
Subcommittee Meeting

of

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS AND
CHARTER SCHOOLS

"An in-depth look at career and technical education as a model for high school reform"

LOCATION: Marine Academy of Technology
and Environmental Science
Manahawkin, New Jersey

DATE: March 23, 2009
1:00 p.m.

MEMBERS OF SUBCOMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblywoman Joan M. Voss, Chair
Assemblyman David W. Wolfe, Vice Chair
Senator Ronald L. Rice, Co-Chair
Senator Diane B. Allen
Assemblywoman Mila M. Jasey
Assemblywoman Amy H. Handlin

ALSO PRESENT:

Assemblyman Brian E. Rumpf

Melanie Schulz
Executive Director

Sharon Benesta
Chief of Staff



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ASSEMBLYWOMAN JOAN M. VOSS (Chair): We'll come to order.

I have to say, I am so impressed by what I have seen this morning. And this is what education should be about -- that students love what they're learning. There's a lot of hands-on activity.

I'm an educator by profession, as is Assemblyman Wolfe. And I spent 41 years in the public schools. And this is what I dreamt should be the way schools should be run. So I can't tell you how impressed I am, not only with the classrooms and the hands-on activities, but I have to say the gourmet lunch was absolutely superb and worth the drive. (laughter)

I'm going to turn it over to Assemblyman Wolfe, who has a few remarks.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Thank you, Assemblywoman.

Is this on? (referring to recording microphone)

Thank you, Joan.

I, too, just have to say to all of you who are here, when I came into the building, my legislative colleagues -- everyone I spoke with, that is -- said to me how beautiful it was here on the campus and driving down to this part of the state.

I'm very proud to represent Ocean County. I don't represent this physical part of the county. That's Assemblyman Rumpf. But I do work at Ocean County College. We do have a very fine relationship with both the vocational school and also -- the college. We have Dr. Gerry from the College and Dr. Hoey here from the Vocational Schools. And I'm just so pleased that we're here not just for Ocean County but to showcase this for the rest of the state -- my colleagues in the Legislature.

We do go around to a lot of different hearings, not always in such elaborate facilities and such good food. But I also was very appreciative of the work the students have done. It's so nice. Usually we hear from the principals and the superintendents, but not too much from the students. So, again, thank you very much. It's a great program, and best wishes.

And do you need any money? (laughter) Talk to us.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Yes, we'll be singing your praises throughout the state.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: I have to say that I am so impressed.

Assemblywoman Jasey, would you like to say a few words?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Yes. I apologize. I was on the phone with my office.

I come from the 27th District, which is Essex County, from the West Ward of Newark out through the Oranges, to Livingston and Fairfield. And education is my passion. I was on the Board of Ed in my district for eight years. And it has been a lot of fun to be on the road with this Committee. We have been visiting.

Thank you so much, Melanie.

I think it's really important for us as legislators to actually see what's going on around the state so that we know what best practices are and what we should be advocating for all of our kids throughout the state. So this is a wonderful example of a partnership between the community

college and the high school. And we need a lot more opportunities like this for our kids here in New Jersey.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Senator Rice, would you like to say a few words?

SENATOR RONALD L. RICE (Co-Chair): Yes. Let me just say it's my pleasure to be here. I had a great time speaking with the students. I know that those of us who have gray hair are in good shape in the future. Sometimes I used to wonder about that when I'd go up and down the state. But you sure have convinced me.

But let me say to the members of this Committee, I've been one of the members -- and along with Assemblyman Wolfe. And I've Chaired and Co-Chaired for a number of years. This is probably the finest Committee we have on the Joint Committee. And we've been up and down the state really trying to pull together where we go from here to forward.

Vocational education and academic skill sets are very important. When we started, we weren't really talking -- Assemblyman Wolfe and I -- on this Committee about solar energy and green jobs. We know what that means. We also know what it means to have to research those opportunities out there. And I think that's what you offer here.

And finally, those of us who have been going up and down the state -- and we'll continue to do so -- we get impressed every time we go to our vocational learning centers. Because oftentimes, on the outside, people hear the word *vocational*, but they don't know what's taking place curriculum-wise. And they're so impressed that it's not the old shop days, where you get an hour in shop, and you run in and fix a light bulb, things

like that, put an S in there for safety and Scullnik (phonetic spelling) -- that was my teacher. So we don't do that.

So just keep up what you're doing. We want to hear from you today. We are in some tight budgetary terms. We know that. But we also know that, from our perspective, education in this state is always number one from where we sit and stand. We know from here you're going to higher ed. And we know some are going outside of the state, and some are going to stay in the state. It is our job to provide the tools and resources you need to make life better for you and give you the greatest opportunities out there. And we're committed to that as a Committee and individually.

So thank you very much for having us.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Thank you, Senator.

Having been an educator for all my life -- for my adult life -- I don't believe that education should be a one-size-fits-all type of thing for the students. And so you certainly have advocates for technology and vocational education up here. And we're so impressed when we come to see what you're doing down here. And as I said, you have cheerleaders now from the Legislature.

Assemblywoman Handlin.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HANDLIN: Well, talk about cheerleaders.

I have a daughter who is currently a junior at M.A.S.T., up in Monmouth County, in Sandy Hook. And my son graduated from High Tech, which is on the campus of Brookdale. And both of them have been the beneficiaries of truly extraordinary educational experiences. And I'm delighted that one of my son's teachers is here. My son went on from High

Tech. He is now a physics major at Harvard. And if he has said it to me once, he has said it to me a hundred times -- that he was better prepared coming out of High Tech High School than 80 percent of the other kids from around the country, coming from all kinds of private schools, all kinds of amazing, private, preparatory academies. He was better prepared.

And my daughter adores her-- Every day for her is an adventure and a joy out at M.A.S.T. And so I've seen firsthand and am continuing to experience what these schools -- these career academies can do.

And all I am really here for is to-- I'm already a cheerleader. I don't need to be convinced. I'm really here to hear from all of you what you need and how we can help you continue doing the amazing job that you do.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Thank you, Assemblywoman.
Assemblyman Rumpf.

ASSEMBLYMAN RUMPF: Yes, thank you.

And thank you to the members of the Committee for allowing me to share a spot at your table. As a member of the Assembly from the 9th district, I am not on this Committee, although it certainly seems to do quite a bit of good work. And I envy the work that you've done around the state.

MATES, I've come to know, is truly a gem here in Ocean County. I know some of what MATES has accomplished. I don't know it all, and I'm anxious to hear more from the people in the room concerning your needs and your desires as we see MATES grow into the future. It's

really a wonderful institution. I'm happy to be here. And I thank all the Committee members once again.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Thank you.

Senator Allen.

SENATOR ALLEN: Thank you.

There was a time, when I was in high school, that I toyed with the idea of going into marine biology. So this was really great fun for me. I dive, and so it was kind of exciting to see the sorts of things here that I love and enjoy so much.

I did end up starting college in science, in physics. I ended up with a degree in philosophy. Long story, not telling it today. (laughter) But when I was in high school, I didn't get all the science that I wanted. It wasn't available. And I went to a good public school. I went to Moorestown High School, in Burlington County. And it's known as a fairly good school. But the science and math that they offered I went through, and there was no more for me, and there was no place to go. And I look back, and I wish that I had had an opportunity to do what the students here are doing.

I'm not sure that we offer that to students across the state though. I mean, you have something really phenomenal here. This is an absolute gem. And I don't think that we're offering this to everybody across the state. I'm not suggesting they should come to your school. I'm suggesting that we should look to replicating what you do. And that's something that I'd like to talk to the Committee about. I mean, this is really remarkable.

