it's better for me if you give it to me
19 in English. So I just wish to congratulate all of
20 you, and hope you do pass this charter school to
21 show Mr. Paul Taylor all he stands for, he has won.

22 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you.

23 MS. AGUIRRE: Thank you.

24 MS. LUCERO: Good morning. My name is
25 Vicki Lucero. And I am actually a mortgage broker,

1 but I am here as a parent and an advocate for the J.
2 Paul Taylor school. So, Chairman and Commissioners,
3 I am a mother of four, mother of one and stepmother
4 to three, and all very different from one another.
5 I completely understand the need for our parents and
6 our families, and our children to have an
7 opportunity for a different type of education.

8 As Dr. Levine stated, there isn't one
9 avenue for every child. They each need their own
10 avenue. I had the opportunity to live in Dallas for
11 a while, and my eldest son went to school there.
12 When he came back to Las Cruces -- in Dallas, the
13 community we lived in had very, very small schools,
14 extremely small classrooms, and it resembled a
15 charter school. It was just the way of that
16 particular community.

17 But when we came back, my son said, after
18 the first week of school, "Mom, what's wrong with
19 our school? Nobody wants to learn. The teachers
20 don't pay attention to us." And that just told me
21 that my son was one who needed a smaller
22 environment, something that had a little bit more
23 focus. And I think that the J. Paul Taylor school
24 really recognizes the needs of our border
25 Mexican-American culture.

1 Las Cruces is one of the lowest HUD median
2 incomes in New Mexico, and extremely low for other
3 competing metropolitan areas. That is just another
4 reason that we need a place for our students, for
5 our families who can't afford the luxury of a
6 private school, to be able to go in there and have
7 focus on these specialized areas.

8 I don't know Mr. Brown, I believe his name
9 was, but my children have always been very musically
10 inclined, and I felt that that was one of the
11 strongest things, because I think that music was one
12 thing that kept my eldest son so focused and
13 grounded in school was having that extra focus on
14 music and literature. And just if I would have had
15 this opportunity when my -- I have three out of
16 school now. If I would have had the opportunity to
17 send them to a charter school, like John Paul
18 Taylor, I would have taken the opportunity in a
19 heartbeat, and I am one of the mothers that wouldn't
20 have been able to afford a private school, but would
21 have wished to, because I do feel that, that they
22 needed that.

23 I was a very involved mother, but I
24 understand in our culture here that we do have a lot
25 of children whose parents can't be there all the

1 time, but we need these specialized schools. I am a
2 very strong advocate for this, and I hope that you
3 all give it the utmost consideration, and we
4 appreciate your thoughts on all of that. Thank you.

5 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you.

6 Is there any other -- oh, there you go.
7 Like you are walking the gauntlet all of a sudden.

8 MS. CREASON: I took the long, scenic
9 route.

10 Good morning. Thank you for hearing me
11 this morning. My name is Monica Creason,
12 C-R-E-A-S-O-N.

13 I am actually a supporter of charter
14 schools, a strong supporter. The founding members
15 are all friends and relatives of myself. Bea
16 Jenkins is my mother.

17 I'm not speaking as an educator, but I was
18 raised by educators. Both my parents are teachers.
19 And my mother was voted teacher of the year in the
20 Las Cruces school district, and the reason I am
21 pointing this out is that I was given the
22 opportunity to write the article for the paper about
23 her educational experience. And when she took her
24 first teaching job, she was 18 years old, and she
25 was teaching at a Catholic elementary school and had

1 44 students. And in that year, she said that was
2 the year that she loved being a teacher and knew
3 that's what she would be for the remainder of her
4 life.

5 I don't know how many of the public school
6 teachers today could take on 44 students, at 18
7 years old, and decide that that was the career that
8 they were going to choose for the remainder of their
9 life. And to tell you the profound effect that she
10 had on those students, there was an oriental child
11 in her school in a community where there were no
12 oriental children, and to this day, 37 years later,
13 that student has contacted her from across the
14 country and written her a letter on how profound an
15 effect she had on her life and how she saved a
16 little girl that was lost in a community, and she
17 has thanked her, and they have become friends after
18 37 years of one year of education. And that's how
19 big of an effect that she had on that child.

