

BEFORE THE PUBLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION

STATE OF NEW MEXICO

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS  
COMMUNITY INPUT HEARING  
EXPLORE ACADEMY-RIO RANCHO

July 19, 2022

4:00 P.M.

New Mexico Highlands University Rio Rancho

1700 Grande Boulevard, Southeast, #100

Rio Rancho, NM 87124

and

Via Zoom Webinar Video Teleconference

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2	<p>1 APPEARANCES</p> <p>2 COMMISSIONERS:</p> <p>3 REBEKKA BURT, Chair</p> <p>4 GLENNA VOIGT, Vice Chair</p> <p>5 STEVEN CARRILLO, Member</p> <p>6 PATRICIA GIPSON, Member</p> <p>7 KT MANIS, Member</p> <p>8 DAVID ROBBINS, Member</p> <p>9 PED STAFF:</p> <p>10 CORINA CHAVEZ Director</p> <p>11 Charter School/Options for</p> <p>12 Parents and Families Division</p> <p>13 MISSY BROWN Technical Assistance and Support and</p> <p>14 Training Administrator</p> <p>15 Charter School/Options for</p> <p>16 Parents and Families Division</p> <p>17 LUCY VALENZUELA, Technical Assistance and Training</p> <p>18 Coordinator, Options for Parents and</p> <p>19 Families Division</p> <p>20</p> <p>21</p> <p>22</p> <p>23</p> <p>24</p> <p>25</p>	4
3	<p>1 INDEX TO PROCEEDINGS</p> <p>2 PAGE</p> <p>3 1 Call to Order, Roll Call, Pledge of Allegiance, and Salute to the New Mexico Flag 4</p> <p>4</p> <p>5 2 Approval of the Agenda 5</p> <p>6</p> <p>7 3 Community Input Hearing for Explore Academy-Rio Rancho 6</p> <p>8 Adjournment 110</p> <p>9 REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE 111</p> <p>10 ATTACHMENTS:</p> <p>11 1 Sign-In Sheet for Commissioners and Staff</p> <p>12 2 Sign-In Sheet for Applicant School Representatives and Members of the Public</p> <p>13</p> <p>14</p> <p>15</p> <p>16</p> <p>17</p> <p>18</p> <p>19</p> <p>20</p> <p>21</p> <p>22</p> <p>23</p> <p>24</p> <p>25</p>	5
4	<p>1 THE CHAIR: All right. It is 4:00, and</p> <p>2 I'm going to go ahead and call this meeting to</p> <p>3 order.</p> <p>4 If I can ask Vice Chair Voigt to do roll</p> <p>5 call.</p> <p>6 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Test.</p> <p>7 Okay. Commissioner Manis.</p> <p>8 COMMISSIONER MANIS: I'm here.</p> <p>9 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Commissioner Armijo.</p> <p>10 (No response.)</p> <p>11 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Not here.</p> <p>12 Commissioner Taylor.</p> <p>13 (No response.)</p> <p>14 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Commissioner Chavez.</p> <p>15 (No response.)</p> <p>16 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Commissioner Davis.</p> <p>17 (No response.)</p> <p>18 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Commissioner Burt.</p> <p>19 THE CHAIR: Here.</p> <p>20 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Okay. Commissioner</p> <p>21 Voigt is here.</p> <p>22 Commissioner Gipson.</p> <p>23 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: Here.</p> <p>24 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Commissioner Robbins.</p> <p>25 COMMISSIONER ROBBINS: Here.</p>	5

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1 Commissioner Taylor.  
 2 (No response.)  
 3 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Not here.  
 4 Commissioner Chavez.  
 5 (No response.)  
 6 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Not here.  
 7 Commissioner Davis is not here.  
 8 Commissioner Burt.  
 9 THE CHAIR: Yes.  
 10 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Commissioner Voigt  
 11 votes yes.  
 12 Commissioner Gipson.  
 13 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: Yes.  
 14 THE CHAIR: Commissioner Robbins.  
 15 COMMISSIONER ROBBINS: Yes.  
 16 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: And Commissioner  
 17 Carrillo.  
 18 COMMISSIONER CARRILLO: Yes.  
 19 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: That passes with a  
 20 vote of six.  
 21 THE CHAIR: So Item No. 3, the Community  
 22 Input Hearing for Explore Academy-Rio Rancho.  
 23 Thank you all for joining us today. We  
 24 are very grateful for you to spend your afternoon  
 25 with us.

7

1 There is an application in peer review  
 2 port (ph) that is available online. We will be  
 3 hearing from anybody who signed up for public  
 4 comment today. And when I get that list, I will let  
 5 you know how -- how much time you'll have to kind of  
 6 prepare yourself, just depending on how many people  
 7 are here.  
 8 I do want to do introductions first of the  
 9 folks that are here on the panel, the CSD staff, and  
 10 then I would like to turn it over to Explore-Rio  
 11 Rancho for you to introduce the folks that you  
 12 brought at the table here today because, hopefully,  
 13 we'll meet everyone else as they come up and speak.  
 14 My name is Rebekka Burt. I am the Chair  
 15 for this year. I represent District 4, which is  
 16 Rio Rancho, Sandoval County all the way up to Los  
 17 Alamos County.  
 18 Vice Chair Voigt?  
 19 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Hi, everyone. Glenna  
 20 Voigt, representing District 3, which is Greater  
 21 Albuquerque, roughly Louisiana to the River, and  
 22 Paseo to Gibson.  
 23 THE CHAIR: Commissioner Gipson.  
 24 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: Pattie Gipson,  
 25 District 7, Doña Ana County.

8

1 COMMISSIONER CARRILLO: Steven Carrillo,  
 2 District 10. The north: Santa Fe, Rio Arriba,  
 3 Colfax, Taos, all the way to the border.  
 4 COMMISSIONER ROBBINS: David Robbins, East  
 5 Albuquerque. But I did live in Rio Rancho back in  
 6 1990-'91, out on Wagon Wheel off of Southern.  
 7 THE CHAIR: And Commissioner Manis.  
 8 COMMISSIONER MANIS: KT Manis representing  
 9 District 9. I represent the counties that touch the  
 10 eastern side of New Mexico.  
 11 THE CHAIR: All right. Great. I will go  
 12 ahead and pass it over to Explore-Rio Rancho, if you  
 13 all would like to introduce your team.  
 14 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: Justin Baiardo. I'm  
 15 one of the founders of Explore Academy-Rio Rancho.  
 16 MS. KAREN WOERNER: I'm Karen Woerner  
 17 and -- one of the founders.  
 18 MS. ELISHA VARELA: Elisha Varela. I am  
 19 also one of the founders.  
 20 MR. MICHAEL MIERZEJEWSKI: Michael  
 21 Mierzejewski, proposed board member.  
 22 MS. HANNAH PERIA: Hannah Peria, the  
 23 elementary model expert.  
 24 THE CHAIR: Do you want to do that second  
 25 row?

9

1 MS. TERI PIERCE: So we are just doing  
 2 names?  
 3 Teri Pierce, school board.  
 4 MR. SKIP MACKAY: Skip Mackay, proposed  
 5 board member.  
 6 MS. BARBARA SENA: Barbara Sena, proposed  
 7 board member.  
 8 MS. VERONICA SANDERS: And Veronica  
 9 Sanders, proposed board member.  
 10 THE CHAIR: All right. Thank you. And we  
 11 do have -- Director Chavez is on her way. She  
 12 should be here any minute. So I'll have her  
 13 introduce herself when she's here. We have two  
 14 awesome CSD staff who are here right at this moment,  
 15 and we're so grateful for you all to be here.  
 16 So with that, we're going to go ahead and  
 17 go to comments from the Chair.  
 18 So, in this session, we will be listening  
 19 to any public comment. I do have a list of four  
 20 folks who are here to speak. So we are grateful for  
 21 all of you to show up and listen about this school,  
 22 this proposed school.  
 23 And for those of you who are prepared to  
 24 speak, we'll be calling you up shortly. We are  
 25 going to be doing a presentation from the applicant