I worked in Philadelphia for many, many years. And they have magnet schools, as they do in many other large cities. And the magnet school for science and technology was spectacular. And they would send, from there, to Harvard and to all of them -- MIT and so on. And the magnet school in the arts would send to Curtis and Juilliard. So everybody expected that the magnet schools -- they were the top schools.

But somehow, in our state, we don't think of vo-tech as the top schools. Clearly, that thought would be inaccurate, because here we have an example of it. We need to make sure that this state understands that vocational education can absolutely mean the top in education.

We tend to think of vocational education -- I will say what I perceive to be the general thought -- that it's for students who aren't so sure that academics are for them. While in fact, what we have here is for students who think that academics is everything for them, and more on top of it. We tend, in this state, to not take care of the best and the brightest, in my estimation. And I believe that we should. We work hard to make sure that those at the lower end of the educational spectrum get what they need. And I absolutely believe we should be doing that. But we don't then go to the top of the spectrum. And you students, and faculty, and administration here show that we can do it, we should do it, and, oh my goodness, how wonderful it is when we do.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Thank you, Senator.

I just wish we could get Governor Corzine and Commissioner Davy down here to see what you are doing. Because they really need to see the excellence of the program.

And, again, I go back to-- We should not have an education system where we have a one-size-fits-all curriculum. And so this is a wonderful example of what you can do.

I'd now like to introduce Superintendent William Hoey.

Would you please say a few words to our assembly?

SUPERINTENDENT WILLIAM P. HOEY JR.: Yes.

I understand that we're the first vocational school district that you're visiting with your meetings and that you have a couple more that you're going to visit.

And I think that you're going to find, when you do, that the diversity of vocational technical education in New Jersey is vast. We have 2,000 secondary students in Ocean County Vocational School and 2,000 adults. The amount of secondary programs we offer -- vocational programs for learning disabled students, traditional vocational education programs such as auto mechanics and electricity -- and we have our two academies.

And my job this morning, I think, is to give you an idea of what career academies are all about, not just here in Ocean County, but throughout the country. There are about 2,000 career academies around the country. And most of the counties in New Jersey now have at least one.

To let you know how it started-- It all started with M.A.S.T. in New Jersey. Some 30-plus years ago, that program was being run by another school district, and they were giving it up. It wasn't working for them. So the parents went to you folks, the Legislature, and you wrote legislation mandating that Monmouth County Vocational School District take over the Marine Academy. And when we did, we said to ourselves almost right away, "This is something we should be doing. This is meeting

the needs of another population that we're not currently touching." So we set about doing that. And the history of Monmouth that came -- they have got, I think, four or five now.

When I came here from Monmouth County, they had started two career academies -- very small -- MATES here, and the Performing Arts Academy, which is located in historic Hangar One at Lakehurst. We've developed these two over the past eight years. But I'm going to try to give you a general concept of what career academies are all about.

First of all, our curriculums are integrated. They're integrated with a theme. We try to, in every subject area, touch on the theme. Our philosophy, when we were developing that, was that if we do that, if we tie every content area to a theme that we know students are interested in, it will motivate them. They will be more likely to improve their grades in every subject area, not just in the one that they're interested in. We maintain that we can turn C students into B students, and B students into A students with a concept like this. And I think that we have shown over the past 30 years that, indeed, we can do that.

These academies are characterized not only by the high standards of the academic education, but also by our commitment to partnerships. We have partnerships. All the career academies have partnerships. Ours here, from MATES, are with Drexel University. And you might have noticed two Chinese folks who were in the building this morning. They almost looked like they were students, but they're not. They're affiliated with Drexel University. They're from China -- Beijing. And they're Chinese scientists. And Drexel and them are working on a panda project -- save the pandas. So they're over here visiting what Drexel

does. Drexel's one of our big partners, so they brought them over to see what we're doing here. And I think we did impress them.

We also have partnerships where we work out on the bay with different governmental agencies. Our big partnership is with, of course, Ocean County College. Ocean County College is offering courses here in this building for our kids. And that's another thing that characterizes an academy: college course work at the secondary level.

We also, at this particular academy, focus on research. And a lot of the academies do that. We start students out researching real projects right in their freshman year. By the time they're seniors, they're very familiar with research techniques. We engage in a lot of field work. We believe in the concept that vocational education generated in the '20s -- that hands-on experience is applying knowledge; knowledge applied is knowledge learned.

We also think that what we do with our small classes and the smallness of the school creates a family like atmosphere where the teachers know all the students, the students know all the teachers. It's a very easy place to go to school. They won't tell you that. (laughter) But it's a comfortable place to go to school.

To give you a little idea of how we accept the students: We, at least in Ocean, are geographically based. We accept applications from throughout the county. And we guarantee an opening or a slot to every resident school district in the county as long as they have a qualified candidate. And *qualified* means different things in the different career academies. But it's basically a C+, B student overall. But here, *qualified* means you're going to have to like the sciences and math, because you're

going to have eight years of both. So students know, coming in here, they're going to deal with that, and they do it very well.

Performing Arts is a different kind of academy. These things aren't cookie cutters. In Performing Arts, the acceptance criteria -- 50 percent of it -- is talent. And talent is sometimes related to academic ability, but not always. So we have a wide spectrum of academic abilities in the students at Performing Arts. But their key thing is they're interested in performing arts. Lorenzo, here, is a theater major. They major in theater, voice, or dance. And they take 80 minutes of that a day all school year. So we keep that focus on. And I think it does wonders for kids.

I'll speak a little bit about our partnership with OCC. The land that we're sitting on here belonged to Ocean County College, and they deeded it over to us and we built this facility. We have a nice partnership agreement where the students -- the college offers courses here in the evening and during the day. So we, with the \$10 million it took us to build this, are providing an academic environment -- or an educational environment for both secondary and college students. So we feel that we've saved the county quite a bit of money by doing that. And this facility is used constantly and in the Summer.

And I think those-- The characteristics I just talked about are pretty similar to -- in our other counties in the career academies. So I'm going to get out from Samantha's chair and let you hear from some of our students.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Thank you.

Principal Alison Carroll, would you like to say a few words?

Samantha, we're going to--

A L I S O N L. C A R R O L L: Sam, we're displacing you again.
(laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Displace you for a moment.

MS. CARROLL: A lot of what Mr. Hoey said, I think, resonates with how I feel as well. Me being put in this position as an administrator of an academy is -- and I'm sure Ms. Homiek will agree -- our Principal of the Performing Arts Academy -- it's a tremendous experience to watch students thrive in this kind of environment; to see all of the perfect pieces that Mr. Hoey allude to come together: the integration, the desire, the focus, the homogenized grouping as far as them all wanting to go into these particular fields. And therefore, I think the power behind that is tremendous -- what these kids can accomplish, and the success, and the empowerment that they feel during their four years in such a special place.

And I'm sure the students here can agree. You've all become very powerful as individuals and powerful as a unit, and you'll go off-- And as Assemblywoman Handlin said, you can go on and be powerful at your chosen fields, as well as in college.

So I guess, as an overall statement, that's really how I feel about what these academies do for our children.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Thank you.

Samantha.

SUPERINTENDENT HOEY: (speaking from audience) I have here, this afternoon, our Board President. Nina would like to say a few words.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Samantha's playing musical chairs. (laughter)

NINA ANUARIO: I'm Nina Anuario. I'm Board President of the Ocean County Vocational School. And I've been involved in this sort of education since 1995. My real employer is Ocean First Bank.