20 And I know that my mother, as an educator,
21 she gets invited to weddings for students that she
22 had 20 years ago. She gets baby invitations. In
23 all of my years of education, of course, my mother
24 was my kindergarten teacher, and it was my most
25 wonderful year. But there are teachers that I do

1 stay in contact with that have made a profound
2 effect on my life, that believed in me, that made my
3 education fun. I had a history teacher that made
4 history phenomenal, and it wasn't until I got into
5 college and had a professor that made it miserable
6 that I actually decided that I wasn't going to be a
7 historian. But I love history and I love math.

8 And when you get teachers that make
9 education fun and make learning so interesting, you
10 learn that you are possibly going to be something
11 for the rest of your life that you didn't know you
12 had in you. When children go to school and they do
13 not enjoy their education, school becomes tedious
14 and boring and becomes uninteresting, and they
15 tolerate their school day, they tolerate their
16 teachers, and teachers tolerate them.

17 That is not the type of learning that I
18 got as a child. I was engaged. I grew up in a
19 small city where the classroom sizes were smaller,
20 and I loved learning. And it passed on with me
21 through college, and I loved learning in college.

22 And so these are not just educators.
23 These are not people that just want a feather in
24 their cap to start a charter school. These women
25 have been speaking education long before this

1 charter school was thought about. We sit around --
2 two of my sisters are teachers. We sit around and
3 talk about the needs of children. We watch little
4 kids grow up, and go, oh, that speech is not really
5 where it needs to be. Are they getting this? Are
6 they getting that? People that love education, that
7 love teaching, that think about children's needs
8 every day of the week, these are the people that
9 should be educating our children. People that love
10 children and think education like a writer thinks
11 writing, every day, all the time, in the middle of
12 the night, the crack of dawn, these are the people
13 that are starting this charter school.

14 And I want it approved, because I have a
15 child, and I want him to learn and I want him to
16 love learning the way I did. And thank you very
17 much for your consideration.

18 (The timer rang.)

19 CHAIR GARRISON: Good timing.

20 MS. CREASON: I always push it.

21 CHAIR GARRISON: Is there anyone else that
22 would like to provide community input? Come on up.

23 Good morning.

24 MS. STEVENSON: My name is Mireya
25 Stevenson, and I am here to speak in favor of the J.

1 Paul Taylor Academy, primarily as a teacher and as a
2 parent mostly. The focus of the J. Paul Taylor
3 Academy is dual language, and I have a very personal
4 connection with dual language, because I grew up --
5 my first language was Spanish, and I was completely
6 immersed in the school system without many choices
7 at all. So now that the school system has changed
8 enough, I have really been wanting to be part of an
9 education that is better for all our multi-cultural
10 society.

11 Right now our nation is called the melting
12 pot, so we should be willing to embrace various
13 ethnical backgrounds, languages, and just really
14 encourage a multi-lingual community. Especially
15 here where the second most common spoken language is
16 Spanish, I think essential for us to really
17 encourage that in our school systems for the next
18 generation, to be completely integrated into our
19 community in every sense. And the best way to
20 control language barriers is by really making an
21 effort to make constructive gains in communication.

22 The dual language program is a brilliant
23 idea, and my daughter, who is starting fourth grade
24 now, unfortunately also missed the dual language
25 program because it was offered one year too late.

1 But we worked with Cynthia Risner at Hermosa. She
2 was her principal from K through third, and
3 absolutely loved her. We loved the way she worked
4 with all the children. She knew every name, she
5 knew them personally, and that is a devotion that I
6 haven't seen through my education or through any
7 elementary school that I have worked at, and it
8 takes just an extra step of devotion to the
9 children.

10 And when she left, we were all really sad,
11 and she felt so strongly about it, that she told me,
12 she asked me to move her to a different school so
13 she could start fresh. And so I have been really
14 looking forward to being part of this movement to a
15 school that encourages a dual language program
16 regardless of ethnicity, because I think it's so
17 important for every community member to be
18 knowledgeable of the languages that are most
19 commonly spoken in our community. So thank you for
20 listening.

21 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you very much.