10	<p>1 first. And then we will have any comments from the</p> <p>2 school district. And I'd like to ask if there's</p> <p>3 anybody from Rio Rancho Public Schools who is here</p> <p>4 as of right now. All right. And we'll check online</p> <p>5 and when we get to that place as well.</p> <p>6 Hi.</p> <p>7 So before I keep going, I'm going to</p> <p>8 introduce Director Chavez. Director Chavez, if</p> <p>9 you'd just like to say hi?</p> <p>10 DIRECTOR CORINA CHAVEZ: Hi. What a great</p> <p>11 showing today. Welcome, everybody, to the community</p> <p>12 input hearing for this charter school. Shows a lot</p> <p>13 of interest in the community for your children's</p> <p>14 education, and that's really important. Thank you.</p> <p>15 Absolutely.</p> <p>16 So I would like to say that I'm Corina</p> <p>17 Chavez. You see my name there. But I could not be</p> <p>18 doing this work without my wonderful staff. And so</p> <p>19 standing at the end of the table is Melissa Brown.</p> <p>20 And should the school be approved and you plan to be</p> <p>21 a governing board member, you will get to know her</p> <p>22 well.</p> <p>23 And then Lucy Valenzuela is sitting in the</p> <p>24 back.</p> <p>25 And so, again, thank you very much to both</p>	12	<p>1 "Karen Woerner"?</p> <p>2 MS. KAREN WOERNER: Karen Woerner, uh-huh.</p> <p>3 MS. LUCY VALENZUELA: (Inaudible.)</p> <p>4 MS. KAREN WOERNER: Thank you. I think</p> <p>5 we're ready.</p> <p>6 MR. MICHAEL MIEREJEWSKI: My name is</p> <p>7 Michael Mierzejewski. I am a resident and business</p> <p>8 owner here in Rio Rancho. I have lived here for the</p> <p>9 last 16 years. Moved here from New York, Long</p> <p>10 Island, New York. And I currently serve on the</p> <p>11 board for the Rio Rancho Education Foundation as</p> <p>12 well as some other networking groups, and I also am</p> <p>13 a member of the Rio Rancho Chamber of Commerce.</p> <p>14 I provide printing and graphic design</p> <p>15 services for my business here. And the -- my wife</p> <p>16 is a -- an educational assistant of one of the</p> <p>17 Rio Rancho elementary schools.</p> <p>18 And I have two daughters who recently</p> <p>19 graduated from UNM who were Rio Rancho High School</p> <p>20 students. And I believe that they would have</p> <p>21 benefited from a curriculum -- a focused curriculum</p> <p>22 that Explore Academy offers, had it been available</p> <p>23 at the time that they were attending school.</p> <p>24 MS. VERONICA SANDERS: Good afternoon. I</p> <p>25 am Veronica Sanders, and I come to you with almost</p>
11	<p>1 Lucy and Missy for making sure that this input</p> <p>2 hearing was well organized.</p> <p>3 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Director Chavez.</p> <p>4 And I'm really grateful for Missy to be here on her</p> <p>5 birthday spending some time with us. Happy</p> <p>6 Birthday, Missy.</p> <p>7 All right. After our community input</p> <p>8 hearing, we will be discussing this applicant on our</p> <p>9 work session on Thursday. So we will be discussing</p> <p>10 it as a Commission. At that time, we will be</p> <p>11 issuing a letter from myself, as the Chair of the</p> <p>12 Commission, on any concerns that the Commission may</p> <p>13 have about the application, in which you will be</p> <p>14 able to respond to that during your application</p> <p>15 hearing when that comes up. So you will receive</p> <p>16 that after our work session on Thursday.</p> <p>17 All right. That brings us to our</p> <p>18 presentation by the applicant. You do have</p> <p>19 20 minutes in order to present. And I am going to</p> <p>20 turn it over to you.</p> <p>21 MS. KAREN WOERNER: Sorry, Chair Burt.</p> <p>22 May we share a presentation? I have it here.</p> <p>23 THE CHAIR: I'll have Lucy -- Lucy should</p> <p>24 be able to.</p> <p>25 MS. LUCY VALENZUELA: So are you under</p>	13	<p>1 30 years in education. I am a native new Mexican.</p> <p>2 I graduated from NMSU a long, long time ago, and</p> <p>3 then went on to UNM for my Master's degree. And,</p> <p>4 currently, I'm working on my ed doctoral through</p> <p>5 Loyola University of Chicago.</p> <p>6 I have been both an elementary and a</p> <p>7 secondary teacher as well as principal at all</p> <p>8 levels, both in Grants as well as in Rio Rancho.</p> <p>9 I also worked for a brief time as the</p> <p>10 assistant director for Parent, Community, and Staff</p> <p>11 Engagement here in Rio Rancho.</p> <p>12 And, most recently, I have retired from</p> <p>13 the public schools. I went to work for the Public</p> <p>14 Education Department. I've worked both in the</p> <p>15 Student School and Family Support Bureau, as well as</p> <p>16 in the College and Career Readiness Bureau. And in</p> <p>17 both of those roles, I've supported principals and</p> <p>18 directors, both with math and reading programs, as</p> <p>19 well as in the Career Technical Education area.</p> <p>20 And in addition to that, I am the proud</p> <p>21 parent of four Rio Rancho Public School graduates.</p> <p>22 And I say very proud, because they have all gone on</p> <p>23 to post-secondary. And I was very pleased with the</p> <p>24 education they received in Rio Rancho.</p> <p>25 But I have to say that seeing my son go</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">14</p> <p>1 through COVID and actually all of my kids get to the 2 level of post-secondary and feel like, gosh, what am 3 I going to do with my life, I think that Explore 4 Academy, like Mike said, offers so many 5 opportunities for students to start to explore their 6 interests a lot sooner. And I found that that's 7 very, very important for our kids, and so that's why 8 I'm here to support it. Thank you.</p> <p>9 MS. BARBARA SENA: Hello. My name is 10 Barbara Sena. And I used to be a special ed dual 11 language teacher for APS for ten years. During that 12 time, I serviced bilingual students who were in the 13 dual language program.</p> <p>14 I moved into social studies and taught the 15 dual language social studies program for ten 16 years -- or six years. I was also part of the dual 17 language New Mexico board up until last year when I 18 switched careers. I exited out of the dual language 19 of New Mexico board. I was on their board for seven 20 years.</p> <p>21 I then went into being an educational 22 consultant for three years. I worked with 23 Santillana Benchmark-Heinemann.</p> <p>24 After that, I had a career change and 25 decided to open up a business here in Rio Rancho.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">16</p> <p>1 Mackay. I'm originally from Wyoming, but I've lived 2 here for 25 years. I do call Rio Rancho home.</p> <p>3 I raised four children through the 4 Rio Rancho Public Schools, and one of them is a 5 senior this year at Cleveland High School.</p> <p>6 I have spent the last 20 years as an 7 educator for Rio Rancho Public Schools. I recently 8 retired last year.</p> <p>9 I was a special education teacher, a 10 special education instructional leader, as well as 11 an administrator all those years.</p> <p>12 What I have noticed over the years is all 13 the changes that have taken place within education. 14 We've all been in it long enough to see, you know, 15 changes go back and forth. I have seen that 16 students and parents struggle with -- especially 17 students with special needs -- being left behind.</p> <p>18 And what I have seen from Explore Academy 19 is that choice that they are offered and the ability 20 to take ownership in their -- in their education 21 plays a huge impact upon them being able to be 22 self-advocates. And that's why I would help -- 23 would like to be on this board, to help with the 24 community and different choices that they have for 25 our students.</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">15</p> <p>1 I've owned a small business here for two years. I 2 now, instead of educating students, I educate dogs. 3 I opened up a doggie daycare, and I instill a lot of 4 my education into the dogs, and the parents love it.</p> <p>5 I've lived in Rio Rancho for 12 years. 6 And one thing that I've noticed living here as an 7 educator is that we don't have much choice in 8 schools. And I am all for school and choice for 9 students.</p> <p>10 I have a lot of people who work for me 11 who -- one of my workers actually went to 12 Explore-Albuquerque. She ended up, her senior year, 13 going back to Rio Rancho because the traffic and how 14 hard it was for her to get to Explore in Albuquerque 15 was just -- the travel, she said, was horrible. She 16 said it was hard to travel an hour, and she wanted 17 to go back with her friends that all stayed because 18 of the travel.</p> <p>19 So that having somebody in my business 20 that went to Explore and loved Explore and told me, 21 "I would have stayed if it would have been here in 22 Rio Rancho," that made me want to be part of this 23 board to see change in Rio Rancho and to see school 24 of choice.</p> <p>25 MR. SKIP MACKAY: Hello. My name is Skip</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">17</p> <p>1 Thank you.</p> <p>2 MS. TERI PIERCE: Hello. My name is Teri 3 Pierce. Thank you for your time and attention here 4 today.</p> <p>5 I've been a lawyer for many years, 6 generally engaged in employment litigation and civil 7 rights defense, including representing several 8 school districts in New Mexico.</p> <p>9 I've also had occasion to be -- to sue 10 school districts in New Mexico.</p> <p>11 I've resided in Corrales for 25 years, and 12 I am committed to the education embetterment of the 13 community. I've served on several not-for-profit 14 boards. I've sought to contribute to the education 15 of others through many avenues, including 16 presentations and trainings on legal issues.</p> <p>17 I welcome the opportunity to share my 18 expertise in the context of this innovative approach 19 to education, a charter school that has proven its 20 worth that I believe will enrich and flourish in 21 this community, given the choice. Thank you.</p> <p>22 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: Madam Chair, do you 23 mind if we have a time check at the moment to see -- 24 THE CHAIR: Sure. It's been seven 25 minutes.</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">18</p> <p>1 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: Okay. All right.  2 So we're going.  3 Hello. Thank you, members of the  4 Commission, for being here today. My name is Justin  5 Baiardo. I am the founder of the original Explore  6 Academy in Albuquerque and the Explore Learning  7 Model, as we've come to call it. I'm one of the  8 founding team members of Explore Academy-Rio Rancho  9 and actually a long-time Rio Rancho teacher prior to  10 taking on the Explore endeavor. So Rio Rancho is,  11 and continues to be, my home.  12 The mission of Explore Academy is to  13 provide students with a personalized education  14 experience through -- through choice.  15 Choice is everything that we try and push  16 for students to provide them some individuality in  17 their learning.  18 Having been a teacher in Rio Rancho, I  19 know the district has moved to a one-size-fits-all  20 educational process in many ways, in terms of what  21 they teach, how they teach it, and when they teach  22 their material. And Explore Academy represents a  23 different approach to that pedagogy.  24 The premise of Explore Academy is based on  25 Choice Theory. Choice Theory, in a basic sense,</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">20</p> <p>1 variation of a seminar. We call our courses  2 "seminars." It's a small, more intimate, smaller in  3 terms of time learning module. And students are  4 provided different flavor options for the same  5 seminar, which cover the same standards.  6 So it becomes a choice of how do they want  7 to learn. And by picking one flavor over another  8 for a given seminar, they are provided with the  9 choice for the first time. And as they make their  10 choices in completing each seminar, they create a  11 path that is very unique.  12 And I'll do a flavor barrage here very  13 quickly.  14 Some of our flavors that we've used from K  15 to 12 have ranged from using music in learning  16 grammar and looking at grammar through music. What  17 some of our teachers have taught: Crop circles  18 as -- in geometry and looking at circles.  19 We've looked at English arguments through  20 TED talks and students actually creating their own  21 TED talks.  22 We've looked at the economics, the  23 standards for economics, through the studies of the  24 Star Wars universe.  25 A very popular flavor for PE has been yoga</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">19</p> <p>1 (inaudible) by Dr. William Glasser, who studied  2 choice in our lives for over four years. He asserts  3 that anytime a person has a choice in any aspect of  4 their life, they will be more at ease, happier, and  5 more successful in what they are doing because they  6 had options presented to them, and, therefore, by  7 following a path of their choosing, there is a  8 greater likelihood of success.  9 We say -- kind of our motto that's sprung  10 up over the years with this model, is that one  11 student represents infinite possibilities in  12 following different patterns and different pathways  13 based on their individual choices.  14 Students choose through this mechanism of  15 flavors that we provide, which we'll get to in a  16 second. And the combination of flavors they choose  17 ultimately provides them something unique, very  18 individualized that cannot be replicated and would  19 be -- would really result in an almost infinite  20 number of possibilities based on the combination of  21 choices that they would come to make across their  22 time at Explore Academy.  23 So these things called "flavors," which is  24 a term we coined early on upon opening the  25 Albuquerque campus, a flavor is simply a thematic</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">21</p> <p>1 and Pilates.  2 We use Angry Birds for quadratic  3 equations, looking at quadratic formulas and  4 projectile motion, Angry Birds being -- I feel like  5 I'm dated even talking about Angry Birds now.  6 But -- personality types was a flavor that  7 we've used in our research class, where students  8 research personality types, and that is the basis  9 for their pursuit of looking at the research  10 standards in the English curriculum.  11 March Madness in terms of statistics,  12 through sports and looking at the basketball  13 tournament that takes place every March.  14 Looking at the Galapagos Islands as a case  15 study for environmental science and ecological  16 standards.  17 Learning about World War II through the  18 lens of the Holocaust.  19 Zip lines and triangles. Looking at the  20 different angles and having students construct zip  21 lines through the creation of different triangles  22 and learn geometry through that lens.  23 A very popular flavor we call the Best of  24 Recess, which is old-school recess game --  25 playground games, that students can take and earn PE</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">22</p> <p>1 credit through.</p> <p>2 We've looked at geography through the</p> <p>3 study of Tolkien's Middle Earth.</p> <p>4 And, of course, obviously, very unique to</p> <p>5 local -- our local flavor is looking at chemistry</p> <p>6 and natural gases through -- through hot air</p> <p>7 ballooning.</p> <p>8 Again, Harry Potter. Looking at literary</p> <p>9 analysis through the study of the Harry Potter</p> <p>10 series.</p> <p>11 African Colonialism looking at it through</p> <p>12 Black Panther.</p> <p>13 Looking at the Drake equation and the</p> <p>14 possibility of life on earth and the existence of</p> <p>15 equations in mathematics.</p> <p>16 And economics through the study of Michael</p> <p>17 Jordan and the economic impact that he had on a</p> <p>18 particular city in the Midwest.</p> <p>19 And a very popular PE flavor, looking at</p> <p>20 Nintendo Wii and Wii sports.</p> <p>21 So all of this represents different ways</p> <p>22 through which teachers have presented the material</p> <p>23 to students and different options that students have</p> <p>24 had in completing the standards set forth.</p> <p>25 Now, the big question is where do these</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">24</p> <p>1 study -- we're not going to get into great depth on</p> <p>2 this. But we do offer upper-level flavors for our</p> <p>3 majors programs, which parallel the important</p> <p>4 flavors, but look at more career pathways, with</p> <p>5 students trying different career pathways so they</p> <p>6 can explore prior to stepping into their</p> <p>7 post-secondary educational experience.</p> <p>8 In terms of that choice, we all understand</p> <p>9 now that the world is opening up for everyone in</p> <p>10 terms of choice. Choice cannot always be a healthy</p> <p>11 thing. There can be too many options. So we do</p> <p>12 provide choice, but reasonable choice, and support</p> <p>13 in that choice, where our students in grades K</p> <p>14 through 7 have options at each level as they move</p> <p>15 through the curriculum in a very patterned way. So</p> <p>16 for every step they take, they will have options.</p> <p>17 That distinguishes -- let me stick with</p> <p>18 elementary here. The course catalog that we provide</p> <p>19 is very clear.</p> <p>20 In this case, you have two flavor options,</p> <p>21 Fun with Fables and Master Chef, for our -- these</p> <p>22 would be for our kindergarten students who would be</p> <p>23 able to choose these two flavors for their</p> <p>24 humanities class; so that's the universe, social</p> <p>25 studies standard blend. And so this catalog is</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">23</p> <p>1 flavors come from? We are not here to generate</p> <p>2 those. That comes from the teachers. It is the</p> <p>3 teachers who got into teaching to engage students.</p> <p>4 They bring their passion, their interests into the</p> <p>5 classroom every day.</p> <p>6 And we don't want to stifle that. We want</p> <p>7 to build on that creativity and expand on it and</p> <p>8 allow them to pursue their interests and passions</p> <p>9 and connect the students who share those same</p> <p>10 interests.</p> <p>11 It does create a synergistic relationship</p> <p>12 between teachers and students.</p> <p>13 And in a traditional educational model,</p> <p>14 students and teachers would be paired together</p> <p>15 randomly, and students would be paired together with</p> <p>16 other students randomly.</p> <p>17 And within this curriculum, students are</p> <p>18 paired with other students and the teachers in a way</p> <p>19 that is purposeful, and they're together because</p> <p>20 they share an interest in roller coasters and</p> <p>21 physics, or sports in whatever lens through which</p> <p>22 they're looking with those particular standards.</p> <p>23 So it creates stronger connections and a</p> <p>24 stronger connection to the curriculum.</p> <p>25 As students pursue advanced courses of</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">25</p> <p>1 provided to families every summer with the flavors</p> <p>2 that are brought together by the teachers who create</p> <p>3 them.</p> <p>4 Now as students mature, and they develop</p> <p>5 the capacity to make choices for themselves in</p> <p>6 grades 8 through 12, getting into high school, they</p> <p>7 are given some more flexibility in exploring in</p> <p>8 their own way. Of course, they have to complete the</p> <p>9 same credits as any other student graduating from</p> <p>10 high school in the state of New Mexico, but the</p> <p>11 flexibility is in how they do so.</p> <p>12 We provide them a catalog which gives them</p> <p>13 all the flavors available from the teachers for that</p> <p>14 particular year and which credits they serve, and</p> <p>15 they use this in conjunction with what we call</p> <p>16 "credit analysis," which charts their path towards</p> <p>17 graduation. It looks something similar to this,</p> <p>18 where it's a giant, colorful matrix that they fill</p> <p>19 in as they go, and they kind of put together when</p> <p>20 they can take it based on the flavors that are</p> <p>21 offered.</p> <p>22 The flavors that they choose and the path</p> <p>23 that they take, of course, will be unique, based on</p> <p>24 the combination of choices that they make. It's</p> <p>25 powerful, student-driven, it's teacher-driven, and</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">26</p> <p>1 we feel it's a better way for instruction for the 2 instructional process.</p> <p>3 The course catalog provides for our 4 upper-level students the breakdown of flavors, 5 course descriptions. And with those come specific 6 learning categories that allow students to know what 7 are they getting into? Is this class a 8 project-focused class? Is there a lot of writing 9 involved? These are our learning categories that 10 exist for our K-5 students and for our middle school 11 and high school students.</p> <p>12 MS. ELISHA VARELA: My timing was on track 13 here, as I was all -- okay. I will go through this 14 a little quicker than I thought, but that's okay.</p> <p>15 My name is Elisha Varela. I was on the 16 founding team from the original campus. I came on 17 as an English teacher.</p> <p>18 I was born and raised in Bernalillo and 19 graduated valedictorian of my class, went to 20 college, had no idea what I was doing. When I came 21 back, I just wanted to teach and make that a better 22 experience. And after almost a decade in 23 Bernalillo, that's when I jumped over to Explore, 24 because I had become very tired of being told, 25 "You're supposed to be on Page 18, why are you not</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">28</p> <p>1 build on their mistakes as they go. So a low test 2 score or a low project grade that happens in the 3 first week or two of the class doesn't impact your 4 entire grade for the whole semester, the whole term, 5 depending on what grade you're in, because you're 6 able to keep building and show that you learned 7 those standards as you went.</p> <p>8 So it's very formative in nature.</p> <p>9 We have pretty much constant academic 10 tracking and reporting. So if there are assignments 11 being missed, parents are notified immediately. The 12 teacher goes in, sends out a notice.</p> <p>13 Every week there's a progress report for 14 every child whether they're doing amazing or whether 15 they're really struggling. And parents and admins 16 get that progress report every single week.</p> <p>17 And we also have a restorative discipline 18 that's rolled into that. Every discipline 19 infraction, parents are notified immediately, as 20 well as administration across the board. Whoever 21 noted it, they can really dive in to see, is there a 22 pattern, what is causing this, is this a time-of-day 23 issue, is this a manifestation.</p> <p>24 So those are some of the systems that are 25 for all students.</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">27</p> <p>1 on Page 18," not caring what my kiddos needed at 2 that time.</p> <p>3 So that's how I came here. So I'm going 4 to talk about the support systems that the model has 5 integrated.</p> <p>6 They're broken down into two sections. 7 One is designed for all students, and one is very 8 specific for special populations.</p> <p>9 One of the things for all students. 10 Number one, small class sizes. The class sizes 11 range from eight to 20, maybe 22 for a PE class that 12 needs more team building and bigger sizes for teams. 13 So very small class sizes.</p> <p>14 We also have flex periods integrated into 15 the day, K-12, which is really helpful, even at the 16 younger grades to make sure that they're getting 17 socialization, soft skills building, academic 18 tutoring, any type of interventions. And we can 19 also use that time to roll in any scheduled doctors' 20 appointments. Things normally they'd be pulled out 21 of class from, our families are able to say, "Well, 22 my child has flex at this period." Makes them not 23 miss class, which is helpful. And as a mom of an 24 eighth- and ninth-grader, it is super helpful. 25 Our formative grading definitely lets kids</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">29</p> <p>1 Specifically for special populations, we 2 are a full inclusion school, so we don't do separate 3 flavors to isolate anybody who's in special ed.</p> <p>4 We also were lucky Hannah helped with MLSS 5 as it became the new RTI at the PED. So she was 6 able to bring a wealth of knowledge to the school, 7 and we have that K-12 pretty integrated into the 8 entire system.</p> <p>9 We also have a solid SAT process, that if 10 MLSS isn't sufficient for a student's needs or if 11 there is gifted eligibility possibility.</p> <p>12 Our English Learners have a special flex 13 specifically for them, and they get their English 14 Language Development in there.</p> <p>15 And they have what is similar to an IEP, 16 but an in-house one, to make sure their language is 17 being tracked and they're getting what they need to 18 make progress every year on their English academic 19 unit performance.</p> <p>20 And we also have a whole system in place 21 for Section 504 and Other Health Impairment to make 22 sure that those are coordinated with the nurse and 23 any health officials.</p> <p>24 Lastly, to make sure that nobody is not 25 able to come -- like, we want everyone from all</p>