One of the things, in all of the things that were said--

And thank you so much for all the recognition that you give us today, because it is certainly well-deserved. They've worked very, very hard for this.

But the uniqueness that I think we all share is the fact that our public and private partnerships -- if we didn't have that strong relationship with both, we wouldn't be able to do this. More than 50 percent of our budget is provided to us by the Freeholders of Ocean County, who truly believe in vocational education. If it weren't for them, again, we wouldn't be here. But we also developed numerous partnerships with the business community. So therefore, through our Vocational School Foundation that was created several years ago and is very well-endowed, we've been able to purchase equipment and items that our students need that aren't necessarily within our budget.

So besides having all of these things that you see in front of you, one of the labs, which cost \$137,000, was actually gifted to us from the Ocean County Vocational School Foundation -- money that was donated from the community so that we could put it into one of our labs. And we continue to seek funding from the Foundation for various things that we need within a school.

It's been a real rewarding experience for us on the Board to be able to interface and make these things happen. And the real deal is when our students achieve what we had dreamed for them and what we hoped for them -- where, in a school of choice, they want to come to school. I always say to Mr. Hoey, it's very hard to get them out of the building. We have to get them out so we can get the next operation in here, to utilize our buildings to the fullest so that we don't have to go back to the taxpayers and say we need to build another college facility. We didn't need that down here. So creating this on the College campus allows us to use this building to its fullest. And that's utilizing taxpayers' dollars to the maximum.

So that's what we aim to do, and we continue to do that. And we certainly appreciate our relationship with the College. Because our expansion may depend heavily on the College partnering with us in the future so that we can maximize these efforts and use the money for what we should really use it for.

I've got to run. I have a prior commitment. But thank you. It was lovely spending an afternoon with you all.

And thank you for your caring, and thank you for your support. We certainly appreciate it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: And thank you very much.

Okay, Samantha. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: There you go. Sit down there.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: And now we'd like to hear some remarks from our student panel. And we'll begin with Samantha. (laughter)

SAMANTHA CASH: Well, I love it here.

When I was in 8th Grade, I went to Lacey Schools. And I remember Ms. Carroll actually coming to our school and telling us about the two academies: the MATES and Performing Arts. And she showed us videos and told us a little bit about what was going on. And I just fell in love. So I decided to apply.

And when I got accepted, I was overjoyed. And we had our orientation. We were at the Toms River Center. And everything was so little, and everyone was so close, that I just felt like a family at freshman orientation. So I knew, from then, that this is where I wanted to be.

And then when we moved here, it was like a family moving to a new home. We all moved together. We all appreciated this building. And since time has gone on, since sophomore year, I feel that it's giving me a lot of opportunities to go on and pursue a career further in the specialized -- marine biology personally -- and just research opportunities. I mentioned earlier my Summer experience. It just gives you so many opportunities. And it's up to the individual student to take these opportunities. And everyone who comes here, comes here for a reason. So they want to take the opportunities, and they want to get the most that they can out of it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Thank you.

Lorenzo, tell us about your experiences.

L O R E N Z O V I L L A N U E V A: With my experiences-- I didn't come into the Performing Arts Academy until my sophomore year. But when I came in-- I seriously have to say that I found it so amazing how the school was able to marry the regular high school core classes -- English, mathematics, science, anatomy -- with the acting, or with the singing and

with the dancing. And it helps -- at least in my acting class, it helped my students -- my students (laughter) -- my classmates--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Someday.

MR. VILLANUEVA: --my classmates. We each found our passion. Some of us are continuing on to be actors.

But I find it amazing, whether or not you end up pursuing what you go for -- your craft -- you are ending up your high school career knowing where you want to go and what you want to do, whether it's writing -- because one of my friends wants to be a writer, one wants to be an artist -- painting. Myself, I want to be an actor, so I'm continuing on after my high school career to be an actor. But each of us know where we want to go and what we want to do. And I think it's put me in a good place, and it's given me a lot of opportunities -- the school itself; with the Two River Theater Company, which I'm working with now, in Red Bank. And it's helped me be able to come up to the level of these professional actors, or seasoned actors, who have been in this business for a long time. And I feel that I was extremely well-prepared to work with them. And it's definitely giving me connections and opportunities that I don't think would be present in my home school at Point Pleasant Beach.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Great. Thank you so much.

MR. VILLANUEVA: You're welcome.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Sara Carlson.

SARA CARLSON: Well, as you can see from my spiffy nametag, I went to High Technology High School -- well, I'm still going there. I'm a senior there.

Ever since I can remember, I always knew I wanted to be an engineer. My father is an engineer, so he sort of inspired me to become one. And that's why I chose to go to High Tech. I went to Ranney for middle school, and I knew I wanted to pursue some sort of better education. I didn't necessarily want to keep going with Ranney because, of course, it's very expensive as a private school. But High Tech was a wonderful opportunity because it's free, like a public school, but there's better students that go there. All the students who go there really want to be there. They want to learn. So you don't go to an environment where there are kids in the back of the class who don't want to learn, and they're sleeping or listening to their iPod. (laughter) Everyone really wants to be in the school. And I think it's such an exceptional environment, especially for engineering, because the coursework is difficult. And it's more science- and math-oriented. So you need that close-knit group of people for support.

I'm not as good at physics as some of the super geniuses in my class, but maybe I'll read over their English paper if they'll help me with my physics homework during lunch. So I think that's a really good opportunity.

And going to High Tech has given me good insight. I actually want to be an engineer. And the mentorship program is really great. This senior year I'm working at French & Parrello, which is an engineering firm. And I'm getting to see what engineers actually do in the field. Because I have those stories that my dad tells me about -- the (indiscernible) seminars he goes to as a civil engineer. And now I'm working at an engineering firm where I get to see what mechanical engineers do, what civil engineers do, what electrical engineers do. So I think that's a great opportunity, and I

wouldn't have had that if I had stayed at Ranney or gone to a regular public school.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Great. Thank you so much.

Maria, tell us.

M A R I A B R I S C I O N E: Well, I'm really excited to talk about Allied, because it took me a little longer than the rest of the students to appreciate the vocational schools. After my freshman year at Allied, I considered transferring to my home high school. My parents left the decision up to me. They were definitely leaning toward Allied, but they left the choice up to me. And I realized that Allied's medical opportunities and the science-based curriculum was really for me, and I would be not very smart to leave it. I've always had an interest in science and medicine. So once I realized that this really is an excellent opportunity, and I started to have a more open mind, I really appreciated it.

We have a lot of science classes, and we have a lot of field-based opportunities. I've done everything, from learning how to make hospital corners, (laughter) which was so hard. I give the nurses so much credit. I've fed patients. I've been to the operating room. I was also able to do a mentorship, and I mentored with an orthopedic surgeon, which is what I hope to someday be. And I was able to see various surgeries. I was able to make sure I could stand all the blood and everything. (laughter) I'm very confident that I can see that. And I just feel so fortunate that I've been able to have these opportunities. And I'm so thankful that I didn't leave it.

And during my mentorship, I was able to go to the clinic where the orthopedic residents work. And I could see some of the orthopedic residents stumbling with making pain injections. And I was like, "I see this

every day.” I got to see more than the residents did. And I just couldn’t believe I had that opportunity. And I feel so confident now that when I go on to college, and when I continue to try to be an orthopedic surgeon, I have all the tools necessary to do so.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Excellent. Wonderful.

We have an educator panel.

Oh, anybody on the panel want to ask the students some questions?

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: I have a question.

I know -- we are here where you are; I know where the Hangar is, in Lakehurst; and I know where you’re located in Brookdale. Where is the Allied Medical?