22 At this time the Public Education
23 Commission reserves time to address any questions
24 that the commissioners may have of the applicant, so
25 I would like the applicant to step up again to the

1 microphone -- oh, I'm sorry -- to the table. There
2 is usually a microphone in front of me somewhere, so
3 the stage.

4 I will ask to keep responses as brief as
5 possible to allow for questioning from all the
6 commission members if they have any. Are there any
7 questions from any of the commissioners?

8 Commissioner Bergman.

9 MR. BERGMAN: Thank you. I have read your
10 application and read the preliminary analysis on
11 that application, and I notice you discuss your
12 desires or dreams, however you want to put it, for
13 community involvement. Given that, and my pet peeve
14 is there is a lack of parental interest in education
15 in this country, which that, of course, leads to a
16 lack of parental involvement, do you have any
17 specific ideas of how you are going to somehow
18 overcome that and get the parents of your students
19 involved in this nighttime program you have talked
20 about?

21 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: I have been
22 fortunate enough in my educational career to have
23 incredible parental involvement, and the way that I
24 find you do it is first of all, the staff and you
25 have to believe in it 100 percent. It can't just be

1 lip service. It can't be we want you when we want
2 you. Parents have to be part of the school, and the
3 most success I have had is that one-on-one contact,
4 and encouraging parents to have one-on-one contact.
5 And it's not because of me. It's because when
6 everybody gets excited and behind it and parents see
7 what part they can be, it is truly inspirational.

8 Just one little example from my latest
9 school, we would have five or six parents at parent
10 meetings, and the last parent meeting we had just
11 for kinder and first grade parents, we didn't have
12 enough room. People were standing. It just takes
13 that patience and that development and that belief
14 that they are the part of the community and they are
15 the experts.

16 MR. BERGMAN: Thank you.

17 MS. HOOLEY: And I would just like to add
18 to that, as we stated before, it's going to be part
19 of everything we do from our first contact with each
20 and every applicant or each and every inquiry that
21 comes to the school, that expectation of the
22 parental involvement will be very well delineated
23 and spoken to at every chance we get. So there is
24 not going to be an opportunity for somebody to come
25 into the school saying I didn't know. They are

1 going to be fully aware of the school's expectation
2 of each parent and family that comes to our school.

3 MR. BERGMAN: Do you have plans for
4 tutoring for those that perhaps are not keeping
5 pace?

6 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: That would be part
7 of the after-school program. We also, of course,
8 will have built-in remediation during the day, but
9 the after-school program will encompass tutoring for
10 additional.

11 MR. BERGMAN: Thank you.

12 CHAIR GARRISON: Are there any other
13 questions from commissioners? I just have one. Oh,
14 I'm sorry. Did you have one? Did you raise your
15 hand?

16 MS. SHEARMAN: Yes, sir, but I will be
17 glad to go after.

18 CHAIR GARRISON: You first.

19 MS. SHEARMAN: Good morning. I noted in
20 your application you are planning or suggesting that
21 you will need \$98,000 a year for lease of the
22 property, and I noted also that you are assuming the
23 \$700 per student will pay for that. Is that
24 guaranteed? If you apply for it, do you get it?

25 DR. DURAN: Yes. At present, if a school

1 applies for it, and the PSFA looks at the facility,
2 they only pay for classroom space, not for
3 administration space. So they will look at the
4 space, determine the number of students that they
5 need -- they have a very complicated formula -- but
6 under current funding, yes, they are guaranteed
7 that.

8 MS. SHEARMAN: But just for classroom
9 space?

10 DR. DURAN: Just for classroom space.

11 MS. SHEARMAN: So your funding through
12 that source would not be totally sufficient for the
13 property. So you have a balanced budget, so there
14 is no money left over. So if you have to come up
15 with say some operational funds to pay the balance
16 of the lease, where will it come from?

17 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: Well, fortunately,
18 as I'm sure you have taken wind of, Bea is very
19 persuasive and she has been working very closely
20 with the Catholic Church. Our local Catholic
21 schools consolidated into one elementary school,
22 leaving another elementary school empty, and the
23 figure that we would have from the 700 per child
24 would meet the needs.