<p style="text-align: right;">30</p> <p>1 parts of our target area to come. So 2 transportation, even though I do it and it's a 3 headache, we do it because this is really the only 4 equalizer to ensure that even if you cannot get to 5 school because your parents are working or they're 6 teachers, too, that they can still take the bus to 7 school. That helps us to get a very even, 8 representative population. 9 Got it. 10 MS. KAREN WOERNER: I don't think we have 11 very much time left. And I just -- part of that was 12 we were planning on doing the introductions before. 13 So the timing is a little off. 14 I apologize for speaking so fast. Let's 15 just cover all those things. 16 So I just wanted to speak to the success 17 of the model. Many educators, chartering 18 authorities, founders are actually contacting Justin 19 to use this model at their school. 20 So, as you know, the school in Albuquerque 21 started in 2014, Las Montañas, I don't know what 22 year that was, but they use the Explore Learning 23 Model to modify -- a modified version of it -- for 24 their high school redesign not too long ago. 25 We opened -- there's a school now in</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">32</p> <p>1 And we have, as I understand, been 2 contacted by educators in Socorro and in Santa Fe 3 who want us to use this model in those communities. 4 And Justin's response, I believe -- correct me if 5 I'm wrong -- "Get your community together and get 6 back and call me when you're ready," because this 7 speaks to the success of this model when others are 8 wanting to implement this innovative model at their 9 school. 10 So thank you. 11 THE CHAIR: Thank you. All right. So now 12 we're going to go -- I'm going to pause for a second 13 and see if there's anybody here from Rio Rancho 14 Public Schools, from the school district, who is 15 here to speak. Or anyone online. Or anyone 16 anywhere. 17 Okay. All right. Thank you. 18 All right. So that'll go -- we'll go to 19 comments from the public. 20 I have four folks signed up to speak. So 21 we'll go ahead and -- I'm going to call you in 22 order. And if you could just come up -- there's a 23 microphone here by the table. You'll just stand up 24 and give your comments. If you could limit it to 25 two or three minutes, that would be great.</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">31</p> <p>1 Las Cruces, New Mexico. 2 What I want to tell you is that the other 3 schools that you see listed there are states or 4 places that contacted Justin, or educators/founders 5 or chartering authorities that contacted Justin and 6 said, "We've heard about your model. We want to 7 implement a school here. We want you to help us." 8 There is a school in Las Vegas, Nevada, 9 that opened in 2020. 10 There's one in Arizona that's been 11 approved. 12 Central Michigan University. If you know 13 in Michigan, Michigan can authorize. And this is 14 really, I think, a neat story to show about the 15 success of this model. They take applications, as 16 you do, but they also solicit models that they want 17 to bring and have in their portfolio. And they 18 contacted Justin and asked him to apply in Michigan, 19 which was no -- he had no intention of doing so, but 20 has helped form a school that's going to be opening 21 here in September in Livonia, Michigan. 22 And, similarly, in California, with a 23 former senator who wants to form a school also 24 somehow heard about Justin and asked him to help 25 with that school.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">33</p> <p>1 The first one is Dotty McKinney. And when 2 you come up, if you could just introduce yourself, 3 make sure you state your first and last name, 4 especially if I said it improperly. 5 FROM THE FLOOR: Thank you. My name is 6 Dotty McKinney. I'm retired from 35 years with 7 public education in the State of New Mexico, 8 specializing in construction and in procurement. 9 And I am just amazed at Explore Academy. 10 I had no idea. I've known Karen for about six, 11 seven years, I believe. And it's just such a 12 dynamic, fresh approach to education for kids. 13 And I would sincerely hope that you would 14 consider letting this grow to Rio Rancho. 15 Thank you very much. 16 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Next I have 17 Brittany Lovato. 18 FROM THE FLOOR: Hello. My name is 19 Brittany Lovato. And I am a resident of Rio Rancho. 20 I'm also the parent of a new kindergarten student 21 that will be attending Explore Academy. 22 And I am really excited about the school. 23 My son is very excited to be attending. We live at 24 the edge of Rio Rancho in Bernalillo. We are 25 willing to have my little one commute almost an hour</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">34</p> <p>1 to get to school in Albuquerque. And it would be 2 really amazing to bring the school and -- the school 3 into Rio Rancho so my little ones can benefit from 4 this. I have another one that will be attending 5 kindergarten the year after, and for anybody else to 6 take advantage of this school. 7 So thank you. 8 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Next I have Lisa 9 Hughes. 10 FROM THE FLOOR: So my name is Lisa 11 Hughes, and I have two children who attend Explore 12 Academy. We live in Rio Rancho, and they previously 13 went to traditional public school. While that was 14 initially fine, we quickly found out that not all 15 students fit in the box that is traditional public 16 school. 17 My daughter is a good kid who just wants 18 to go to school, get good grades, and show what she 19 knows in more ways than just a test. She's a hard 20 worker who will put in 150 percent on all her 21 working projects. She is a quiet, cautious student 22 who will make sure she has all the knowledge and 23 understanding before participating in class. 24 When she was in fifth grade, we knew the 25 transition to middle school was fast approaching.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">36</p> <p>1 If we had not found Explore Academy, we 2 would have a much different story at this time. I 3 cannot thank the teachers and staff at the school 4 enough for bringing the joy back to learning for my 5 daughter. 6 I also transferred my son, who is now a 7 third-grader, to Explore Academy, and he says, "The 8 flavors are a great way for me to learn through 9 choice, projects, and hands-on learning. The 10 teachers trust us and make us create learning with 11 them. Everything about Explore is awesome," he 12 says. 13 This model works for students and values 14 students for who they are. I have a daughter who 15 made honor roll and is fully invested in her school 16 because of the unique model and growth mindset. It 17 would be a benefit to students and families to have 18 more campuses of Explore Academy to truly show that 19 all students can be successful. 20 THE CHAIR: Thank you. 21 And last I have Lexie Hughes. 22 MR. SCOTT HOUSE: My name is Lexie Hughes, 23 and I am going into seventh grade, and I'm going to 24 be web leader. I attended traditional public school 25 in Rio Rancho from kindergarten until fifth grade.</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">35</p> <p>1 And from what we heard about class size and the size 2 of the school in general, we realized we needed to 3 find a different option for her. 4 She would have just been a number and not 5 been seen as a student at the traditional middle 6 school. She, too, was fearful and worried and even 7 asked to be home-schooled after fifth grade. 8 Luckily, after many searches, we found 9 Explore Academy and we were able to secure a spot 10 for her. This was a true blessing and has totally 11 been a positive journey for my daughter. 12 Explore Academy's philosophy of student 13 choice made my daughter excited about learning 14 again. She knows that she is an important student 15 due to the value Explore Academy places on small 16 class sizes and the autonomy of knowing teachers 17 will respond to her when she e-mails them for help. 18 The staff members support any and all 19 students and make them feel that they are important. 20 I now have a student who wants to go to school, 21 feels connected to her peers and teachers, has 22 joined the student council, and even went to the 23 state student council conference as the only 24 representative from middle school from Explore 25 Academy.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">37</p> <p>1 I remember when I was in fifth grade, I was so 2 scared for middle school. But Explore Academy has 3 made middle school and learning in general fun. 4 Some ways that Explore Academy makes 5 learning fun is all the flavors you get to choose 6 from and all the flavor projects. Explore Academy 7 is such a good school, and it should be all over the 8 world. 9 Explore Academy gave me confidence with 10 teachers who -- that understand that not all kids 11 learn in the same way. The model of Explore Academy 12 makes me feel connected to my school and is the 13 place I want to graduate. All my teachers care 14 about me and want me to be successful, and I always 15 know that I can talk to my teachers when I need 16 help. I hope more kids can attend Explore Academy. 17 THE CHAIR: Thank you so much. 18 All right. 19 Once again, thank you to everybody who has 20 come. We're so grateful to see the room full and 21 see everyone here tonight. 22 (Inaudible comment.) 23 THE CHAIR: Sure. I'll give -- one moment 24 real quick. If anybody is here and would like to 25 come speak, we definitely have time. This is your</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">38</p> <p>1 chance. We care deeply about hearing from you.  2 So if you are here and didn't have a  3 chance to sign up, you're more than welcome to. If  4 you're online, you can raise your digital hand, and  5 Lucy will let you in to speak.  6 So I'll pause for one second just to see  7 if anybody would like to.  8 Okay. Great. If I can have -- those of  9 you who are up here, if you all want to come line up  10 right here. And, Lucy, while they're lining up, if  11 you want to -- you said there's one or two?  12 MS. LUCY VALENZUELA: There's two. So  13 (inaudible.)  14 THE CHAIR: Okay. Great.  15 All right. I'm going to go to the -- here  16 first. And then we're going to go online, and then  17 I'll come to you all here.  18 Once again, if you could limit your  19 comments to two minutes or so, introduce your first  20 and last name, and then you can make your comment.  21 FROM THE FLOOR: My name is Brianna  22 Boulanger. I'm a graduate from Rio Rancho Public  23 Schools. I went to Cleveland High School. I grew  24 up in Rio Rancho. I now live in Albuquerque and  25 went to UNM.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">40</p> <p>1 Lucy, what's the name of someone online?  2 MS. LUCY VALENZUELA: (Inaudible.)  3 THE CHAIR: Karyl Ann Armbruster. We know  4 that name. Go ahead.  5 Ms. Armbruster, you can go ahead and  6 introduce yourself, and I'll go to him next.  7 ONLINE SPEAKER: Yes. I'm Karyl Ann  8 Armbruster. I am a former Public Education  9 Commissioner from 2015 through the end of 2020.  10 This is at least the fifth time I've heard  11 Explore, from the time I got on and they wanted to  12 expand to the Las Cruces one, to everything in  13 between.  14 And what I find extraordinary about it is  15 that it's really just an ordinary school. They're  16 not teaching dance; they're not teaching music;  17 they're not a bilingual school. They're just giving  18 kids some choices on how to learn the basic learning  19 stuff that you all had to learn.  20 As a former special ed teacher of  21 39 years, I like the fact that the classes are  22 broken down into parts, so that if they didn't do  23 well on grammar, they can take it again, but they  24 don't have to take the whole class again, or they  25 don't have to repeat the entire class, because each</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">39</p> <p>1 And while I did have a good educational  2 experience, I was always a gifted student, and I  3 wasn't, like, sufficiently challenged in my high  4 school years.  5 And having seen the model that Explore  6 Academy offers and the ways in which they help those  7 special populations, including gifted students and  8 special education students, I wish that would have  9 been an opportunity I had. I really think I would  10 have enjoyed that opportunity.  11 I also spent the first two years of my  12 undergraduate education at UNM being an undecided  13 student, and I didn't know what I wanted my major to  14 be because I hadn't had the opportunity to explore  15 different things that I was interested in.  16 And so if I had been at Explore Academy  17 where they get to make those choices early and get  18 to choose different flavors for all of their  19 classes, I think I would have been more successful  20 in my undergraduate education and been able to make  21 that decision sooner.  22 So I hope that you'll let Rio Rancho have  23 this opportunity for future students like me.  24 Thank you.  25 THE CHAIR: Thank you.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">41</p> <p>1 one has to -- you have to get a B, I believe, in  2 each section of the class.  3 So I do support this school and have  4 supported the school for six years, and I hope that  5 this school does come to fruition.  6 Thank you.  7 THE CHAIR: Thank you. All right. Go  8 ahead and tell us your first and last name.  9 FROM THE FLOOR: My name is Jace Hughes.  10 I've been in a traditional public school for pre-K  11 through first grade, and I didn't like it. And when  12 I found Explore Academy, I was really excited. And  13 I'd heard about the flavors. I -- when I got the  14 course catalog for the first year, I looked at the  15 flavors right away, 'cause I was excited. And then  16 I hope that kids in Rio Rancho can do that.  17 THE CHAIR: Thank you. I think I've --  18 you spoke better than many folks that I've heard in  19 Santa Fe speak, and I thank you.  20 All right. We'll have you come on. And  21 then we'll go to the second online person after this  22 one.  23 Thank you. If you can introduce yourself,  24 first and last name first.  25 FROM THE FLOOR: Good afternoon. I'm</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">42</p> <p>1 Scott Mathena, a Rio Rancho resident for 23 years, 2 now retired, and now doing a small business here in 3 Rio Rancho.</p> <p>4 So before Explore was around, our oldest 5 was -- went to Questa Del Sol for kindergarten. And 6 then we started talking about charter schools, 7 because my friend's daughter went to a charter 8 school outside of Rio Rancho.</p> <p>9 So they started a charter school. This is 10 long before Explore Academy started. And we've been 11 driving them to Albuquerque for -- well, he's a 12 senior now, so, you know, 12 years going into 13 Albuquerque, which, for us, living out near 550 and 14 Unser is about 27 miles a day to get them down 15 there.</p> <p>16 And our youngest is going into ninth 17 grade.</p> <p>18 If I would have found Explore earlier, we 19 would have hopefully gotten into Explore and the 20 charter schools they are because of different 21 choices.</p> <p>22 Our charter school is a very small charter 23 school to go to now and doesn't give them as much 24 freedom for choice to determine what their careers 25 are or what they want to do.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">44</p> <p>1 yourself, and you can go ahead and speak now.</p> <p>2 ONLINE SPEAKER: My name is Lori McRoy. 3 And we recently moved to Placitas from Wisconsin. I 4 have a Master's degree in Special Ed, Caseman [ph] 5 College, and I have a bachelor's degree as well. 6 The majority of my career, I spent being a principal 7 in charter schools, all different models. Some of 8 the schools were working with universities; some 9 were working with the city.</p> <p>10 I'm really impressed with this model. 11 Hearing kids talking about how much they love 12 learning and using a vernacular that they've learned 13 from the school and from teachers, that is a very 14 rare thing to see in this day and age.</p> <p>15 I said I would never teach again after I 16 taught in a suburban school. This is the first 17 school that I feel like would be an amazing 18 experience for kids and for staff and for parents.</p> <p>19 So I commend this model and look forward 20 to seeing the progress that kids and teachers make. 21 So thank you so much.</p> <p>22 THE CHAIR: Thank you. 23 FROM THE FLOOR: I feel like -- oh, 24 just -- the tall person went before me. 25 Hi. My name is Melinda DerGregorian. I</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">43</p> <p>1 He's a senior. He wants to go into 2 engineering. Explore would have been a better 3 choice for that in the model that they are going to 4 do to give them the academics to say if he does like 5 engineering -- and he wants to go into aeronautical 6 engineering. My daughter, she's not really sure 7 what she wants to do.</p> <p>8 When they told me that they were going to 9 have an Explore Academy up here, I asked what 10 grades. However, our child won't be able to be in 11 this school, because -- Rio Rancho needs this. 12 Rio Rancho needs the ability to have different 13 learning capabilities for different students.</p> <p>14 I don't feel like my daughter is very 15 challenged right now. And I think Explore, this 16 type of curriculum, would be something that she 17 would enjoy.</p> <p>18 And a lot of her friends did move to 19 Explore.</p> <p>20 So Rio Rancho has grown tremendously since 21 I started living here. And the amount of education, 22 this is just needed for the students that aren't for 23 a traditional-type setting. So...</p> <p>24 THE CHAIR: Thank you. 25 All right. Lori, if you could introduce</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">45</p> <p>1 have the perspective of three different ways of 2 looking at Rio Rancho Public Schools.</p> <p>3 I've been a resident here for about 16, 4 17 years. And all three of my children graduated 5 from Rio Rancho Public Schools. I had one that 6 graduated from Rio Rancho, one from Cleveland, and 7 the -- another one, actually, Cyber Academy, 8 actually.</p> <p>9 But I also worked in the public schools 10 for eight years.</p> <p>11 Now I'm in real estate, so I have another 12 perspective that way. And what I think is really 13 great about this is, of course, I love the students, 14 and all three of my kids were totally different 15 learners, high achievers, different stories. But I 16 know my daughter, she just finished her freshman 17 year in college, and she's kind of like, "I wish I 18 had been able to kind of learn a few different 19 things, and just -- kind of just go out there and -- 20 she's, like, "I have no clue what I want to do." She 21 just has no perspective.</p> <p>22 But also I think it also teaches the kids 23 to be advocates for themselves and make choices for 24 themselves. 25 But as being in the school system for</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">46</p> <p>1 eight years as an educational assistant, what I saw 2 is nobody has any clue how hard these teachers work. 3 And it's, kind of, when you have that one model of 4 teaching, it kind of takes away some of the joy that 5 they feel. 6 And I think a teacher who's excited to 7 teach, it goes onto the kids and will make the kids 8 more excited to learn, and giving the teachers some 9 choice and some ways to feel like the joy of why 10 they got into this job in the first place, because 11 it wasn't for the money. 12 So, anyways -- and, also -- so, third, 13 from the business perspective. I love Rio Rancho 14 and I -- you know, I don't steer people to 15 Rio Rancho. But I say, okay, let's go look at the 16 statistics. 17 And I love this community. I'll never 18 leave. But I do think that it will just be one more 19 piece that will kind of steer people a little bit 20 more into our community. 21 And, I mean, just looking around this 22 room, how many people I know from Rio Rancho, it's 23 that small-town feel. But it's not a small town 24 anymore, and it's -- the educators, we just -- they 25 love their community; they love their kids. And,</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">48</p> <p>1 Talented option within school. 2 So I hope that it will come to Rio Rancho, 3 and it'll be a closer option for me as parent, a 4 working parent. Getting them all the way to 5 Albuquerque is not for me. So I really hope it can 6 come closer. 7 Thank you, guys. 8 THE CHAIR: Thank you. 9 FROM THE FLOOR: Hello. My name is 10 Nichole Moberly. I have lived in Rio Rancho my 11 entire life. I went to kindergarten through 12th 12 grade in Rio Rancho Public Schools, went on to 13 New Mexico University of New Mexico, have a 14 Bachelor's K-3, have taught in APS. This year I'll 15 be in Rio Rancho teaching third grade. 16 I have four kids of my own. One, my 17 seventh-grader, will be in a charter school in 18 Rio Rancho this year. And then I have a 19 fifth-grader, a third-grader, and a first-grader. 20 And all of those three younger kids they all have a 21 diagnosis. One has Down Syndrome. One has ADHD. 22 One has sensory processing disorder and anxiety. 23 As a parent and as an educator and as a 24 parent who was also home-schooled, choosing to say, 25 "I need to take my kids out for a while because I</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">47</p> <p>1 anyways, I'm excited about it. 2 THE CHAIR: Thank you. 3 FROM THE FLOOR: Thank you. Hi. My name 4 is Katie Raspa. I have been a teacher for 15 years, 5 a relatively new transplant to New Mexico from 6 Maryland. We love Rio Rancho, love everything about 7 it. 8 I've got a rising fifth-grader and a 9 rising third-grader. My rising fifth-grader had the 10 privilege and the opportunity to be in Gifted and 11 Talented this year for a small portion of her school 12 day. And that was all we heard about the 13 project-based learning, the choices that she got. 14 She had a fabulous teacher, but I think 15 the teacher was a little bit constricted with the 16 curriculum, and it just was not something that 17 excited my daughter. 18 So my rising third-grader, now, this year, 19 she'll have the opportunity to possibly join Gifted 20 and Talented. And she's really hoping she can, 21 because she wants that opportunity. And as a 22 teacher and as a mom, I don't -- I want every child 23 to have that opportunity for the choice and the 24 project-based learning and all of that, not just the 25 very small portion of kids that get that Gifted and</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">49</p> <p>1 don't like what is being offered," I think it's 2 really important for you guys to know from the 3 parents' perspective, also the educators' 4 perspective, that there are a lot of kids who just 5 do not fit, that -- you know, the whole square peg 6 in a round hole. 7 I would be thrilled to have this option in 8 Rio Rancho. It would mean so much to parents whose 9 kids cannot sit still, whose kids just do not learn 10 by pencil and paper. And that is what a lot of our 11 kids are given. A lot of our teachers are 12 constricted by that. 13 And I agree with Deborah -- lady in the 14 pink, wherever she went -- you know, she had 15 remarked about kids needing options. And I 16 completely agree with her. 17 So as a parent and an educator, please, 18 will you please consider this for the future of our 19 children and for our community? 20 So thank you. 21 THE CHAIR: All right. I'm going to go to 22 you, and then we have one more person online after 23 you. 24 FROM THE FLOOR: I think this would be a 25 great opportunity for kids that live --</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">50</p> <p>1 THE CHAIR: Sorry. Can I have you pause 2 real quick? Can you tell us your first and last 3 name first and then start over? I should have told 4 you that. It was my fault. 5 FROM THE FLOOR: My name is Carmela 6 Correjo. And I think that this would be a great 7 opportunity for kids that live closer to Rio Rancho 8 so they can be closer to their school. Thank you 9 for your time. 10 THE CHAIR: Thank you. All right. Lucy, 11 what's the person's name online? 12 MS. LUCY VALENZUELA: Donna -- 13 ONLINE SPEAKER: Yes. Hello. 14 THE CHAIR: -- donna, if you could 15 introduce yourself, first and last name, and then 16 you can speak. 17 ONLINE SPEAKER: My name is Donna. I am 18 from Madison, Wisconsin. I'm watching from afar 19 looking at this wonderful program your folks are 20 talking about starting. 21 I totally support the idea. I'm 22 particularly impressed with the students who already 23 spoke. Anyone who talks about course curriculum and 24 what flavor they would like, I think -- I think you 25 have to give these kids this opportunity.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">52</p> <p>1 I just totally throw my support behind 2 Rio Rancho. I know how hard -- I think Karen 3 Woerner perhaps is one of the people that is working 4 on this, it's my understanding. And I know how hard 5 she has worked throughout her career. If I had kids 6 or grandkids, I would want them to go there or be in 7 a program like that. 8 And so I just send from afar my 9 100 percent support. Thank you. 10 THE CHAIR: Thank you. 11 FROM THE FLOOR: Hi. My name is Melissa 12 Vredenberg. I live here in Rio Rancho. I've lived 13 here for about eight years. But I am standing here. 14 I would like to express as proof that this model 15 works. This school works. 16 My son, he -- I'm headed day after 17 tomorrow to his pinning ceremony. He's becoming a 18 dental assistant. He's graduated, and I'm very 19 proud. And he's a product of Explore Academy. 20 When he came to Explore Academy, he was 21 far behind. He's dyslexic. He has short-term 22 memory deficit. He was way behind in school. 23 And I remember coming to Justin in tears. 24 And I was, like, my kid's flunking out of school, 25 and I don't know what I'm going to do.</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">51</p> <p>1 Anyway, my background is in international 2 experiential education. I was -- my husband and I 3 both worked on the staff for the international 4 program called Up With People for years. And my 5 undergraduate degree is in French and Spanish. And 6 my Master's is International Public Affairs. 7 And I've always worked in the 8 international nonprofit world in international 9 leadership development. And as a member of Phi Beta 10 Kappa, I am also particularly interested in the 11 importance of schooling with regard to letters and 12 science and fine arts and well-rounded education and 13 experiential education. 14 Up With People is one of the leaders in 15 experiential education, along with Harvard, who was 16 one of the first colleges to recognize the 17 importance of international experiential education. 18 I have already referred to some of the 19 folks there. The person who I know best with regard 20 to a charter school -- and that is a woman who 21 started, years ago, an international multilingual, 22 not even bilingual, charter school in St. Paul, 23 Minnesota, that has just really flourished. And she 24 has agreed to be -- to advise some -- somewhat on 25 this project.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">53</p> <p>1 And he -- you know, he has -- he had lost 2 his ambition because he fell through the cracks of 3 public school. 4 And they didn't test him, nothing like 5 that. They just kind of pushed him along. But he 6 was so far behind. And I was so freaked out, and I 7 didn't know what to do. 8 And Justin said, "Bring him. Bring him. 9 We'll get him through, and we'll help him." 10 And I was, like, oh, my God, am I doing 11 the right thing? Took him out of public school, 12 brought him to Explore Academy. 13 Ms. Boatman, one of our math teachers -- 14 she's now part of the team -- she brought him up 15 three levels in math in one year. He stayed in for 16 lunch, but so did she. And she brought him up to 17 where he needed to be. 18 Same thing with the English teachers. 19 These teachers care. They put their whole 20 heart into everything that they do, and they saved 21 my son. 22 And so from there, I became part of the 23 PTO. From there, I became one of the employees. 24 And I had these degrees, but I was a stay-at-home 25 mom and was, like, I'm not like ready to do, like,</p>