MS. BRISCIONE: It’s about two blocks away from Jersey Shore University Hospital.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: In Neptune?

MS. BRISCIONE: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Okay. Very good.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HANDLIN: I had a question for the Superintendent.

I’m not sure how many of you are aware of this, but one of the many special features of M.A.S.T., the Marine Academy of Science and Technology, in Monmouth County, is that the student body constitutes a battalion of the Junior Naval ROTC. And I believe that to be a tremendous leadership training program. I understand it’s not for all high school

students, but I also believe that for those to whom that kind of training appeals, it is unique. It offers another kind of unique opportunity to learn, to experience.

And my question is whether you had considered an ROTC program. And one of the reasons I'm asking about it is that when a school qualifies for the formation of a battalion, the Navy comes in and -- as I'm sure the administrators know -- provides a good deal of support: money, and teachers, and all kinds of important administrative things that we can't necessarily afford right now. So I just put that to you -- whether you had considered it, whether it's something you had -- whether it's something that might make sense here at some point in time.

SUPERINTENDENT HOEY: I'd like to give you a little history of that. When we opened M.A.S.T., there were no phys-ed facilities. There was nothing for us to provide physical education, which is a requirement every year. The only thing you could replace it with is military science. So naval science, which is built around a battalion, is a substitute for physical education. They march, they do all those things. So that was the reason that we started the ROTC at M.A.S.T.

When we were working on this building here, MATES, I did consider it -- the possibility of doing that. But you have to-- There's a minimum number of students that you have to have to run a naval science program or an ROTC. And we just about reached that. That's one of the reasons it's required of every student at M.A.S.T., because they need that many students for the Navy to sponsor it.

And we have a beautiful fitness center. I thought that -- I realize all the leadership skills that come out of that kind of a military

experience, being a Navy veteran myself. But I didn't consider it for here because we were meeting the requirements of phys ed. And we get at the leadership skills in other ways.

And out at the Performing Arts Academy, which is on a naval base, student interest in military science might be a little less. We never actually did it there, even though we have a huge partnership with the Navy. In fact, we're signing an agreement with the Navy for a partnership in environmental engineering here.

But that was the reason we didn't do it. We didn't have to, so we didn't.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Assemblywoman Jasey.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: I'm just curious to know--

Thank you to all the students who are here. I love hearing from students, because I think you can tell us better than anyone else what you need, and what's working, and what's not working.

So I'm just curious, as a parent actually, to know-- Clearly you have peers in your schools, in your academies. How do your peers in your neighborhoods and your home schools feel about your decision to come to an academy?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Who would like to answer that?

MR. VILLANUEVA: Do you mean the students we used to go to school with?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Yes, and who you may still have -- hopefully you still have relationships with. What do they think of your choice?

MS. BRISCIONE: I still have friends at my home high school. And I think at first they were kind of shocked that I went, but I know now -- especially because they're seniors as well -- so with the college admissions process, they're so jealous, especially for college essay topics. They're like, "Well, what are you writing about?" And I'm like, "I'm writing about how when I went to the hospital, and I got to watch this--" And they're like, "Oh, that's so cool. They're definitely going to let you in." (laughter)

But I feel like -- especially students -- at this point in our educational careers is when we're really looking at, "Well, what have I done?" And they see now, especially for the college process and getting into colleges, that I've been able to have so many more experiences that were given to me, whereas they've had to look for them or search for them, and they haven't been as accessible to them.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Anyone else?

MR. VILLANUEVA: I have to agree with Maria. My friends in my home school were completely surprised when I was, like -- because we never discussed, like-- I told them, "Next year, I'm going to be going to a performing arts high school." And they go, "Performing arts high school? What are you talking about?" And then in later years, my friends ended up falling in love with music. They started a band and everything. And they kind of wish they had this sort of ability, and training, and focus in these types of crafts. And they feel like they kind of missed out on a lot of the things, because the program -- I know at Point Pleasant Beach High School -- has a performing arts program, but it's very small and very minimal -- the number of students who do it. So at this school, everybody shares that common interest of love for the arts -- whatever art form it is -- we love the

arts. And it's very hard to find that group of people who you can say, "Well, we all enjoy any aspect of art." And so they're kind of jealous sometimes. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thanks.

MS. CASH: I have to agree. A lot of my friends kind of discouraged. They were like, "Oh, you're going to be so far away. We're not going to talk anymore. You won't be able to participate in home school sports." And they were very negative about it. But now that I still talk to them, and they see everything-- I tell them, "Oh, we went out into the field today. We went seining. We got scuba certified, CPR in gym." They're all like, "Wow, I wish I had this opportunity." And it's just like they see what they missed out on. And now they're happy for me, and they're like, "Oh, I'm sorry I tried to make you not go there." (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Sara, do you have anything to add?

MS. CARLSON: I think because everyone else went to public school before this, I come from a little bit of a different background with private school. But even my best friend who I went to school with in middle school, in Ranney, she's absolutely in love with that school. She talks about it all the time. And one time I was talking to her -- I had brought her to the semiformal, I think, at High Tech. And for that one moment, she was like, "I think I regret not choosing to go to High Tech." And I thought that was really amazing because she raves about Ranney all the time. She loves it so much. And even this girl who goes to a private school, and she has the opportunities there at a private school, she wishes she had gone to High Tech.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: I think, Samantha, you answered this before. Do you have any classes that are given for college credit? Because I know that -- I was telling you, I believe, that I taught a humanities class, and my kids got six college credits before they graduated from high school. Do you have something comparable to that?

MS. CASH: Actually, yes. Last semester I took English 151 and 152 with OCC. And this semester I'm taking environmental science, which is a college course. But also what was offered -- for me at least -- was OCC calculus. But I know the juniors now have gotten college credits for physics. And I think we're getting biology now. So as the years go on, more become available.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Will those credits be accepted by all colleges or just State colleges?

MS. CARROLL: (speaking from audience) We've been very successful thus far. Our students -- even our young man, two years ago, from Stanford -- they took both of his English classes. So Ivys and highly competitive schools are (indiscernible).

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Does anyone else have any questions?

SENATOR RICE: Yes, I have a question.

We put a lot of work into making certain, at least in this state, that college credits are accepted. Are all your credits being accepted from the kind of curriculums we're doing here -- college credits?

MS. CASH: Are they accepted at other schools?

SENATOR RICE: Where you're going to college, yes.

MS. CASH: I don't know exactly, yet, because I need to go and talk about it. But I would think so, yes. In the past it's been pretty good.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: It would depend on the school. Harvard may not, but--

MS. CARROLL: (speaking from audience) Stanford (indiscernible).

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Oh, really? That's excellent.

MS. CARROLL: (speaking from audience) So Ivys, and competitive to highly competitive -- not necessarily all the Ivys, but the Ivys that our students have gone on to -- they've accepted them.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Excellent.

Anyone else have questions?

MS. BRISCIONE: I was just going to say--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Oh, I'm sorry.

MS. BRISCIONE: --Allied also works with UMDNJ, and we can take -- we take our normal classes: nutrition, anatomy, physiology I and II, to name a few. And we can take the test at UMDNJ. And I know for a lot of students-- I'm, hopefully, going to be pre-med. So for pre-med, I would have to take anatomy again. But a student who, say, chose not to do medicine could use the A and P credits as an elective. So I know most of the time it's taken as that. There's normally no problems with that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Terrific.