25 If due to this formula we came into

1 trouble with some of it being administrative space,
2 there are certainly areas in the budget that we
3 could remove this from. For example, just the first
4 thing that comes to my mind without consulting the
5 budget again. The first year we have approximately
6 \$50,000 in audio-visual materials, and some of that
7 could be taken to rent the space. Now, how would we
8 make up for that, that would have to be in our
9 planning year budget, and our planning year budget
10 would have to increase its audio-visual requests.

11 MS. JENKINS: One other thing, if we get
12 this one school, it would not be true if we have to
13 go to another building, but if we get this one
14 school, I have spoken to them about our money
15 crunch, and they have agreed to sit at the table
16 with us and work it out. But that would not be true
17 in the instance that we would have to go get another
18 building. It would only be for this one building.

19 MS. SHEARMAN: I also noted that you are
20 not planning to hire a business manager. You have
21 \$25,000 in your budget for -- I never can say the
22 words right -- financial auditing, financial
23 bookkeeping -- whatever the last word is -- of
24 25,000. Now is that that you are assuming a
25 contract there for the financial services?

1 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: Yes, ma'am. That
2 would be contracted services. As you can see from
3 the budget, we are making every attempt to keep
4 administrative costs low. We want everything to go
5 into teachers and materials for the children, and we
6 do have a local accountant who has acknowledged that
7 that would be a reasonable amount for the contract,
8 and there are accountants in town who have indicated
9 they would be willing to go to a specialized
10 training for school finances to serve that function.

11 MS. SHEARMAN: I also notice on page 77 of
12 your application there is a job description for a
13 chief financial officer, but I didn't find that.

14 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: You know, I have to
15 say that was an error, and it's my error. I can
16 take full responsibility. Actually as a contracted
17 person, that would not be necessary, but I put the
18 expectations for the chief financial officer in the
19 job descriptions.

20 MS. SHEARMAN: And my last question has to
21 do with student performance expectations, and it was
22 stated very well, I thought, in the preliminary
23 review or the preliminary analysis, so I would refer
24 you to that if you, by chance, have a copy of that
25 in front of you. If you would respond to those

1 concerns, they are listed on page seven, actually
2 six and seven.

3 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: Yes, ma'am. In
4 preparation for today, we did take the opportunity
5 to respond to these questions, because we felt we
6 wanted to make sure we were grounded. With due
7 respect, we believe somehow it was missed in our
8 application that there is no way that we are going
9 to wiggle out of the state expectations. We are
10 familiar with the state law, that our learning has
11 to be based on the standards and benchmarks.

12 On page 40 of the application, there is an
13 example of how we coded all the standards and
14 benchmarks for the children. And if you look at the
15 activity we provided in the first project from 28 to
16 38 on those pages, they are all coded according to
17 subject areas and grade level.

18 Additionally on page 41, we provided a
19 method, a form that teachers could use to make sure
20 they were addressing all of the competencies, but we
21 all know addressing is not enough. So the flip side
22 is that there is also an independent form for each
23 student to record when that student has mastered a
24 benchmark and the evidence and the date, so that we
25 have all the documentation we need. So the

1 standards and benchmarks are going to be carefully,
2 carefully addressed. They will also be reporting to
3 the parents the student's progress.

4 Then as indicated earlier when Dr. Sanchez
5 was speaking, we do plan to participate in the MAPs
6 testing, as well as DIBELS, so that we get little
7 looks, little glimpses along the year of how the
8 children are progressing, and then, of course, the
9 state mandated testing in the spring will give us
10 some direction as well.

11 MS. SHEARMAN: If I could direct your
12 attention to the stated goals and the questions
13 about those goals, the reason I ask, I am fairly new
14 to the commission, but I have been through one cycle
15 of renewals. And when you go through a renewal
16 cycle, you are actually looking at those goals to
17 see if they have been met. And when there is a lack
18 of specificity on dates and specific measures, are
19 they ambitious, and all those kinds of things, those
20 are the questions that I am really targeting from
21 the preliminary analysis.

22 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: I'm sorry. I
23 misunderstood. That again was one of those
24 misunderstandings because you know your application
25 better than anyone else, so in our responses we did

1 fill out more fully what we meant. It was not as
2 implicit as we had thought. And so I could read
3 that to you or when you all read our response, it
4 will be in there.