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1 anything significant.

2 And I had Ms. Fraga, who was our principal

3 at the time, said "You have to teach. You have an

4 education. What are you doing? We'd love having

5 you here in your capacity. You would be an amazing

6 teacher."

7 They not only pushed my son; they pushed

8 me. And I'm going into my second year of teaching

9 at Explore Academy. It not only works for the

10 students; it works for the people who work here.

11 And so my whole heart is with Explore

12 Academy. And I'm here to tell you that Rio Rancho,

13 we've -- I live here. We made the trek all these

14 years. But Rio Rancho would be so fortunate to have

15 this school, because me and my family, my two

16 younger children now attend the elementary and the

17 middle school. And they would be so fortunate to

18 have this school, because I am proof that it works.

19 Thank you.

20 THE CHAIR: Thank you. And thank you once

21 again to everybody who spoke. And thank you for

22 everyone who's here tonight.

23 All right. That's going to take us to our

24 last item, which is PEC questions.

25 I'm going to do a quick reminder for

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1 Commissioners. You can ask any questions to the

2 applicant. We are not, today, going to be

3 discussing kind of opinions of it. It's really

4 information-seeking.

5 You will have that opportunity on Thursday

6 to discuss your concerns. But if you need further

7 information today, that's really what this time is

8 for.

9 So please refrain from, kind of, your

10 opinions on the application itself and more

11 directing a question towards the applicant team and

12 getting information.

13 Okay? All right.

14 That being said, Commissioner Gipson, you

15 first.

16 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: I think my

17 question -- I have no questions about your program,

18 you know. My questions are more about the unknowns.

19 And it's primarily with the start-up and the CSP

20 Grant and the changes.

21 And I know Louie is here, and he's going

22 to help us probably tomorrow with that. But my

23 understanding -- and I've been tracking -- trying to

24 track the changes in it.

25 So one of my questions is I think, at this

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1 point in time, in order to get the grant, you have

2 to have a -- you have to have a facility before you

3 can pull any money. I think that was one of the

4 changes that came through that I read.

5 So I'm just -- my -- it's curiosity about

6 a challenge with -- because I know how hard it is to

7 start up without being able to pull money. And how

8 do you sign a contract? You know, it's, like, this

9 vicious circle that we keep getting into with this

10 grant money.

11 So I don't know whether if you've even had

12 time to even flesh that out at this point in time.

13 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: I mean, we have --

14 Louie and I have -- spoke on the phone last week, I

15 feel like. We talked about the current application

16 cycle and the funding that's remaining that the

17 school could potentially seek out.

18 And then we spoke about the benefits of

19 waiting for the next grant cycle. Of course, there

20 are some unknowns there that we discussed. And I

21 think our team has discussed that internally.

22 And so we're -- he and I are planning on

23 getting back on the phone here in the next week to

24 obviously see how this process plays out.

25 But I think the -- there is more certainty

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1 with -- with applying for the -- the funding within

2 the current cycle than there is with the next cycle.

3 And there might be more money in the next cycle, but

4 there are also unknowns that come with -- the State

5 has to apply, and then they have to be awarded, and

6 there's -- I think the new application, from what

7 Louie and I spoke about, was there's different

8 requirements now they're adding on, of course, and

9 that makes sense.

10 So we've discussed it internally. We

11 haven't made a decision, which we will -- we'll

12 pursue. But I'm thinking that this -- the safest

13 approach, if we have to, would be to apply for the

14 current round -- the current cycle that's just

15 finishing, because there's funding available for new

16 school start-ups.

17 I will -- anything I say incorrectly?

18 There -- okay.

19 MS. KAREN WOERNER: I think maybe, Justin,

20 you want to add about the -- I don't know if the

21 facility is part of it. But do you want to speak to

22 the facility?

23 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: So we're well ahead

24 of the facility curve this time around, just

25 ensuring that we're ahead of that curve.