SENATOR RICE: We need to, Madam Chair, Chairpersons-- We need to get a better fix on that. And the reason I say that is because I think this is the right direction to be going in, as someone indicated -- I think Senator Allen -- statewide. But we also want to look to see where we

have to refine certain areas, because of all the work we're doing in the state to at least make sure that there's a relationship between community colleges and the four-years. And now some of us had discussions about having this discussion with secondaries and colleges. I think someone mentioned here that some of you may wind up in the future with an associate's or close to it. So we want to fine-tune some of those areas, in terms of acceptance -- not so much that you don't take what you take, but maybe working with our congressional delegation and make sure that some of these folks look at things a little bit differently at the different levels of the State. We know with private schools, sometimes you can't dictate to them, but sometimes you can get the spirit of cooperation.

So we need to maybe take another look at that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Does anyone else--
Senator.

SENATOR ALLEN: It seems that at least two of the schools have major relationships with colleges, and that probably plays a role. I'm wondering if you think it does.

And secondly, I'd like to hear about the relationship, if the other schools have a relationship with colleges or whatever your outside partners are.

MS. CASH: I don't think it played a role for my decision to come here. It was kind of just an added bonus for coming here. But I definitely do believe that taking a college course, like my college English that I took last semester -- we went on the OCC -- the Web site, the Ocean Cruiser. We had all the resources available to the Ocean County College students, and we were directly linked into their system. So it's definitely an

advantage for next year when I do go off to school. It kind of gives you a preview of what it's going to be like. But it didn't play a part on why I chose to go there.

MR. VILLANUEVA: I think what mostly played a part for me to choose to come to the Performing Arts Academy was definitely how much I loved acting and my passion for it, which is what definitely fueled me to make this choice.

SENATOR ALLEN: Are there any partnerships with your Academy and any other schools or anyone else on the outside?

KAREN HOMIEK: (speaking from audience) We're in the process of (indiscernible) with Georgian Court University.

At this time, we're in the process of forming a relationship with Georgian Court University. They're looking over our arts credits for dance, voice, and acting. And we're going to look at the curriculums and see-- We feel we should be able to get at least nine to 12 credits by them looking over our curriculum.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: I have a question.

I know before I said, did you need any money. (laughter) But here's the deal. Assemblywoman Voss, and Assemblywoman Handlin, and I are on the Education Committee in the Assembly. And we had a hearing, I don't know, last week--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: We have a lot of hearings.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: --everything runs together -- with the Commissioner of Education. At the same time, we were given a big, long printout -- it was about this wide and this high -- of how much money went to all the districts that we represent -- the school districts in our

legislative district, and also vocational schools. And I think I read my printout wrong, because it looked like Ocean County lost money and Monmouth County Vocational School gained money. I know some of you are from Monmouth County. You're from Ocean County. How did you make out in this coming year's budget?

SUPERINTENDENT HOEY: We're stable. We're getting the same aid this year that we got last year.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Okay. And how about you folks?

A S S T. S U P E R I N T E N D E N T T I M M c C O R K E L L:
Good afternoon.

I'm Tim McCorkell, the Assistant Superintendent for Monmouth County Vocational School.

At the secondary level, we were stable. We lost almost \$400,000 in adult education funding.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: I meant for the vocational schools. How were you?

ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT McCORKELL: We were stable.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Is that okay, not okay?

SUPERINTENDENT HOEY: It's better than what we might have--

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Expected.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: In these fiscal times, I think just about all of our schools have been-- In looking at the printout from my district, everybody was pretty much stable. I don't think anybody lost any appreciable money. But these are very difficult times, as we all know.

SUPERINTENDENT HOEY: There is a problem down the road.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Oh, okay.

SUPERINTENDENT HOEY: In the aid formula, there's a line called *adjustment aid*. And what that represents for us in Ocean County is \$3 million in State aid. And that adjustment aid is primarily because the State is no longer funding adult programs. And the Governor indicated that as long as we didn't lose enrollment, even after three years that adjustment aid would continue. And if that doesn't happen, if we lost \$3 million in State aid, we will be cutting programs in schools because I can't-- Right now, actually, the County provides -- Ocean County (indiscernible) with 65 percent of our revenue. To ask them to come up with another \$3 million would be a difficult thing for them to accomplish. So we would be in a situation where we would be looking at closing programs.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: All right. I just want to say there's Ms. Judy Savage, in the back there.

Raise your hand, Judy.

She's the hired spokeswoman for the vocational schools in the state. She does a very effective job. (laughter) We listen to her, and she's a very effective spokeswoman for your group. And we look forward to her free advice.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: I have to say ditto to that.

Senator, and then Assemblywoman.

SENATOR RICE: Let me say this to you. I've been doing this for a long time, and we don't need to know what may happen in the future,

given the times when I really think that-- And we're going to have more conversations that -- if we're talking about, in your case for example, \$3 million on the adjustment side, and you're not sure what the future's going to bear, that's something we should be talking about now, going into the future. Because we're going to have to find a way to say, "Look, we're not going to look at it the way you're looking at it from an administrative perspective," to the Governor or whoever is there. We're looking at it from a different perspective. We're looking at it from the needs of the students and what it means to have that program in there rather than cutting the program.

See, one of the problems with New Jersey is that when we look at our priorities, to me, we cut too many of the wrong things. We say it costs too much, too much money is going there. You're right. It's costing a lot. A lot of money is going there, and maybe more should go. You don't cut them because, when you do a true cost benefit analysis -- which I always talk about -- technically you're spending more, but in the long-term you're spending less going this direction.

And so that's something that the county groups need to talk to us about. It's something I don't want to be seeing next year. But we're going to have that conversation up front, from my perspective now -- I'm talking. And I'm also speaking as Co-Chair of this Committee. We need to know that up front. Because we may not be able to resolve the issue if it becomes a negative in the future, totally. But if we're in front of it, we may be able to prevent it. We may be able to get some adjustment before the adjustments are needed, in terms of people's commitments.

I don't trust government -- and I want to say this -- politically, because-- Where's my young -- my politicians? Not here. (laughter) But anyway, I want to say that regardless of what happens, if in fact the present Governor -- that's the administrative side of government -- is reelected in this election -- understand the State statute -- he can't run again. Do you understand where I'm coming from? But we're going to still be there trying to figure out where we go. (laughter) And I don't want anybody leaving me hanging. There isn't any use in me lying about that. Okay?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Thank you.

JUDY SAVAGE: Thank you.

I'm Judy Savage. I'm the Executive Director of the Council of County Vocational Schools. And I thank you all for being here.

And I just wanted to, kind of, give sort of a more global answer to Assemblyman Wolfe's question about how the vocational schools are fairing in the funding environment, and kind of build on what Senator Rice just said -- because he's absolutely right. We need to get in front of this.

I've prepared my testimony for the Senate Budget Committee for tomorrow, so I happen to have it right here. (laughter) There are 21 county vocational technical schools. Seven of them are going to be level funded for next year, eight of them are going to receive an increase of 2 to 5 percent, and six of them are going to receive an overall loss. And where that comes from is through adult high school programs, through programs that the vocational schools run for dropouts. Those have been zeroed out. So when you subtract out that money, even though the Department adjusted the printouts -- the money was in the printouts last year -- it's not in this year. It's an actual loss for six counties. And there are others in the State.

But as Senator Rice was talking, it occurred to me that, really, career technical education is something that the State of New Jersey needs to invest in. It is more expensive. When you have labs like this, and even the traditional vocational programs like an auto shop or a culinary arts program, they need to have up-to-date equipment. The class sizes are smaller, and they are more expensive than traditional programs. But the investment that we're making is not only in the education of students going on to college, but it's also an investment in the workforce.