5 One thing I definitely want to bring up,
6 though, and I have to assume that it was the way we
7 had written it, there was a misunderstanding that we
8 only expected 25 percent of our students learning to
9 speak Spanish would make progress, and that is
10 clearly not the case. We are gearing for 25 percent
11 of the students to be completely proficient, but we
12 have project goals for all the other children.
13 Everybody is going to progress, but we did not
14 assume that every child would be proficient in
15 Spanish by the end. Would you like us to read that
16 response?

17 MS. SHEARMAN: No, that's fine. Just one
18 more question. On the letters from the two
19 departments at New Mexico State, the people who
20 signed those letters, is their signature binding on
21 New Mexico State for the agreement to provide
22 student -- for want of a better term, not student
23 teachers -- but student participants; is that a
24 binding agreement with New Mexico State?

25 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: Yes.

1 DR. BORCHERT: I can speak to that. I'm
2 sorry. Any kind of contractual stuff has to go
3 through the provost office, and so technically, no,
4 it's not a binding commitment. But I can tell you
5 that, on behalf of Ken Van Winkle, who is the
6 department head, he is very much interested in both
7 the opportunity and the concept.

8 CHAIR GARRISON: Sally, would you like him
9 to restate his name?

10 THE REPORTER: No, but the name that he
11 mentioned.

12 DR. BORCHERT: Oh, Dr. Van Winkle. He is
13 the department head. Van Winkle, W-I-N-K-L-E. He
14 blew out his knee and had to have surgery, so he is
15 not mobile right now. I am speaking, but his
16 signature is on that document.

17 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you.

18 Any other questions?

19 MS. SHEARMAN: No, sir. Thank you.

20 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: Thank you.

21 CHAIR GARRISON: I just have one, and it's
22 a reference to the letter of intent. This bullet
23 states, "Meals will be designed to meet current
24 nutritional guidelines and provide opportunities for
25 the development of healthy eating habits. Health

1 and wellness will be a priority." Would you expand
2 on that, please.

3 MS. JENKINS: We are very concerned about
4 the health of children, and so we want to try and
5 develop healthy eating habits and healthy lifestyles
6 in the children and hopefully carry it over into the
7 homes. Because if you look nationwide, it's a
8 major, major problem, and we feel that an elementary
9 school is a very good place to build healthy eating
10 habits and healthy lifestyles.

11 That is one of the reasons we teamed up
12 with New Mexico State for the PE, because they are
13 offering us so, so much more. They are offering us
14 music and dance and all kinds of things that, just
15 with our half time teacher, our half time teacher
16 can oversee these students, but these students can
17 do many more things than we could otherwise have.
18 And the meals, we want children to learn to eat
19 properly.

20 MS. HOOLEY: Are you asking how we are
21 going to provide the meal itself, or what is our
22 philosophy around feeding the children?

23 CHAIR GARRISON: Without me going into
24 specific details on what my perception of it is,
25 health and wellness and physical education and

1 community input and families, it all should be
2 integrated into the curriculum in some way, so
3 that's what I wanted expansion on.

4 MS. HOOLEY: Absolutely. So I just wanted
5 to add that even the meal time, the preparation of
6 the food and the ingredients in the food are going
7 to be incorporated into their daily learning. So
8 there will be discussion as it relates to what they
9 had for lunch, if we got the eggs from a local
10 farmer. We are not going to have processed foods as
11 much as possible, because we want to create habits
12 that are going to be sustainable. So even the
13 choices for snacks and fruits and vegetables, the
14 students will be included in that as much as
15 possible.

16 Yes, I know we have high ideals and we are
17 going to stick to them as much as we can, but it's
18 possible. I am a nurse practitioner and I am a
19 pediatric nurse long-term, so we are going to be
20 looking very closely at the food options both for
21 breakfast and lunch, and Egg McMuffins are not going
22 to be on our menu. I apologize for that. That will
23 be on the expectation page as well for choice.

24 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: If I could just
25 piggyback, we do hope to be part of the federal

1 lunch program. If our desired location does not
2 come through, we are looking into other avenues.