<p style="text-align: right;">58</p> <p>1 The -- we've -- we've had our real estate 2 team looking at facilities for the last six months 3 when we decided, obviously, to put in an 4 application. 5 We currently have a facility that's under 6 contract at present. Also, we built into that 7 contract some leeway. In the event that we're not 8 approved, we can -- you know, we can back out of 9 that contract. 10 But upon approval, we do have investors 11 allowing the school and its foundation to purchase 12 the building by November and start renovations 13 shortly thereafter to be ready for the opening next 14 fall. 15 So, yeah, I wanted to make sure that 16 the -- and the facility we found, I think, given 17 facility unpredictability within the current 18 economic environment, we found a facility that we 19 like that will allow the school to grow into it, 20 located primarily in the center, where we can still 21 reach students further north in Rio Rancho and into 22 Bernalillo. 23 And we feel like because it's on 528, it 24 does provide good access for families. So we're -- 25 I think we're very happy with the facility</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">60</p> <p>1 Correct me. 2 So when Justin first started the school 3 and people started approaching him about the model, 4 he founded an LLC to help share this model with 5 others. So that team, Explore Learning Systems, 6 provides various supports via contract services. 7 So, obviously, the first year of this 8 school in Rio Rancho, the portion of ELS, that 9 contract that covers the Explore Learning model, 10 would obviously be needed to get this off the 11 ground. So that portion of it would be what I would 12 say is a sole source if you talk about procurement. 13 But the other services provided can be 14 contracted, and there will be an RFP that goes out 15 for those services, and the board will decide and 16 award based on the RFP results. 17 That includes things like your school 18 business official, support from compliance, support 19 from special ed. Whatever it might be on our team 20 that we can provide support in would be an option 21 for the schools to choose. 22 I did notice in the application that the 23 team that reviewed the application said that the 24 budgeted amount wasn't sufficient. 25 We realize that it's pretty low. And I'll</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">59</p> <p>1 opportunity that we have ended up with. And, again, 2 we've secured it with -- with some of the 3 contingency planning involved to allow our team to 4 get out of contract if -- you know, with a 5 non-approval, I should say. 6 THE CHAIR: If I take that March Madness 7 course, will it help me fill out my bracket? 8 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: It will. It will. 9 It's all pretty hard. Just perfect timing. 10 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: Any help I can get. 11 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: (Inaudible) money. 12 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: I know. So one 13 more -- just one more quick question. 14 The -- you know, all the schools that you 15 have listed there, I guess I'm -- I'm not quite 16 clear about Explore Network and the -- so are all of 17 these schools, do they all contract for a core of 18 services? 19 MS. KAREN WOERNER: Yeah. So each school, 20 as you know, is an independent school with its own 21 head administrator and governing board. However, 22 they are -- they can contract with Explore Learning 23 Systems. 24 So what happened, I believe -- and I'm 25 probably going to put words in Justin's mouth here.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">61</p> <p>1 let Justin speak to that if you'd like. But I 2 wanted to just say that we are doing this already 3 for schools. We know we can be much more 4 cost-effective than many of the services that are 5 out there. So I'd be surprised if schools chose not 6 to contract with this team. They certainly have the 7 option to through an RFP process and annual contract 8 review. 9 So yes, to answer your question more 10 briefly, yes. 11 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: So is that that -- 12 I'm not the contract person; Commissioner Robbins 13 is. Is that the \$30,000 in the first year? Is that 14 what that is? 15 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: I'll have to go back 16 and look at the budget to confirm. It ramps up. 17 And we know having opened schools, that first year, 18 even the second year, cash is tight, and the 19 principal is going to have their hair on fire for 20 the entire -- and principal burnout in charter 21 schools is a very real thing, and the life span of a 22 principal is very short. 23 And we -- finding a good person that is a 24 charter leader is different than a school principal. 25 And I think to support that, our goal is to try and</p>



62	<p>1 alleviate -- and I tell our principals this -- is</p> <p>2 that we want to help you do the job that you want to</p> <p>3 do as a principal, because, as a charter school</p> <p>4 principal, they are also a superintendent, and</p> <p>5 there's all that district -- the district tasks that</p> <p>6 come with that.</p> <p>7 So our goal is to have them be out and</p> <p>8 about, not tied to their desk. Be in classrooms, be</p> <p>9 with parents, with students, be at lunch, be on the</p> <p>10 playground, and to not feel like they're being</p> <p>11 worked to the bone.</p> <p>12 That is what we want to try to alleviate</p> <p>13 to keep that leader in place and to keep that</p> <p>14 relationship and that commitment strong.</p> <p>15 We fully realize that it's -- especially</p> <p>16 early on, it's -- I think it's very, very</p> <p>17 cost-effective for the schools. Our team is built</p> <p>18 out to have different areas of specialization that</p> <p>19 schools can or cannot take advantage of.</p> <p>20 So if they want enrollment help, if they</p> <p>21 want S.T.A.R.S. reporting help, we have individuals</p> <p>22 for that. If that person has done it for years that</p> <p>23 they've hired on who also teaches English, more</p> <p>24 power to them. Absolutely. It's going to save them</p> <p>25 money.</p>	64	<p>1 have astigmatism so sometimes my lines don't go</p> <p>2 right. So I might have just been looking at</p> <p>3 something --</p> <p>4 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: We have a second</p> <p>5 principal coming in in year two.</p> <p>6 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: Got you. So it's a</p> <p>7 double salary.</p> <p>8 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: Starting with K-12</p> <p>9 and 6, now the 6 becomes 7, there needed to be some</p> <p>10 focus on middle school as well as the building of</p> <p>11 the elementary. While there are principals that</p> <p>12 cover K-8, those grade levels have different needs</p> <p>13 as well.</p> <p>14 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: It makes way more</p> <p>15 sense. Because when I saw it --</p> <p>16 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: Huge increase.</p> <p>17 MS. ELISHA VARELA: (Inaudible.)</p> <p>18 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: Yeah. So that makes</p> <p>19 total sense.</p> <p>20 This is my last question.</p> <p>21 And I know equity councils are difficult</p> <p>22 to get. Governing councils are hard to get, you</p> <p>23 know, where you keep asking the same people to do</p> <p>24 the volunteer job for everything.</p> <p>25 So my only question is, is there an</p>
63	<p>1 That's what we want. It's definitely a</p> <p>2 pick-and-choose.</p> <p>3 MS. KAREN WOERNER: Justin prompted my</p> <p>4 mind. Many of you know I worked at the Public</p> <p>5 Education Department and have always been a fan of</p> <p>6 Explore Academy. When I first visited them in 2017,</p> <p>7 I was blown away that here was a high school at the</p> <p>8 time -- just a high school, ninth through twelfth,</p> <p>9 doing standards-based instruction, assessment, and</p> <p>10 grading. So I've always been kind of a fan of the</p> <p>11 school.</p> <p>12 But when Justin said to me, "We do the</p> <p>13 work so the principals can focus on professional</p> <p>14 development and student achievement," I was, like,</p> <p>15 "How can I say no to that?"</p> <p>16 That's what we do and why I joined the</p> <p>17 team. Just wanted to share that.</p> <p>18 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: So talking about</p> <p>19 tight money, it looked -- and I might have looked at</p> <p>20 it incorrectly. It looked like the first year, the</p> <p>21 head administrator was going to make around 95-ish,</p> <p>22 and then the second year it bumped up to, like, 175.</p> <p>23 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: The head</p> <p>24 administrator? I think it was a --</p> <p>25 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: I could have -- I</p>	65	<p>1 intention for the school that there be a separate</p> <p>2 equity council? Or a shared equity council?</p> <p>3 Separate?</p> <p>4 MS. ELISHA VARELA: Hannah can actually</p> <p>5 speak to that.</p> <p>6 MS. HANNAH PERIA: Yeah. No, definitely a</p> <p>7 separate council. So we'll be looking at the</p> <p>8 community and seeking parents, students who are</p> <p>9 going to be at our school, and also educators, but</p> <p>10 from the community as well.</p> <p>11 We do recognize that, just as folks were</p> <p>12 speaking about the many hats that charter leaders</p> <p>13 wear, it can be really helpful to have networks to</p> <p>14 bounce ideas off of.</p> <p>15 And so we do have the opportunity to</p> <p>16 connect leaders to others who implement this model.</p> <p>17 But that can be more as a thought partnership;</p> <p>18 whereas, the actual equity council will be looking</p> <p>19 at the data for our school population, for our</p> <p>20 community, determining those needs and then ensuring</p> <p>21 that we're following through on actions and</p> <p>22 advisements that are serving those students best.</p> <p>23 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: I appreciate the</p> <p>24 fact that everyone that spoke referred to</p> <p>25 traditional public schools and a charter school,</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">66</p> <p>1 not, "My kids used to go to a public school," you 2 know. So I was, like, like, charters are a public 3 school. So I -- it's a tough mindset to shift. So 4 I appreciate that. Thank you. 5 THE CHAIR: All right. Commissioner 6 Voigt? 7 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Thanks. So the only 8 question that came up as I was listening to everyone 9 speaking is how do you anticipate any shift in your 10 enrollment from your current campus to you here? 11 Because there were a lot of folks here that spoke 12 that they're really looking forward to not having to 13 drive an hour round-trip. 14 So how does that enrollment plan to shift, 15 and how have you built in for that? 16 MS. TERI PIERCE: Sure. So, obviously, 17 the current situation is what drives it. And that 18 Albuquerque charter had 1,100 applications for 19 300 spots. So it has a huge waiting list. 20 And about a third of those were from 21 Rio Rancho, Corrales, Bernalillo, Placitas. If you 22 take the ZIP Codes, the western side of Albuquerque, 23 it goes to 50 percent. 24 So if the question is, is there enough 25 interest to support two schools, I don't think</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">68</p> <p>1 THE CHAIR: Right. Commissioner Carrillo 2 and Commissioner Robbins. 3 COMMISSIONER CARRILLO: Well, that's 4 pretty incredible to have a waiting list like that 5 and the excitement around it. And -- so just a 6 couple of little notes here really quickly. 7 In the flavors, is -- that kids are 8 choosing, is there -- are there elements of civics 9 and government? 10 MS. ELISHA VARELA: Yeah. Well, the way 11 that the flavors are broken down, it's very similar 12 to as if you would take, like, a yearlong course in 13 a traditional public school, or a semester course. 14 And whatever units would normally be taught, that's 15 kind of how each seminar is broken out. 16 So civics, government, all those standards 17 that have their normal place in the scope and 18 sequence of the high school, they still have 19 seminars that correspond with all of those 20 standards, and they all have their own flavors. 21 They are taught in a way -- and, actually, 22 Rio Rancho won't have that for another six, seven 23 years. If you look at the Albuquerque campus, you 24 can actually look at the social studies section, and 25 see the government and economics classes that are</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">67</p> <p>1 there's really any question about it. 2 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: I'll come in about 3 just the grade levels. 4 We can't offer a K-12 to start. And so 5 the K-12 and 6, there will be families that their 6 students -- you know, if they're a tenth-grade 7 family, let's say, going into seventh grade, they 8 will not be able to enter -- you know, they'll have 9 to go to the Albuquerque school. They'll have to 10 stay there and can't move over. There will be 11 families that do move because it's closer. 12 But the families that start there, we feel 13 like will grow, and then the backfilling of 14 kindergarten and sixth grade. Really, sixth grade 15 is probably the biggest point at which Albuquerque 16 will experience some shift in enrollment. We'll 17 have more families who apply here, maybe apply to 18 both, depending on where they're selected. With the 19 waiting list, we feel like that impact will not hurt 20 the Albuquerque campus. That's the last thing we 21 want, obviously, is cannibalism of that particular 22 enrollment. 23 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Right. Right. 24 Right. 25 Thank you.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">69</p> <p>1 broken out and what flavors correspond. 2 And then in the elementary grades, all of 3 the standards for social studies are interwoven 4 within the humanities curriculum. 5 So when they're choosing a certain flavor, 6 all of those standards that are at the K-5 grades 7 are interwoven within that flavor that they choose. 8 So they're all flavored (inaudible) 9 standards, and then they use a common assessment to 10 make sure that all kids in all flavors understood 11 the same civics or, you know, social norms, soft 12 skills that are in those standards. So that's kind 13 of how they're broken out. 14 MS. HANNAH PERIA: If I could add just 15 briefly? For the K-5 standards, for those grade 16 levels that -- we don't call them those traditional 17 grade levels, because students are aware they need 18 to be in the humanities area, instead. But we've 19 already worked with educators, some of whom are in 20 this room, to develop the scope and sequence 21 integrating the new New Mexico social studies 22 standards, even though this is the planning year. 23 So we'll be testing those and be able to 24 pilot and also ensure that we're building aligned 25 assessments that are project-based and also more</p>