So I appreciate your comments, Senator Rice, about getting in front of it. And it is something that we need to think about. Because, right now, vocational schools are part of this new school funding formula. There was a big change, and it's very much wealth-based. So Ocean County is considered to be a wealthy county because of all the shore communities. Monmouth County is considered to be a wealthy county. Those counties are not going to be getting any increase in State aid for the foreseeable future. Counties like Essex, counties like Camden, counties like Burlington do get a little bit more. They are getting a small increase. And that allows them to keep investing in the programs, adding students, or upgrading equipment, those kinds of things. But it is going to be a real crunch in many of our counties, because level funding year, after year, after year is actually -- as prices rise, it's a cut.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: I think we all have to advocate, because I think that many of the people in government do not realize the importance of technology and vocational education at this point in time. We need to prepare our kids for jobs. And what is happening in some of

the public schools is, they're not really being prepared to do much of anything.

And so I know that Judy has been a wonderful advocate. And I have several bills in, trying to get people to pay attention to getting some funding for teachers who are going to be going into the fields of vocational and technology education. So we're really trying. But you also need to put pressure on your legislators to make them aware of the importance of what is going on in your schools. Because too many times-- Like I said, I wish I could get the Governor and the Commissioner of Education down here to see what is being done, and how important, and how well done it is for our kids and for many of you guys. I wish I could take you back to Trenton with me and let you speak.

Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HANDLIN: I wanted to pick up on that. I think there's an 800-pound gorilla in the room with us. The Superintendent alluded to the fact that here in Ocean County -- and I believe it's the same in Monmouth, unless it's changed recently -- the freeholders are actually paying most of the freight for the vocational schools. And I know that that's not something that's well understood.

What I do know, having seen it also as a Freeholder, is that unfortunately there is, I believe in many places, a resentment among taxpayers -- a sense that they're -- part of what they're being asked to pay for is a small group of schools that serves an elite population of students, the few rather than the many. And I think all of us here are very comfortable with the response. And Judy gave a little bit of the response, which is, of course, that investing in these highly specialized career

academies or other vo-tech opportunities is an investment in the State, it's an investment in the workforce, it's an investment in the educational system, it's an investment in the country, ultimately.

But to the extent there is an us-versus-them mentality out there, it's a very, very serious problem, especially when the costs of funding for the vocational school districts are not equitably distributed and probably won't be equitably distributed in the near term. So those of us, I think, in the State have a very important advocacy job to do. But honestly, those of you here have a critical advocacy job to do too.

And Senator Allen said something that really, really struck me a little while ago.

You had said, Senator, that we've not done a good job as a State in investments in our best and our brightest. And unfortunately, when we head into a serious economic downturn, like the one that's occurring all around us right now, the first thing that goes sometimes are things that are viewed as, again, being just for the few, for the elite. And I don't want us to make that mistake. It's actually one of the reasons why I had spoken to the Chairman of the Assembly Education Committee about doing a public hearing on gifted and talented programs and services in the State of New Jersey, because we need to hear how those are fairing. We don't want to lose people like you, we don't want to lose the others who benefit so greatly from all the other vocational programs, who might otherwise slip through the cracks and be of very little value to themselves or to anyone else because they're never given that opportunity to develop their unique skills and potentials.

So anyway, this wasn't intended to be a lecture. I get passionate about this. (laughter) But, again, I do think that advocacy role is something that each and every one of us has to be willing to play a part in.

SENATOR RICE: I have a question, through you, Chair.

When you go out in the community, do you say you go to a vocational school? How do you identify your academic environment? Is it a vocational school that you go to?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Academy?

SENATOR RICE: Academy? What terminology do you--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: MATES?

MS. BRISCIONE: I do say *vocational school*. But I notice a lot, on college interviews or even talking to family friends, most people aren't familiar with the term *vocational school*. I have to explain to them exactly what it is: that I applied, that they take a select few. They are more familiar with the traditional -- I think as we mentioned -- the woodshop ones, the auto shops. That's what's kind of in their mind, and they have to be familiarized with this.

SENATOR RICE: The reason I raise that is because, from a funding perspective, but also from a real-world perspective, part of the problem is what, in reality, occurs. And it is kind of an us-versus-them scenario that adults create. Every student that I come across has the ability to learn. And as a former adjunct professor, you put me with them, I'll teach them.

But we don't have the opportunity with the hands-on experiences. When you cut out field trips, and you can't go to the beach to pick up a rock -- you know, the things that you can do here. That becomes

very valuable. But to those who don't represent those areas, they think they're not very valuable. And they like to play it off by saying, "Students don't want to learn," and this and that.

When you say *vocational*, it has one meaning in people's minds in terms of what old-timers know vocational used to be. And so one of the things -- if we would just have some conversation here. And I'm putting a bill in, by the way. I just told Melanie to set it up. Now, whether I get the votes or not-- We just need to get rid of the word *vocational*. To me, everything should be career academies. Because we're starting to put academies in urban school settings now. It's not necessarily our vocational setting. Right in the high schools themselves, we're carving out these things called *academies* now. And the young people do feel a part of it. But when you say *career academy*, you think about working and doing something of value in the future. And that's where you want to be.

And so oftentimes, we change the language, semantics -- makes a big difference in the realities, as well as the perceptions. If the perceptions, oftentimes, are as real as the real thing, then we can move people based on that. And there's no cost to do that.

But then I think if we talk *career academies*, I really think that some of our colleagues in the Legislature and some of our administrators will start to see things differently. Because they have the same mindset, as older people, as young people have -- and some in the business world -- when you say *vocational*. They just don't see-- When you say *career*-- Because some of them come from professional backgrounds and families, they understand the word *career*. Some came from poor families and got

rich. I don't know how, but they did. They understand *career*. Whatever the career was, they got there.

But the point is that we need to take a look at some of those kinds of things. And that's why it's important to come out to settings like this, to hear from you, because we think our own way. And I'm glad you said what you said, that the people you're talking to happen to be adults. And you're saying, "Let me in. I can make it." And they're saying, "Vocational? What's that?" Do you know what I'm saying? And that's a barrier in itself. So now you have to sell yourself beyond your academics. "Your grades are wonderful. But vocational?"

So I just wanted to get that out there and see where we go with that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: I just want to add on to what the Senator is saying -- is that in Bergen County, we have the Academy where they have like a stem cell research laboratory and a wonderful culinary school. They have the School of Technology, where people are learning to be engineers and go into related professions. And then we have the vocational. So it's a matter of semantics, I think, what we're going to call the schools. And in many instances-- I mean, if you look in New York City, you have the High School of Performing Arts, you have the High School of Science. And everybody realizes that these are very specialized schools. And I have to agree that we have to be very selective when we use the word *vocational*, because the connotation in many people's minds is not a positive. It is sometimes a negative one. I mean, maybe we should call all of our schools *academies of* or *schools of technology*. But even that, I think, is sometimes misunderstood by the public in general. But semantics plays a

very important role in people's perception. And so I think we have to think about that in the future.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: I'd just like to say something about our Committee. We are just some of the members of the Committee. There are actually 14 members on our Committee. We have probably -- I don't know how many -- three, or four, or five different Subcommittees. And not all of us attend all the meetings. But I think-- I've been on the Committee for several -- well a number of years. And this is probably the largest turnout from the legislators that I've seen in a long time. I want to thank them.