3 Ms. Jenkins has already met with Aramark
4 through contracted food services to see what could
5 be provided there. As Ms. Hooley indicated, we are
6 going to help educate the children on what kind of
7 snacks to bring in. We don't want to see the hot
8 Cheetos.

9 MS. HOOLEY: And the families. We are
10 hoping there will be parental involvement in the
11 meals as well, so they can offer their opinions,
12 their suggestions, and whatever their peach tree
13 happens to provide in the fall, we hope there will
14 be some communication there with our agricultural
15 component of our community as well.

16 CHAIR GARRISON: Thank you.

17 Question?

18 MS. KRIVITZKY: I just had a quick
19 question. You talked a little bit about, you called
20 them field trips. This is a really interesting
21 community. Can you elaborate on anything that you
22 guys looked at or planned or --

23 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: I will try to keep
24 this brief. First of all, another reason we really
25 like this location and a component of wherever we

1 end up, it's on the city bus lines which takes the
2 cost of field trips way, way down. To rent a bus
3 with all the legalities and insurance gets quite
4 expensive from any of the transportation providers
5 for schools. We feel that schools are becoming more
6 schooled. They are doing tests and putting more
7 time into that kind of thing, and they are becoming
8 more separated from the community, and we don't
9 think that is a good way to go.

10 We believe that the community should be
11 part and parcel of the school. We want the students
12 to go to visit farms, visit my farm so there will be
13 options out there. New Mexico State agriculture
14 department has talked with us, and they are very
15 interested in participating with the children. As
16 you know, some of the local businesses, like Lowes,
17 provide children an opportunity to build, have a
18 small craft activity and learn those kinds of
19 processes, as well as measuring and figuring out
20 what it would cost if they were going to do it at
21 home.

22 The library is another great opportunity.
23 We just see a wealth of opportunities to have the
24 children in the fields. And there may be occasions
25 where it's not just those kinds of activities. They

1 might visit the soup kitchen. It's important for
2 them to know the span of our community and that we
3 are all responsible for it.

4 MS. KRIVITZKY: Thank you.

5 CHAIR GARRISON: Mr. Bergman.

6 MR. BERGMAN: I have a couple more things.

7 CHAIR GARRISON: Sure.

8 MR. BERGMAN: I noted on page 25 that you
9 said children will be placed in fluid groups created
10 by teachers in response to needs, and then again it
11 was essentially repeated on page 43, that children
12 will move to classrooms across the school according
13 to their needs. Then I wrote a note to myself. It
14 said mixed grades, question mark. Could you expand
15 on that? Is that what we are talking about? What
16 are the positives of that?

17 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: Well, the positives
18 are if we assume all the third graders need this
19 piece of instruction, we are going to hit about the
20 middle third of the children. A third of them will
21 need some support to understand it. A third of them
22 will already understand it and be bored to tears.
23 So we want to make sure that we group the children
24 according to the level where they need the
25 instruction at that particular moment.

1 This instruction has to be fluid, because
2 if we put you in a group that needs a little bit of
3 catch-up type to work and we leave you there for the
4 whole school year, we are not serving your needs.
5 So we will frequently assess the children and
6 determine when they are ready to go on to another
7 level. We want the instruction to be right at their
8 point of error, right where they need it as opposed
9 to just kind of in the general area.

10 MR. BERGMAN: Is there an age problem
11 there do you think?

12 MS. HOOLEY: If I may, Cynthia?

13 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: Uh-huh.

14 MS. HOOLEY: My children right now, at
15 least one of them, has been in a multi-age classroom
16 in the public schools throughout his first four
17 years of school, and there are some wonderful things
18 that happen in a multi-age, multi-grade classroom.
19 And one of the biggest things is that for those who
20 are advanced and have had the material, in order to
21 prevent them from being bored, they are used as
22 mentors, and they help educate and help partner with
23 those in the middle third and the bottom third. And
24 so there is great, great opportunity for the top
25 third, who are gathering the material quickly, to be

1 able to mentor those beneath them. And there is a
2 lot to be said about that interpersonal relationship
3 that occurs, so we are taking full advantage of that
4 as well.