70	<p>1 traditional as the students get older.</p> <p>2 So that is something that the Albuquerque</p> <p>3 campus will be blocking and tackle a little bit for</p> <p>4 the teachers and making sure the students have the</p> <p>5 best civics education from the A level, or</p> <p>6 kindergarten-age level.</p> <p>7 COMMISSIONER CARRILLO: Sounds like</p> <p>8 citizenship, which is something that, in America, is</p> <p>9 missing in education. I can't remember who it was</p> <p>10 that said, "Schools aren't there to just move people</p> <p>11 into the career track and college. Schools are</p> <p>12 there to teach people to be citizens. And after</p> <p>13 that, they do whatever they want to do and</p> <p>14 contribute."</p> <p>15 So I was on the Santa Fe School Board for</p> <p>16 nine years. And, luckily, I'm still very close with</p> <p>17 the students at SFPS and particularly the super.</p> <p>18 Larry, I think, is fantastic. Something came up,</p> <p>19 and I just want to ask you this question.</p> <p>20 Do you see, at the other two campuses, any</p> <p>21 bullying? And, if so, how do you approach that,</p> <p>22 using that restorative model in some way? But how</p> <p>23 do you approach that? Because there was just a kid</p> <p>24 that recently -- and I'm meeting with Larry about</p> <p>25 it. She left. She left Santa Fe High. Nothing was</p>	72	<p>1 two, three times it's happening -- my daughter</p> <p>2 didn't wear her Explore shirt. She zipped her</p> <p>3 hoodie up and hoped no one would notice. If that</p> <p>4 happened a second time, she's going to get called in</p> <p>5 to say, "Right, why is this an issue? Why are we</p> <p>6 doing this?"</p> <p>7 My son was being too rough in PE and was</p> <p>8 hurting other kids; right?</p> <p>9 So I look at -- ADD.</p> <p>10 So I look at those things as a parent. I</p> <p>11 know it happened instantly. But if this was the</p> <p>12 second, third offense -- his first offense, he was</p> <p>13 called straight to the counselor to ask, "What's</p> <p>14 going on? Is there something that we should know?"</p> <p>15 Are you having a bad day?"</p> <p>16 Called the other girl in. They mediated</p> <p>17 it. It was a girl. She was being mean to him, he</p> <p>18 was being mean back to her. It was one discipline</p> <p>19 referral in, not ten in.</p> <p>20 I think that system really is helpful,</p> <p>21 even at the elementary level, where the counselors</p> <p>22 really integrate it into the discipline process, and</p> <p>23 it's not just an administrative burden. Because the</p> <p>24 counselor needs to know it. Because sometimes</p> <p>25 somebody is purposely falling asleep because there's</p>
71	<p>1 down. She's been pushed down the stairs. She's</p> <p>2 been beaten up in the bathroom for being different.</p> <p>3 It breaks my heart, because the bullies are still</p> <p>4 there. She left.</p> <p>5 Can you talk a little bit about how you</p> <p>6 handle situations like that?</p> <p>7 MS. ELISHA VARELA: Absolutely. I'm also</p> <p>8 speaking as the parent of an eighth- and</p> <p>9 ninth-grader. It is near and dear to me to think,</p> <p>10 when my kids go to that campus every day. Granted,</p> <p>11 it's a completely different school. It's</p> <p>12 Explore-Albuquerque.</p> <p>13 I don't ever want to feel like when they</p> <p>14 come home that they have felt like they're outcasts,</p> <p>15 which makes some of the parents more sensitive to it</p> <p>16 that are also part of the school.</p> <p>17 The discipline system and the way it is</p> <p>18 instantaneous is really helpful, because -- and both</p> <p>19 of my kids have been -- they're in this room, both</p> <p>20 of them. I'm going to embarrass them. They've both</p> <p>21 been written up for something at some point, which</p> <p>22 when you get that as the person on the other end,</p> <p>23 you're, like, "Seriously?" Like, "Why?"</p> <p>24 I immediately get it in my e-mail. The</p> <p>25 principals immediately get it. If it becomes one,</p>	73	<p>1 a million other things going on, not because they're</p> <p>2 miserable in your fourth-grade class.</p> <p>3 But the kid's falling asleep. Let's talk</p> <p>4 about it.</p> <p>5 But also the documentation is there. Every</p> <p>6 time something happens, it's written off.</p> <p>7 Regardless of if a point is taken off or whether</p> <p>8 they have a chance to work through it, the</p> <p>9 discipline record remains. We can start to see</p> <p>10 trends. Because if you can't see the trend of what</p> <p>11 is happening to these kids -- we also have a really</p> <p>12 good system. We have QR codes even posted for,</p> <p>13 like, "See something, say something."</p> <p>14 And that has been really helpful, because</p> <p>15 kids can walk up, QR code to a form, and they can</p> <p>16 anonymously say if they've noticed bullying,</p> <p>17 vandalism. The TikTok challenges are wreaking havoc</p> <p>18 everywhere, and I'm sure it's going to happen again</p> <p>19 this year because people are crazy.</p> <p>20 And they can anonymously say, "I noticed</p> <p>21 so-and-so pulling soap dispensers off the wall."</p> <p>22 No one ever knows who reported it. But</p> <p>23 admin is notified. And we plan to do the same thing</p> <p>24 at this campus that we did over there, at least</p> <p>25 suggest that they do it, is we did put cameras up,</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">74</p> <p>1 like, everywhere. Because it's easy for the he 2 said/she said to be squashed when you can say, 3 "Let's review the footage and see what actually 4 happened." 5       Again, counseling is always involved. 6 It's a huge thing to have a counselor there to 7 mitigate all of these circumstances that are coming 8 up and really navigate that for an admin who's got a 9 million other things going on, the mental health 10 side of it, making sure it's not Covid hangover, as 11 we've come to call it, of, like, just lack of social 12 interaction. 13       So I think all of those systems have 14 really helped keep the kids in a place where I don't 15 notice bullying as an issue. 16       Hannah knows more about what happens at 17 K-5, and I'm much more at the middle and high school 18 because that's where my kids attend, and I get 19 day-to-day reports of what they're seeing and what 20 they're not seeing. 21       But I think this model attracts so many 22 different people, like different types of kids. 23 Like, it's very quirky. Like, when you're on site, 24 like, it is a very weird eclectic mix of people. 25 And I think that makes everybody feel relatively --</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">76</p> <p>1 17 kids instead of 32, 33, just in managing a 2 population. Because in the back of a room for 36 3 kids, things go on back there. I mean, having 4 taught, it's -- it's crowd control. But in a class 5 with the seminar feel, which is what we really push 6 for, is a different experience. And there's no one 7 that's going to sit in the back and be a wallflower. 8 It's very much, "Come to the table, share your 9 ideas." 10       Of course, kids will change classes more 11 often as they get older. We do like the younger 12 kids to go to first grade and stay with the same 13 teacher because of that stability. But as they get 14 older, upper elementary, middle school, and 15 especially in high school, they're changing classes 16 and teachers sometimes every nine weeks to maybe 17 even every four weeks. 18       We didn't anticipate this in opening the 19 Albuquerque campus. But that became the biggest 20 community builder. They came to know so many more 21 teachers every year and so many more students in a 22 year because every 22 days, the students shuffle. 23 They might have four different English teachers in 24 the first four months in the school. 25       That lack of anonymity, I think, does</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">75</p> <p>1 we had somebody wear like earmuffs for, like, four 2 years. No one ever said anything to her. She 3 walked around with earmuffs. And everyone was, 4 like, she wears earmuffs. 5       It's a strange little culture. People are 6 like, "No, you can't tease them. Why would you 7 tease them? Let them wear what they want." 8       I find that to be helpful. I'm from 9 Rio Rancho. This is where I live. I feel our 10 community is very similar here, very, very similar, 11 very eclectic. People will just jive, and when 12 they're not, and if they're going to be mean, it's 13 going to be obvious. 14       COMMISSIONER CARRILLO: It sounds very 15 safe for kids to be who they are, which is 16 fantastic. And I love this QR code idea. I'm going 17 to take that back to Larry. Get that for our 18 schools. 19       MS. ELISHA VARELA: Make a Google form and 20 use a QR code generator. All the kids have phones. 21 They can pull it up without having to touch anything 22 like their camera. 23       MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: I will speak to the 24 fact that the small class sizes, we go out of our 25 way to ensure that our class sizes stay small. 16,</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">77</p> <p>1 create a culture that leads to almost a passive 2 anti-bullying effort, in a sense. Because bullying 3 can come from isolation, you know, anonymity in a 4 lot of ways. And so, you know, we have found that 5 community-building piece to be directly opposed to 6 bullying. So we see very little of it. 7       COMMISSIONER CARRILLO: That's fantastic. 8 You used the word "anonymity." And it's, like, we 9 know when kids feel known, seen, and heard, they 10 excel. They feel good about where they are. 11       So a question about -- because we just -- 12 I think the question came up along -- you just 13 opened Las Cruces, for God's sake. And so -- and I 14 have no problem with the fact that you're wanting to 15 be in Rio Rancho. 16       And Larry would be upset with me. I wish 17 there was a model like this in Santa Fe. Because 18 everybody needs -- hey, man, it's on the record. 19 I'm fine with that. We talk all the time about what 20 I think that Santa Fe needs to do to hold onto kids 21 and make all of our schools better up north. And 22 it's an ongoing conversation. And he understands -- 23 he recognizes all that. 24       But, so, now opening this school, what did 25 you learn? What challenges maybe came up in opening</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">78</p> <p>1 Las Cruces that you learned now that you're opening 2 your third site? 3 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: Well, let's hope 4 COVID -- let's take the COVID piece out of the way. 5 COMMISSIONER CARRILLO: Yeah. 6 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: Coming out of virtual 7 learning, which coincided with this first year in 8 Las Cruces, was challenging. 9 The reach into the population, the 10 outreach, was ongoing. And I think the -- 11 obviously, facility being the driving force. 12 And that timeline getting thrown off and 13 hitting its own -- it's own challenges, obviously 14 being approved in late May/early June and opening in 15 August, allowed for a very, very short time frame to 16 officially recruit. 17 And so, obviously, the longer runway helps 18 in approval in August and opening up the following 19 August, potentially. 20 So I think time being the biggest driver 21 of that would be the biggest driver of that, would 22 benefit everyone, in terms of staff recruitment, 23 staff training, student recruitment, and facilities, 24 in terms of ensuring students attend a school that's 25 in an adequate facility that conveys the</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">80</p> <p>1 (inaudible) Court from my house. So I know that 2 that area is -- plus, it's got right out to Corrales 3 Road, right out to 528. It's pretty easy ingress 4 and egress, so I look like that. 5 Some of the other challenges Cruces had to 6 do with, like, vendors and challenges we don't have 7 here. Meal vendors and people not wanting to work 8 with the National School Lunch Program. 9 We had to convince the vendor to go down 10 for transportation from here, to please service 11 students there. 12 And none of those are an issue here 13 because of the metro area. Because I think some of 14 the challenges down there were just very unique to 15 the location, where I don't think that Rio Rancho 16 has those same charges. And that specific area for 17 the facility is in a good spot where they've just 18 done traffic studies, so that's helpful too. 19 COMMISSIONER CARRILLO: So I don't have 20 any more questions. 21 I have a couple of comments because I am 22 who I am, and they all kind of accept me for who I 23 am. Scott said "Rio Rancho needs this." 24 I loved hearing that. Because no matter 25 how great a district is doing -- and let's face it.</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">79</p> <p>1 professionalism and the program that we wanted to 2 convey to parents. 3 So I think the short runway that we had in 4 Las Cruces was probably the biggest undercutting 5 effect that we feel like we will avoid with the 6 traditional approval route in this case. 7 COMMISSIONER CARRILLO: Are there any 8 challenges with the City of Rio Rancho at all in 9 terms of where you want to be at this point? 10 Are they going to go back and -- wasn't it 11 MAS or somebody saying, "Parking is going to be a 12 really big issue?" 13 All of a sudden, it became the driver in 14 the decision -- not parking -- traffic -- that every 15 school has 20 minutes of traffic every day, twice. 16 Do we expect -- is there anything from 17 Rio Rancho? 18 MS. ELISHA VARELA: No. I actually expect 19 the opposite. Because Rio Rancho just did a big 20 traffic study for the exact same area, because they 21 want to put a school there, and they had no issues. 22 Considering they just did all of the legwork for us 23 to say that that's a good place. 24 And I lived right by there for a decade. 25 So, like, I could have thrown a tennis ball to</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">81</p> <p>1 Rio Rancho has great schools. They do. They have 2 parents who support, money that supports. That is. 3 That doesn't mean you're the be-all and end-all and 4 know everything, because it doesn't fit every kid. 5 You're going to grow no matter what. 6 You're going to build out your schools. And we're 7 going to -- obviously, I love this concept, and I 8 love what you're doing, and I think that my son 9 would have thrived in this situation as opposed to 10 traditional public school. 11 The -- Melinda mentioned joy. And, man, 12 anything we can do to bring joy back to the 13 classroom and to teachers so when they come home 14 they don't feel spent, they feel loved and loving, 15 and, like, they've loved, bringing all that back. 16 And Katie said about a teacher being 17 constricted. It's, like, what kind of results are 18 you going to get from anyone in any job if you're 19 stifling their creativity and their humanity. 20 I know when we were getting ready to open 21 Cruces and discussions and loving the concept then. 22 So I believe -- I always reserve the right to say 23 something later. Like Columbo. He'd always come in 24 at the end. "Oh, by the way....," then he'd solve 25 the murder in 30 seconds.</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">82</p> <p>1 No, I just -- I'm excited for the concept.  2 So the last thing I'll say -- so is there  3 anyone still not here from Rio Rancho? There's  4 nobody here?  5 So don't you even think of coming to us or  6 writing an editorial about how -- how a charter is  7 going to be opening in your area and that we're  8 taking your money and we're taking your kids,  9 because just, like -- Larry and I are great friends,  10 because I said to him, when they were going to open  11 THRIVE, "It is not your money. These are not your  12 kids. It's taxpayer money. They're our community  13 kids, and our responsibility is to them first, not  14 to your budget."  15 And so the Rio Rancho Schools, you know,  16 you had your opportunity. If there was a challenge  17 that you had with a charter opening in your area,  18 you missed your opportunity. So forever hold your  19 peace, and let's just welcome this school as part of  20 our educational community, if everything is  21 approved.  22 (Applause.)  23 THE CHAIR: All right. Commissioner  24 Robbins.  25 COMMISSIONER ROBBINS: Yeah, I think</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">84</p> <p>1 recruitment? Have you had any issues in the two  2 locations currently? And how would you approach  3 teacher recruitment? Granted, salaries are going to  4 be higher with what the Legislature did.  5 How are you going to address teacher  6 recruitment? Because you have to -- you know,  7 there's a pot of -- bad term -- but there's a  8 certain number of teachers. Some have left it, may  9 be willing to come back. How do you go about  10 recruiting teachers for this innovative approach?  11 MS. KAREN WOERNER: I'm going to start and  12 ask Justin to add in anything that I miss.  13 I think the model sort of sells itself.  14 You're finding some teachers -- you heard from some  15 educators tonight.  16 You've heard teachers are getting burnt  17 out and leaving the profession. And some are coming  18 to an Explore Academy model or other charter schools  19 where they can have more freedom to teach. As you  20 know, pedagogy is the area, and the instructional  21 material, is an area that is actually a freedom for  22 charter schools.  23 So we honestly haven't had that big of a  24 problem recruiting teachers. We advertise on our  25 websites. We post on Indeed. But a lot of word of</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">83</p> <p>1 Commissioner Carrillo is going to run for mayor  2 here. With that, at least -- yes. No.  3 I appreciate the presentation. I greatly  4 appreciate all the support that I see here, what we  5 heard online, even from across the country, one  6 individual.  7 Rio Rancho Public Schools got started  8 30 years ago, roughly. And when they wanted a high  9 school, Intel built it for them.  10 Have you had any interactions or dealings  11 with staff at Intel? Not workers. But executives?  12 Management?  13 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: Not yet, not  14 officially, yet. We're working our way up the  15 ladder so to speak.  16 COMMISSIONER ROBBINS: Just looking at the  17 type of individuals a company like Intel seeks and  18 recruits, this is a model that I could see that they  19 would really enjoy partnering with you on.  20 So that's just a comment.  21 Teacher recruitment. You know, it's been  22 a big issue the last couple of years in New Mexico.  23 COVID was a big issue. We've had teachers that have  24 left the state, retired, things like that.  25 How have your schools dealt with teacher</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">85</p> <p>1 mouth. And the word is out with educators that this  2 is a great place to teach, and you're allowed to use  3 your professional judgment and use your creativity.  4 I've even had folks at the site visit in  5 Las Cruces from the Charter Schools Division that  6 said, "I want to go to this school." Others, "I  7 want to teach here." Just, the model sells itself  8 to educators, and they're attracted there.  9 We also have other programs built in. You  10 heard from a teacher tonight. We are always looking  11 for folks who might be good fits for teaching and  12 suggest, even if they aren't yet teachers -- as you  13 heard, I think, Melissa earlier -- I think it was  14 Melissa -- speak to that, of being recruited from  15 parent involvement to actually being in her second  16 year teaching with us.  17 We also participate actively in the  18 Educated Fellows program. And I anticipate that  19 we'll do all of these things in the Rio Rancho  20 school, if approved.  21 Educated Fellows. I'm sure you're  22 familiar, but in case not, if you're not familiar  23 with that in our audience, those are positions at  24 the school that are sort of extra positions funded  25 through a grant that we have additional hands on</p>