But also, I just want to say something to the students and also to the rest of you who are here in the audience. You have a face that we see, and you've advocated, and it makes a lot of difference. We get a lot of form letters: same wording, just dear Senator, Assemblyman, signed. We get inundated with e-mails. But when we have someone come into our office, when we have someone come and talk to us and say, "Look, this is what I do. This is what I mean. Please listen to me," it's so important. And I'm not saying this based on political party, I'm saying it as representative of the folks of New Jersey. You students have learned a big lesson today, and I hope you'll tell your friends to advocate, to speak up. Don't be reticent, don't be quiet. If you have something you think is very important--

You've demonstrated so much today for us. I mean, just the tour -- just the way it was handled -- is so important. And I think obviously you're speaking for all the students in the state right now who are in schools

such as yours. But you've certainly made an impression on all of us. And I want to thank you.

I'm not wrapping up the meeting. I'm just saying that.
(laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Stay tuned.

Anyone else have any questions or concerns? (no response)

Well, I thank you all very, very much for your input. And you certainly are an extremely articulate group of young people. And you make me proud to be a person who has taught in the State of New Jersey. I wish I had all students like you. (laughter)

SUPERINTENDENT HOEY: If I could say one thing. Since Lorenzo didn't mention it, I'm going to. Lorenzo is currently a working actor and a member of Actor's Equity. He's on-stage. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Excellent.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Good job. Very good.

MR. VILLANUEVA: I'm not a member of Actor's Equity, but I am working with actors who are part of the Equity. The Equity is a union for the actors. And it's working with this theater. To be part of the Equity, you have to get credits, and that's what I'm receiving.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: And pay dues. (laughter)

Do you have a panel of educators here?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Okay.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: Swap out?
(affirmative response)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Now we have some educators who are going to enlighten us.

Should we start with Mr. John Wnek?

J O H N W N E K: Correct on that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Okay.

MR. WNEK: How are you doing?

I want to thank the Committee for the opportunity to address you today and talk about education, which is, I guess, why we're all here at the table and here in the building today -- to talk about the specialized programs.

I've been fortunate to be at the Marine Academy for a long period of time, probably longer than I want to admit. Every bit of the time here has been excellent. Working with some of the individuals that you have met today, young men and women who are out here, who are going to be the leaders of the future, has just been a tremendous experience.

And at MATES, we have a mission where we try to address three different areas including critical thinking; academics, of course; and we also really want to key up on community involvement. That's another one of our key programs here.

So one of the things that I am fortunate enough to work on here at MATES is to be in the classroom and yet kind of oversee some of those other components, including community involvement and student research. So we run an externship program, which is similar to some of the mentorship programs that you've heard before, where we get seniors out to work in the field or in an area where they maybe want to pursue a career

after coming through here. So we try to get them linked up as soon as we can to kind of meet up with some of the partners that we have.

As Mr. Hoey alluded to, we have a number of partners here that we work with -- anything from the aquarium -- local aquarium -- to the State Parks, working with agencies, working with different scientists and researchers along with Drexel University -- you heard about today -- and also Richard Stockton College, Rutgers University, Montclair State University, to name a few. So we do have those links as well.

Our students, in terms of the community, do quite a few things as far as involvement. They'll get involved in helping, basically, at the food kitchen down the road. But also, they go off and work on ecological problems; and also help with getting involved in ecological outreach programs; and also environmental cleanups, which is a great and rewarding feat. Some of the students work along with conserving some species locally, and they do a great job.

And the thing that I guess I'm most proud of is that we don't just confine it to working within the building. We also reach out and work with other elementary schools, middle schools -- work with those teachers and help to provide them resources and give them opportunities to kind of expand what we're doing out to those areas. It gives students an opportunity to look at other students who are possibly in high school, students that they see immediately -- that they might be able to attain those ranks and go out and work with them; which I think is a really good opportunity, not only for the students, but also to kind of share in community involvement. That's something that we're heavily involved with here with a lot of local elementary schools.

And we've been taking it out of this area and into other states as well. We even work with a middle school in Philadelphia to try to teach them about the estuaries and things that we learn about here. We have a program where they raise species in their school for us. And our students go out and teach them about that too. So we're really proud about that.

And we also get students involved in research. That's important to kind of develop their critical thinking skills, and have them do problem solving and conduct problem-solving activities. They get out. And the projects that we work on here are even team-oriented projects, where we're working with different agencies like U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service -- the critically endangered species program that you heard about today. We're also working with the parks in terms of trying to conserve different areas within the park; and trying to provide information that is scientific, yet teaches our students how to get involved and give back to the community.

So we do a number of that here at MATES. And I'm sure that's done throughout with other academies. And it's that theme that really drives the students to want to be here -- but also the involvement that really gets the students to want to stay here and keep focused. And I think it's about those things that -- students are successful.

And vocational education really tailors to those specialties, those ideas, those careers that students are involved with. And I think that's really important. And I'm really glad to teach here. And I can't see doing anything else.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Thank you.

I love to see the passion and enthusiasm, because that's what we need in our teachers. And I don't think that, no matter how long you teach, you will ever lose that. That's so important.

Mr. Quist.

WILLIAM QUIST: Yes, thank you for allowing me to speak.

I came up here for a totally different reason, and here I am. But that's okay. I love to talk about my students.

First of all, I love my job. I spent 20 years in the engineering industry before I came back into the classroom. And I've had the opportunity to teach at MATES and the Performing Arts both. So I have seen both sides of what they do here, and they're both incredible programs.

I'm a history teacher now at the Performing Arts center. As I said, it's an incredible experience, not just for the students, but for the teachers as well. I think in both cases -- to blow our horns a little bit -- not only are they very gifted, they're very dedicated. And you don't always get that, and we have it in both cases here.

And as a result, we plow that into our students and what we expect of our students. And we expect a lot from them. One of the things we do-- Well, what we try to stress are interdisciplinary lessons so that you're not out just doing history. For example, if I'm-- A dance teacher will come up to me and say, "Hey, we're doing -- we're working on the Lindy," or something like that. Then I will try to incorporate that timeframe into my lesson plan and other disciplines as well. Maybe English can write a -- whatever. We try to connect everything so they can see that the dots do connect. And sometimes they complain a little bit, but eventually the light goes on, and they say, "Oh, that's pretty cool."

We also-- They work on a SIP, it's called a Senior Intern Project. And they start when they're freshmen, and they work toward their senior year. In fact, we're looking at the presentations this week -- last week and this week. And they pick a particular topic from their core: dance, vocal, or acting. And they come up with a historical perspective on that. And they do a lot of research. It's a four-year thing. And what we do to kind of get them into the mood -- the staff -- is, every year we come up with our own SIP project. It's not a pretty sight watching some of us act and dance. (laughter) And one of the topics was: How did the entertainment industry support the war effort -- World War I and World War II? And so that was kind of a big history thing. And so we did a thing on World War I and World War II, through Vietnam. And we tried to-- We acted, and we did skits we had to create. And that was a challenge for the staff, because we were in their shoes. And I really believe that if you have to walk a mile in somebody's moccasins, as somebody once said, you appreciate the moccasin. And so -- it's a stretch. And it was tough for some of the teachers to step out of their boxes. But now, man, there isn't a box in town right now. We created a bunch of hams. (laughter)

But it's truly an incredible-- It has been an incredible experience for me. I hope the students love it. The talent-- They just put on "Bye-Bye Birdie" at the Strand Theater in Lakewood a couple of weeks ago. It just amazes me to sit there and teach-- Lorenzo's in my class right now. He's very political, but a good guy. He's always giving me an argument, but that's okay -- a good argument. I see these kids performing, and they're high school kids. And I try to -- I have a very interactive classroom, I hope. And then I go to a performance like that, and I see them

on stage. I'm like, "Holy cow." And then Monday morning they're back as my students. It's quite amazing.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Thank you so much.

MR. QUIST: You're welcome.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: That was great.