5 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: And I think I hear
6 your concern. I think in essence what you are
7 asking is what about the eighth grade level reading
8 on a first grade reading level, and that too could
9 be addressed. Those children will have to make sure
10 that their integrity is respected. So I see no
11 reason why the school would put an eighth grader
12 with kindergarteners where they are learning letters
13 or those kinds of things. We will have to design a
14 program for that eighth grader, and it may be more
15 of an independent instructional mode.

16 As you can see, we plan for several
17 instructional assistants. It might be that student
18 working with the teacher prior to the lesson for the
19 younger children, and then helping present it so the
20 child is also a teacher and not embarrassed, but we
21 do realize that children are not going to want to be
22 perceived as not achieving their learning goals, and
23 we are going to work with them to make sure that
24 their integrity is respected and their learnings are
25 met.

1 MR. BERGMAN: It wasn't so much a concern.
2 Part of it was from my own personal experience.
3 When I was back in elementary school when you had to
4 work through the dinosaurs to get into the building,
5 but I was advanced a grade. A year difference, so I
6 was a year younger than all the people I was with.
7 It wasn't a major problem, but I still remember
8 that. So it was just kind of more on my personal
9 experience but --

10 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: I think you can
11 create a community where we understand everybody has
12 different needs and we are addressing different
13 needs as opposed to this student is an A student and
14 this student is a B student, but we are all in there
15 together, including the staff.

16 MR. BERGMAN: And Dr. Sanchez said
17 something about your contracting with local schools
18 for transportation. Perhaps my memory failed, are
19 you going to offer transportation?

20 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: Not the first year.
21 Of course, IEPs may spell out that children need
22 transportation. And we weren't able to meet with
23 the company providing the transportation at this
24 time, because as I'm sure you are aware, Las Cruces
25 changed transportation companies, but we are well

1 aware that we may need to contract to bring in some
2 students who have that as part of their IEP.

3 Just as a little aside, Ms. Oliver Lewis
4 alluded to something that's very positive, is that
5 this school is across the street from Valley View,
6 and that's one of our target special ed schools, so
7 we anticipate there will be many buses in the area.

8 MR. BERGMAN: Thank you.

9 Mr. Chairman, I think that's all I have
10 got.

11 CHAIR GARRISON: Are there any other
12 questions by commissioners? Seeing none, I have a
13 couple of closing statements to make here.

14 The commission encourages continued public
15 input in writing until this Thursday, August 19th at
16 5:00 p.m. Written comments should be sent to Public
17 Education Commission in care of Beverly Friedman,
18 300 Don Gaspar Avenue, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501.

19 You may also e-mail comments to Beverly
20 Friedman at bev.friedman -- F-R-I-E-D-M-A-N --
21 @state.nm.us.

22 We request that the applicant adhere to
23 the deadline and submit their written responses to
24 both the preliminary analysis and our questions by
25 e-mail to Mrs. Friedman to ensure that they are

1 received on time for consideration in our
2 decision-making meeting on September 9, 2010.

3 The commission will now recess the hearing
4 until 5:30 p.m. in the community of Gallup where the
5 hearing will resume at that time. Thank you very
6 much.

7 MS. LUCERO: Could you repeat that e-mail
8 address, please?

9 CHAIR GARRISON: I can. Bev, B-E-V,
10 .friedman -- F-R-I-E-D-M-A-N -- @state.un.us.

11 Thank you very much, Las Cruces. You have
12 a splendid morning.

13 MS. RISNER-SCHILLER: Thank you for
14 reading our application. We appreciate it.

15 CHAIR GARRISON: You are very welcome.

16 (The hearing concluded at 9:22 a.m.)
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1 STATE OF NEW MEXICO)
2 COUNTY OF BERNALILLO)

3

4 REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

5 I, Sally Peters, RPR, CCR #57, Certified
6 Court Reporter in the State of New Mexico, do hereby
7 certify that the foregoing pages constitute a true
8 transcript of proceedings had before the Public
9 Education Commission, held in the District of New
10 Mexico, in the matter therein stated.

11 In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set
12 my hand on August 16, 2010.

13

14

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