86	<p>1 site. But they're required to pursue a teaching 2 license. And we, of course, hope they'll stay with 3 us since they're doing their fellowship at the 4 school.</p> <p>5 So we will continue to do that here in 6 Rio Rancho if you so allow us.</p> <p>7 MS. ELISHA VARELA: I just wanted to add, 8 in Rio Rancho, a specific note that I think there 9 were several -- even people I know that were, like, 10 "I love your school, but I'm not crossing the 11 river." "I'm not crossing the river."</p> <p>12 They worked in Albuquerque before. 13 They're sick of the drive. I don't blame them. 14 Paseo and Alameda. It doesn't matter what you take, 15 it's not fun usually in the morning. My kids take 16 that bus. It's no fun.</p> <p>17 There are teachers who are commuting to 18 different places and doing homeschool programming 19 who don't want to teach traditionally, so they've 20 just stopped teaching.</p> <p>21 I'm kind of hoping that some people will 22 be reinvigorated and be, like, if this is on this 23 side of the river, why, I only have to drive up 528, 24 makes a really big difference for people. Because 25 we've had applicants withdraw their application from</p>	88	<p>1 wasn't on the board, I would put somebody to work in 2 my doggie daycare and take over and go back to 3 teaching, because I loved teaching, and I loved the 4 students, but I didn't love the restrictions.</p> <p>5 And Explore doesn't give that. They let 6 you do what you love, which is teach. And that's 7 what traditional schools are stopping from teachers.</p> <p>8 So if I would have been able to, I would 9 have gone back and crossed the river, because I 10 cross the river every day for my school. I know.</p> <p>11 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: Commissioner Robbins, 12 I want to add just one more thing to what Karen 13 said.</p> <p>14 We finally have developed a partnership 15 with a post-secondary institution. And it's 16 Highlands, for teacher placement. We've asked UNM 17 for years. We've asked CNM for years. UNM has told 18 us blatantly that they do not place their teacher 19 recruits into charter schools. And that's been -- 20 you know, it's been depressing to see that that's 21 their stance to take.</p> <p>22 But Highlands has been open for it. And, 23 actually, just this spring, for both Albuquerque and 24 potentially the Rio Rancho campus, we are now an 25 official partner of Highlands and their teacher</p>
87	<p>1 Albuquerque saying, "I just don't want to commute 2 anymore. I'm tired of commuting."</p> <p>3 They act like they're going to Albuquerque 4 or Las Cruces or something.</p> <p>5 Even then, once you're crossing the river, 6 I get the snobbery there. I was, like, "Who? 7 Where? San Mateo? No. I'm staying on my side of 8 the river."</p> <p>9 I get that, and I understand having 10 something close to home. I live two minutes up the 11 road from here. It's just so nice to think that the 12 school will just be here, and people wouldn't have 13 to commute 30 minutes to get across the river from 14 Rio Rancho.</p> <p>15 MS. BARBARA SENA: I would like to speak 16 on this. I worked at the same school for ten years, 17 because I loved my principal, and she gave us the 18 opportunity to teach how we wanted to teach.</p> <p>19 And when we switched principals, that 20 stopped, and that's why I left the profession.</p> <p>21 If I would have had a school like Explore, 22 I would have jumped right in there, because they 23 give you the opportunity to teach differently than 24 they do in a traditional school.</p> <p>25 So I look at this, and I'm, like, if I</p>	89	<p>1 licensure program to have student teachers placed 2 within our two schools.</p> <p>3 So that's been a long time coming, but 4 we're excited. And it's also, of course, 5 Rio Rancho-based, given that's the building we're 6 in. So I wanted to mention that as well.</p> <p>7 COMMISSIONER ROBBINS: That's good. How 8 did you come about interacting with Highlands 9 University here to -- to work on teacher 10 recruitment? What was your reasoning behind it?</p> <p>11 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: A connection between 12 one of our administrators and one of the licensure 13 teachers, I believe, or administrators in the 14 licensure program, who knew one of our 15 administrators. And they were open to that 16 pipeline, so to speak. And so we jumped on it, 17 knowing it's something we've been looking for for 18 other programs like that.</p> <p>19 COMMISSIONER ROBBINS: Good. Good. 20 Mr. Carrillo touched a little bit on bullying and 21 things like that. It goes to school security.</p> <p>22 I'm on the PSCOC dealing with capital for 23 schools and things like that. One of the things I 24 keep hitting on when schools come with design 25 funding, when they come for construction funding --</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">90</p> <p>1 and I chair a subcommittee, so I work very closely 2 with PSFA also, the Public Schools Facilities 3 Authority -- is school security. 4 And it's been in the news very much lately 5 and everything. But it seems like every time, it 6 comes back to a failure in the school security 7 system. 8 Yes, there's an individual involved also. 9 But there's a failure somewhere in the school 10 security system. And having minimal points of 11 access, having cameras, things like that, all good. 12 The bullying, no, this is one of the 13 things that in every school shooting, it has 14 generally been a present or a former student. 15 Bullying is so critical that we stop it and that we 16 deal with it early and try to correct those things. 17 So it's a comment. But I hope you're 18 considering that when you get into it. 19 Transportation was touched on also. 20 And the Intel conversations. 21 I applaud the governing council candidates 22 for being here. It's very reassuring that you're 23 here. One of the things that we've experienced with 24 the almost 60 charters, State charter schools, that 25 we approve and look at is a lot of turnover on</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">92</p> <p>1 Okay? 2 And for all of the individuals who spoke 3 today, even your students going forward, present and 4 future students, don't worry if you graduate high 5 school and you don't know what you want to do. On 6 the other hand, even if you think you know what you 7 want to do -- I was going to be a lawyer. Three 8 years into college, I decided I don't want to be a 9 lawyer. Okay? 10 So -- but have flexibility. And I think 11 the flexibility of your colors (verbatim) and the 12 seminars and the things like that will give those 13 students the grounding they need to go into anything 14 that they choose right out of school or later in 15 life. And that is so critical. 16 That's one of the things I think that's 17 missing in education. We try to pigeonhole kids 18 into different things. It's kind of like the old 19 '50s things, when you went to the school counselor 20 and they said, "Well, you should be a secretary; you 21 should be a pipefitter." 22 I was, like, no, let them be what they 23 want to be, but give them the exposure to a lot of 24 different things. Because my son-in-law was -- he 25 got a degree from CNM, Associate's degree in</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">91</p> <p>1 governance councils. And sometimes they have 2 difficulty filling the minimum required positions of 3 five. And getting appropriate training, finance 4 training, and other types of things. 5 I would urge you -- and, you know, by you 6 being here, I think there's a commitment there. But 7 it needs to be a long-term commitment. One of the 8 things that we've also seen over the years, you get 9 a lot of people wanting to be on governing councils 10 when their kids are in school. And once their kids 11 leave that school, their interest wanes. It goes 12 away. 13 I was on the Albuquerque Board of 14 Education for four years. And people were always 15 asking me, you know, "What kids do you have in 16 school?" 17 I said, "I don't have any." 18 "Do you have any grandkids in school?" 19 I said, "I don't have any." 20 "Well, why on earth would you want to be 21 on the school board?" 22 I said, "Because I'm a manager, and I want 23 to hire people. And I want to hire people that are 24 coming out of APS, and I want people that I hire to 25 be educated. I don't want to have to educate them."</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">93</p> <p>1 machining, okay? He now owns one of the largest 2 machine shops in New Mexico. 3 And so you don't know exactly what you 4 might want to do. I mean, when he was younger and 5 everything, he wanted to be a race car driver, and 6 he actually did that when he was a teacher and 7 everything until he met my daughter, and she put an 8 end to that. 9 But don't -- students and parents, don't 10 lock your kids into something because you want them 11 to do it. Let them be creative and find their own 12 way. That's what I like about the -- the plan that 13 you have, the program that you have. So I commend 14 you on that. 15 But also, council members, now or in the 16 future, commitment is so important, and long-term 17 commitment for the success of the school will be 18 important. Thank you. 19 MS. KAREN WOERNER: Madam Chair, may I 20 respond with something? 21 I just wanted to share -- Commissioner 22 Robbins, thank you for your point about the board 23 members being here today. I just want you to know 24 that none of them are parents of students that would 25 attend the school. So I think there is a strong</p>



<p style="text-align: right;">94</p> <p>1 commitment here.</p> <p>2 We will be looking to those in the</p> <p>3 audience. If we are approved, we would like to have</p> <p>4 a parent on the board. But I just wanted to let you</p> <p>5 know, Commissioner, that none of these folks have</p> <p>6 students in the school. They are parents and</p> <p>7 community members and educators from the area who</p> <p>8 are committed to this cause. So thank you.</p> <p>9 THE CHAIR: All right. Thank you. I have</p> <p>10 a couple of questions, based off of the review and</p> <p>11 the capacity interview.</p> <p>12 A couple of them were already asked and</p> <p>13 answered, so I want to make sure not to repeat</p> <p>14 those.</p> <p>15 I think -- like, one of my questions was</p> <p>16 about enrollment projections. But I think you kind</p> <p>17 of touched on that with how many folks are on the</p> <p>18 wait list for Albuquerque and the percentage of</p> <p>19 those that could possibly come over here and then</p> <p>20 allow more kids into the Albuquerque one.</p> <p>21 So while first I was going to ask you</p> <p>22 about your enrollment projections, it seems like</p> <p>23 they're actually pretty reasonable for this one.</p> <p>24 Because I know that was something -- and I know</p> <p>25 COVID was part of it, and, I know opening late in</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">96</p> <p>1 Learning Systems.</p> <p>2 As we mentioned earlier, obviously, the</p> <p>3 first year, the Implementation year and even the</p> <p>4 first year of operations, we will be needed, and the</p> <p>5 ELS team will be needed to get this off the ground,</p> <p>6 to get this model -- get teachers trained, all the</p> <p>7 professional development that goes behind that.</p> <p>8 But I think we answered the reason why we</p> <p>9 don't think it should have been included in there is</p> <p>10 that it's just a contracted services provider. And</p> <p>11 the board would have every right to decide who will</p> <p>12 provide the services and how long they continue</p> <p>13 those contracts with them.</p> <p>14 Again, it was me being extra cautious</p> <p>15 about if we didn't put it in there, I would have</p> <p>16 some Commissioner, I just knew, asking about Explore</p> <p>17 Learning Systems. And we tried to just acknowledge</p> <p>18 that relationship without -- but should have</p> <p>19 probably just put Non-Applicable and explained it</p> <p>20 maybe. I don't know exactly how we should have</p> <p>21 handled it. But those two questions should have</p> <p>22 been "Not Applicable." And I think we answered the</p> <p>23 question earlier to Commissioner Gipson.</p> <p>24 I had some notes here about it, because I</p> <p>25 thought you might ask that. You know, the school</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">95</p> <p>1 Las Cruces was part of it. But I also know</p> <p>2 enrollment was a thing that was a concern last time,</p> <p>3 so -- I think you also addressed my questions about</p> <p>4 the Explore Learning Systems, because they did talk</p> <p>5 about the MOU.</p> <p>6 I feel like this is being nitpicky,</p> <p>7 because it was an Approaches. It was not Does Not</p> <p>8 Meet. They gave you an Approaches. But the MOU</p> <p>9 wasn't clearly talked about or wasn't clearly</p> <p>10 explained in the application or in the capacity</p> <p>11 interview. And so I'm hoping to just kind of get</p> <p>12 more information about what that looks like and,</p> <p>13 like, give me more information for that, because</p> <p>14 right here, it doesn't a lot.</p> <p>15 MS. KAREN WOERNER: Thank you,</p> <p>16 Madam Chair. This is -- Justin is laughing because</p> <p>17 that was my fault. Those answers should have been a</p> <p>18 "Not Applicable." And we all believe that.</p> <p>19 We've seen this Commission in prior years</p> <p>20 require an MOU, for instance, with the NACA Inspired</p> <p>21 Schools Network that provide similar kinds of</p> <p>22 support.</p> <p>23 So I didn't want to look like we were</p> <p>24 trying to hide the relationship, either, so, in full</p> <p>25 transparency, included the information about Explore</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">97</p> <p>1 can exist without ELS. As I said, probably not the</p> <p>2 first year, but it could exist without ELS. That's</p> <p>3 the whole purpose of having a strong board and a</p> <p>4 strong leader, to be hired, is to be sure that the</p> <p>5 charter school can exist with or without us.</p> <p>6 But we do think our services will be</p> <p>7 cost-effective and hope to continue the</p> <p>8 relationship. But, again, it's up to the school.</p> <p>9 THE CHAIR: I think that is an important</p> <p>10 distinction. But also, I actually appreciate -- I</p> <p>11 think it does sound like you gave too much</p> <p>12 information. You didn't need to go there and you</p> <p>13 went there, and now we've got to talk about it kind</p> <p>14 of thing.</p> <p>15 But I actually -- like, one thing that I</p> <p>16 would say I get most worried about is when a great</p> <p>17 model of a school is being taken to a new community;</p> <p>18 right? Like, can it -- can you have -- you have</p> <p>19 proven success for your Albuquerque model. Can that</p> <p>20 translate to a new community?</p> <p>21 And I think I have my own opinion of that.</p> <p>22 But I do think -- one of the things I would be</p> <p>23 concerned of is I met Justin many years ago when</p> <p>24 Explore just started. And I was, likes "What?</p> <p>25 You're teaching standards?" Like, what is in this?</p>

1 But I think one thing I was worried about  
2 is, is it Justin; right? Is it -- this leader that  
3 started this school, is that the kind of rock that  
4 creates the model and makes it continue?

5 So I think that there's a good balance of  
6 having -- like, you not being the rock -- like, the  
7 middle part -- right? -- and continuing on without  
8 you, but having that support available seems like a  
9 good balance to that.

10 Because I think that's what my worry is,  
11 is, like, how does it keep going? And does that  
12 initial passion, that initial mission get diluted  
13 when it gets transferred from leader to leader?

14 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: Yeah, it is not  
15 Justin, and it will not be just Justin, for sure.  
16 Just to comment briefly on your comments.

17 The -- those who have experience in  
18 teaching and administrating within this model or  
19 members of our team, I think help ensure the  
20 fidelity of the implication of the model.

21 There's a tremendous crossover in that.  
22 And I think that's, again, kind of the power of  
23 ensuring that.

24 Yes. New school leader who's never been a  
25 principal within a charter school, potentially, or

1 our charter school, potentially, but the experience  
2 that our team has, especially on the featuring  
3 front, because we've all, a lot of us have taught in  
4 the model, and we feel like that's important. And  
5 those who have gone into administration who are now  
6 part of our team are leaders within the model as  
7 well. So that type of mentorship, we feel is  
8 necessary for the implementation of it in a new  
9 community like this.

10 THE CHAIR: Okay. Thank you.

11 All right. So my other question is,  
12 there's a couple of other places -- once again, it  
13 wasn't a Does Not Meet. It was an Approaches. But  
14 there's a couple of different places where it talks  
15 about that some of the items were just not answered.  
16 They weren't responded to by the applicant team.

17 I can kind of go through those, if you --  
18 but I have a feeling, based off of Karen moving her  
19 papers around, she might already know what I'm  
20 talking about.

21 But, I mean, obviously, once again, it  
22 wasn't like a Does Not Meet. But it does create  
23 some kind of concern in my mind when the review team  
24 and the capacity interview team is, like, "Yeah,  
25 they just didn't respond to this. We did not get a

1 clear answer on these items."

2 I don't know if you want to address those  
3 pieces.

4 MS. KAREN WOERNER: Madam Chair,  
5 Commissioners, I would love to.

6 We did a very thorough analysis of the  
7 peer review's comments. We took it very seriously  
8 and reviewed very carefully and shared with all the  
9 board members, proposed board members, our own  
10 analysis of the peer review's analysis, if you will.  
11 So I'm very aware of the prompts that they said we  
12 missed.

13 So pardon me while I find them exactly.

14 There was one about, in the academic  
15 framework question, D-1, if you want to know. That  
16 asked about, "Provide a description of how the  
17 proposed school's curriculum will ensure equal  
18 education opportunities by discussing how the equity  
19 council will assist..." blah-blah-blah.

20 They said that we didn't address that.

21 But it was not one of the prompts in our  
22 application. And you can review that in Part A of  
23 the rubric. It was not -- I assume that there were  
24 changes made in the application that removed equity  
25 council from this question, because we do answer

1 several questions about equity council later in the  
2 application that did get a Meets Standard. So I  
3 suspect it's from a change.

4 So there was a prompt they said they  
5 didn't address, but we actually did. Or it wasn't  
6 there, and it was addressed in other areas.

7 Governing board qualifications. We were  
8 asked about -- it was commented that we didn't  
9 address the selection and oversight of a qualified  
10 and highly effective school leader.

11 Again, that was separated in another  
12 section. I think you must have changed, since I was  
13 at PED, the application. So that was no longer a  
14 prompt in that section.

15 And we did get Meets Standard on C-2, C-3,  
16 and C-4, which were all the head administrator  
17 questions. This was A-2, governing body  
18 qualifications, that we were told we didn't respond.

19 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: Just to be clear with  
20 that, that is -- those were prompts from previous  
21 years' applications that were not prompts in the  
22 current-year application that we -- so we did not  
23 obviously address those prompts, because they --

24 MS. KAREN WOERNER: There was a disconnect  
25 between what the peer reviewers were using and what

<p style="text-align: right;">102</p> <p>1 we were given to respond to.</p> <p>2 There was another prompt about -- in D-2</p> <p>3 about the job descriptions about how the</p> <p>4 responsibilities relate to the school's mission.</p> <p>5 That was not there, either, so we didn't answer</p> <p>6 that.</p> <p>7 There was one that we didn't get. It was</p> <p>8 in the yearly calendar. We did neglect to describe</p> <p>9 the ELT program. We put in the calendaring and all</p> <p>10 that, but we did not address describing the ELT</p> <p>11 program. So we did miss that prompt.</p> <p>12 I think there was one more -- yeah. Under</p> <p>13 Facilities, there was, "The application did not</p> <p>14 mention the student population transportation</p> <p>15 needs."</p> <p>16 Again, that was, similarly, a prompt that</p> <p>17 was in an old application, not the current one.</p> <p>18 So of the four -- was that four or five?</p> <p>19 Looks like four. One of those was -- we missed, but</p> <p>20 the rest we actually didn't have to answer.</p> <p>21 THE CHAIR: Okay. All right. I'm looking</p> <p>22 just to make sure I have my questions answered.</p> <p>23 Yeah, I think.</p> <p>24 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: I have one more --</p> <p>25 THE CHAIR: Okay.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">104</p> <p>1 Commissioner Burt has mentioned this -- it's not</p> <p>2 something that's rocket science when you look at it.</p> <p>3 It's just standards-based teaching in a thematic</p> <p>4 way. Anyone could look at what we're doing and try</p> <p>5 to replicate it. It does take -- we've put a lot --</p> <p>6 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: It's out there. It's</p> <p>7 out there. Schools are doing project-based thematic</p> <p>8 units, right, and then they're cutting backwards and</p> <p>9 they're (inaudible) their standards (inaudible).</p> <p>10 They're doing that. But as far as calling it</p> <p>11 something -- you know, I mean, that just makes it</p> <p>12 something that you can -- you can take with you.</p> <p>13 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: Right.</p> <p>14 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: And present at</p> <p>15 national conferences.</p> <p>16 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: Perfect. Yeah.</p> <p>17 Yeah. Got it. Got it.</p> <p>18 THE CHAIR: Commissioner Carrillo.</p> <p>19 COMMISSIONER CARRILLO: Just follow-ons.</p> <p>20 Totally agree. Just the use of the word</p> <p>21 "flavors" is different. And if I were eight years</p> <p>22 old or seven years old, and I got to choose my</p> <p>23 flavors, that brings a whole new way I'm going to</p> <p>24 look at going to school.</p> <p>25 Okay. There's five on the board right</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">103</p> <p>1 Commissioner Manis, do you have any</p> <p>2 questions?</p> <p>3 COMMISSIONER MANIS: I just wanted to say</p> <p>4 thank you for the fantastic presentation. It's nice</p> <p>5 to see the community supports that you have. I</p> <p>6 don't have any questions. Thank you.</p> <p>7 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Commissioner.</p> <p>8 Commissioner Voigt?</p> <p>9 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Yeah. I just wanted</p> <p>10 to ask Justin, when did you create the LLC for</p> <p>11 Explore Learning Systems?</p> <p>12 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: Going on two years</p> <p>13 ago, maybe? Two and a half years.</p> <p>14 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: It seems like it was</p> <p>15 recent. A great move, I think, because the model</p> <p>16 that you have -- and I don't know if we talked about</p> <p>17 this years ago about copyrighting -- yeah -- because</p> <p>18 this is something that is really sought after, this</p> <p>19 type of project-based learning, student</p> <p>20 presentations, the whole piece of choice,</p> <p>21 definitely. And so I can see how there would be a</p> <p>22 need and how it's growing, and it's very sought</p> <p>23 after.</p> <p>24 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: And we've looked into</p> <p>25 that. But to some degree, it's not -- and</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">105</p> <p>1 now. Are your bylaws such that you can have up to a</p> <p>2 certain amount and no less than, and, if so, because</p> <p>3 I don't have it in front of me right now.</p> <p>4 MS. KAREN WOERNER: That's the proposed</p> <p>5 bylaws is five to nine.</p> <p>6 COMMISSIONER CARRILLO: Less is -- I</p> <p>7 always -- for me, personally -- and others don't,</p> <p>8 Missy certainly doesn't. Less is better. Less</p> <p>9 personalities -- right? -- on the board. I would</p> <p>10 say listen. Life happens. But I would say always</p> <p>11 be thinking about replacing yourself. You may be</p> <p>12 called to move to Maryland or do whatever.</p> <p>13 But there are people you know. And they</p> <p>14 don't have to have kids at the school, who just love</p> <p>15 public ed and public ed kids. So replace yourself.</p> <p>16 Justin, I'm curious. So years ago, there</p> <p>17 was an article in Harper's. And it was talking</p> <p>18 about education in America.</p> <p>19 And it's, like, don't blame teachers.</p> <p>20 Blame the ed programs at colleges and universities,</p> <p>21 because they just -- they found a way to make a</p> <p>22 buck. They started programs. They weren't -- they</p> <p>23 run horrible programs. Teachers -- it's a puppy</p> <p>24 mill. Teachers go through these programs. They</p> <p>25 shouldn't be in front of classrooms, ever. They</p>

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1 might may not even like kids. They couldn't do  
 2 whatever they wanted to do, so they figured, "I'm  
 3 going to do this."  
 4 I really put that in a nutshell. That was  
 5 Harpers' thing, blame the people who are training  
 6 our teachers.  
 7 What was UNM's reasoning for not wanting  
 8 to --  
 9 MR. JUSTIN BAIARDO: We were not provided  
 10 a reason. It was when we -- the statement that we  
 11 received from them is that they simply do not --  
 12 they don't allow -- us -- we wanted to present to  
 13 their licensure candidates who were going through  
 14 their student teaching just to know that there's  
 15 options out there that are different from the  
 16 traditional pathway that they might do student  
 17 teaching in at the moment.  
 18 Their simple statement was they do not  
 19 place students, teachers, or recommend charter  
 20 schools to their candidates. That was it. No  
 21 direction.  
 22 COMMISSIONER CARRILLO: That's why we're  
 23 stuck in 1975. That kind of thinking is abhorrent.  
 24 And it was just those three things. These --  
 25 calling it flavors. Okay, we're good. I'm excited.

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1 THE CHAIR: All right. Well, I -- I think  
 2 all the Commissioners know I have a kiddo, a rising  
 3 seventh-grader who's at Explore in Albuquerque. So  
 4 I won't be able to take advantage -- as a Rio Rancho  
 5 resident, she'll be in Albuquerque her whole career.  
 6 I know, I will say when I heard people  
 7 describing the school and the safe space for kids,  
 8 it is that.  
 9 I mean, I have -- my daughter needed a  
 10 safe space for middle school, and she absolutely has  
 11 that at Explore-Albuquerque.  
 12 I'm a little sad that she happens to be  
 13 right under where she need -- that's okay. The bus  
 14 ride is its own memories; right? Exactly. Yeah.  
 15 When she gets to be older, she'll be able  
 16 to say, "I had to spend 45 minutes in a bus each  
 17 way." She needs some struggle, right?  
 18 So -- and she gets beautiful pictures of  
 19 Balloon Fiesta. Every day on the way to Balloon  
 20 Fiesta, she takes beautiful pictures.  
 21 MS. BARBARA SENA: I grew up in San Miguel  
 22 County. We had to get on a bus -- I grew up -- I  
 23 had to get on a small bus for half an hour to get  
 24 onto the big bus. And that big bus was 45 minutes.  
 25 I was on the road for almost two hours going one way

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1 and coming back another way.  
 2 And now, when I say -- when people say, "I  
 3 have to go to Albuquerque, it's so far."  
 4 I say, "That's not far. That's just, you  
 5 know, half an hour. You're not going far." So...  
 6 THE CHAIR: It's true. I actually just  
 7 heard Commissioner Gipson talking about you had a  
 8 17-mile commute that took you an hour and a half in  
 9 New Jersey? So our kids need some struggle in their  
 10 lives. So it'll be fine.  
 11 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: Can I make one last  
 12 comment?  
 13 THE CHAIR: Yeah. You want to finish us  
 14 off?  
 15 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: To Commissioner  
 16 Carrillo about the school district, I think it's  
 17 possibly telling that the school district isn't  
 18 here.  
 19 For those of us who were on the Commission  
 20 for a while, we were embroiled with a lawsuit with  
 21 the school district with a proposed charter --  
 22 what? -- four or five years ago. It was a while  
 23 ago.  
 24 So I think it may be a telling moment that  
 25 they're not here.

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1 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Right. Yeah.  
 2 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: Silence often speaks  
 3 loud, you know. I'm just saying. You take that  
 4 silence and interpret it however you want to.  
 5 THE CHAIR: All right. So I think -- do  
 6 we need a vote to adjourn?  
 7 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: We need a motion.  
 8 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: I'll move.  
 9 COMMISSIONER CARRILLO: I'll second.  
 10 THE CHAIR: So there, on the notice, it  
 11 was --  
 12 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: That should be part  
 13 of the record of this meeting.  
 14 THE CHAIR: So there was notice that any  
 15 member of the public can submit comment  
 16 electronically regarding this charter school  
 17 application via e-mail. Written comments and  
 18 petitions could be mailed, and they are due at 11:59  
 19 as of today.  
 20 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: No, no. Three days.  
 21 THE CHAIR: Our notice says today.  
 22 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: Oh, no, it  
 23 shouldn't --  
 24 THE CHAIR: I will move to adjourn.  
 25 COMMISSIONER CARRILLO: I second.

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1 THE CHAIR: Thank you. And can we do  
 2 roll?  
 3 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Commissioner Manis.  
 4 (No response.)  
 5 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: I'll come back to  
 6 you.  
 7 Commissioner Burt?  
 8 THE CHAIR: Yes.  
 9 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: I vote yes.  
 10 Commissioner Gipson.  
 11 COMMISSIONER GIPSON: Oh, no. I want to  
 12 stay here longer.  
 13 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Okay.  
 14 Commissioner Robbins?  
 15 COMMISSIONER ROBBINS: Yes.  
 16 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Commissioner  
 17 Carrillo.  
 18 COMMISSIONER CARRILLO: No, no, no. I  
 19 want to stay here longer. I enjoy this.  
 20 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: You guys are going to  
 21 mess us up. Commissioner Manis.  
 22 (No response.)  
 23 COMMISSIONER VOIGT: Commissioner Gipson  
 24 has already voted "yes." This passes.  
 25 (Proceedings adjourned at 6:01 p.m.)

1 RECEIPT  
 2 JOB NUMBER: 6923N CC Date: 7/19/22  
 3 PROCEEDINGS: Community Input Hearing Proceedings  
 4 CASE CAPTION: In Re: EXPLORE ACADEMY-RIO RANCHO  
 5 \*\*\*\*\*  
 6 ATTORNEY: MS. BEVERLY FRIEDMAN, NMPED  
 7 DOCUMENT: Transcript / Exhibits / Disks / Other \_\_\_\_  
 8 DATE DELIVERED: \_\_\_\_\_ DEL'D BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
 9 REC'D BY: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_  
 10 \*\*\*\*\*  
 11 ATTORNEY:  
 12 DOCUMENT: Transcript / Exhibits / Disks / Other \_\_\_\_  
 13 DATE DELIVERED: \_\_\_\_\_ DEL'D BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
 14 REC'D BY: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_  
 15 \*\*\*\*\*  
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 24 REC'D BY: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_  
 25

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1 BEFORE THE PUBLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION  
 2 STATE OF NEW MEXICO  
 3  
 4  
 5 REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE  
 6 I, Cynthia C. Chapman, RMR, CCR #219, Certified  
 7 Court Reporter in the State of New Mexico, do hereby  
 8 certify that the foregoing pages constitute a true  
 9 transcript of proceedings had before the said  
 10 NEW MEXICO PUBLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION, held in the  
 11 State of New Mexico, in the matter therein stated.  
 12 In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my  
 13 hand on August 28, 2022.  
 14  
 15  
 16  
 17 \_\_\_\_\_  
 18 Cynthia C. Chapman, RMR-CRR, NM CCR #219  
 19 BEAN & ASSOCIATES, INC.  
 20 201 Third Street, NW, Suite 1630  
 21 Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102  
 22 License Expires: December 31, 2022  
 23  
 24 Job No.: 6923N (CC)  
 25

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15  
16 *Cynthia Chapman*

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