Ms. Sargent.

L A U R A S A R G E N T: Hi.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Hi.

MS. SARGENT: I'm Laura Sargent, and I'm from the Academy of Allied Health and Science. And we're located in Neptune, Monmouth County.

I'll just give you a brief history of what I'm about. I've taught anywhere from Kindergarten to college. And I teach at the high school now, and it works. It's the best place I've ever worked. I'm passionate about it. I love it.

A lot of things we do are-- Since we are thematically based in science and medicine, we need to get these students out in the community. We believe in service learning. We need to get out in the community too because there's so much technology out there in medicine at this point that we can't afford to have all that technology bought. So we need-- Our focus is transportation of getting the kids out there in the community.

So we start freshmen year, getting them out to introduce them to a well population of people. We go to a handicapped school, and they live a day in the life of the handicapped students. We go to the senior places so that they get used to the senior population. We do visit-- We have an affiliation with the University of Medicine and Dentistry in

Newark. And we do bring them to Newark so they get to see University Hospital, the 9-1-1 command center. And sophomore year, they get a rotation in the hospital. They spend one morning, once a week, and they go to different floors, and they partnership with hospital members -- all different units, from the trauma unit, to a nursing floor, and to the lab -- to get to see a good picture of maybe what they want in a career -- what works for them, what doesn't work for them. Junior year we focus on the community. And they get out in the community and do service-learning projects. They do numerous amounts of them -- from like six to eight projects -- whether it's adopt a trail, or going to the senior center, or going to ARC. Oh my gosh, they're all over the place in the county -- the food bank. And then in senior year, they have to do a mentorship program. They do an eight-week mentorship three days a week. And the students select a mentorship site to go to, something they're passionate about, something they think they might want to do for their future. So they get out there. They have to solicit for their mentor. And they meet with their mentor and establish goals that they're going to work on for the eight weeks. We don't just want them sitting there and stagnating. We want them to be involved in it, to see if this is what they're about.

Sometimes students, by the time they're seniors, figure out, "Medicine isn't for me." And that's a good thing. It's better than investing in, like, med school or whatever and finding out it's not your -- whatever.

So sometimes we do have to find a thread to where it's tied to the medicine or science. So some students opt to like -- they want to be writers. So we get them buddied-up -- a partnership with the newspaper,

and they write the health column. Somewhere there has to be a thread or a tie-in to the theme of the school.

And I think Senator Allen mentioned that sometimes, through the integration -- sometimes they learn other areas. And our school actually -- we are thematically based in medicine and science. Our students last year had the highest English scores in the HSPA. Go figure. But they're all actors and actresses. (laughter) They're amazing in a lot of different areas. We do offer them college credits through the University of Medicine and Dentistry. They can earn up to 24 college credits. We have an affiliation with Georgian Court too, where they take a senior molecular biology class, and I believe it's four credits through them. We don't have AP courses per se, except for calculus. And if the students test out, they-- Some of them have gone to Temple and have gotten six credits for testing out in AP courses.

But it's not the main focus. The kids come in and they don't even realize they're testing for college credits right away. They come in because hopefully they have a passion, a love, a desire in some form of medicine or science.

And it's hearing from the alumni that really validates what we do sometimes -- to hear that they go out and-- They were the ones -- like they did a project when they were in school, and they were the ones who wanted to present it, because they felt comfortable with their presentation skills. They're the ones who, like, did the write up. They had no problem with their research, because they research all the time and are constantly citing. So they're comfortable with things like that. They're comfortable with -- because we have such a cross-section of students, that they're

comfortable with students from all nationalities, and ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds. So it's, like, to hear that, you go, "Yes, it works."

And the small classroom size-- I mean, we can touch into these students. I've worked the big classrooms. And you try-- I've worked with, like -- you had 120 students. It's hard to individualize everything for each student. With the small class sizes, we can, like -- you know, if somebody doesn't look right, we'll go, "Are you okay? Do you want to talk about it?" And they feel part of it, they feel part of that school community, which is very important. So the transition that they make is comfortable. And I think-- We want them to feel passionate about what they're doing in life.

And they're also, what I feel, are informed voters. And we're trying to create that with our students. They know about health insurance and the healthcare issues from freshman year in high school. And that's what's important -- to put students out there with these tools to make them better citizens, hopefully leaders, and informed consumers.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Thank you very much.

MS. SARGENT: You're welcome.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Mr. Dennis.

R O B E R T D E N N I S: Last but not least here.

I guess a little bit about my background-- I guess I come from-- Actually, originally, I'm a shop teacher -- so I won't talk about vocational education -- and then went on to industry for my main career, and then came back into High Tech High School.

So I'm a technology teacher there. So I've had that whole range of experience. I don't know if you see on the card there, it says Project Lead the Way. I don't know if any of you are familiar with that

particular term. But as a pre-engineering high school, I was given the opportunity to kind of start this program, which is in conjunction with our partnership with RIT, Rochester Institute of Technology.

They had a program that started in New York state. And all the high schools in New York state carry through on this program. So we were able to adopt it -- and one of the first ones in the State of New Jersey. And now we're a fully certified school. And we offer college credits for our engineering courses through RIT. So the students will take the course. They take my final exam, and then they can take an additional final exam for credit. So it's a little bit extra. And it's really reasonable. It's only like \$400 for four credits. So they can really make a difference on that. And they'll go through the program. So Project Lead the Way is a great program. And hopefully they're coming for that pre-engineering program -- to the high school.

We also have research in our high school. We're heavy on math and science. But as a focus, we're on pre-engineering as we go along through that. So, I mean, the kids are-- I hate to say this, but as the number four high school in the country, we're getting a lot of people who are coming and maybe they're not looking for what we're doing. So we're finding people just want to come to our high school. But we're trying to keep it focused on engineering as we go along.

RIT and Project Lead the Way saw that there was a need for engineers, because we were starting to lose a lot of engineering students. So they put this program together to encourage the students to explore. So through our courses, they get to explore different engineering disciplines and then decide they really want to do it; or maybe they don't want to do

it, or go to a different area, which is okay. But at least they've had the opportunity so they don't start college and not complete what they want to do there. So we're trying to build up our engineers in the country through the program.

But High Tech is a great place to-- I also worked in public schools for a while too. And there's no way I would go back to that. (laughter) The class size was mentioned; and what we could do there. They're challenging all the time.

Dan was a student of mine -- Dan Handlin. And sometimes you just had to-- They just want more, and more, and more, which is great. It comes to the point where -- "Okay. Go ahead. You're beyond what I'm talking about here," which is good. So they're probably teaching us too.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Thank you very much.

Does anyone have any questions?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: A question and a comment.

Several of you have mentioned class size. What class size are we talking about?

MR. DENNIS: About 18 -- probably 18 to 20 is our max.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Eighteen to 20.

MS. SARGENT: Twenty is about the norm.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: And that's in all of the specialized academies?

MR. QUIST: Sometimes. It depends. Sometimes it's as low as 13 or 14. It depends on when they take the class. And then-- Because their dance is a block. And the first semester they might have to take other things. So I'll get more freshmen the second semester -- lighter on the first

semester. So it depends on how it works. But it's between 12 and 20. It's great.

MS. SARGENT: Twenty has to be pretty much the max for us too, because bringing them out into the community -- it's hard to bring large groups. People look down on that. So you have to make something manageable for where you're bringing them.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Okay. And the comment I would make is that I think the theme here is engagement. And it's something that we talk about a lot, it's something that I feel very strongly about. And every child, every student has to have some reason to get up in the morning and go to school, especially if it's early in the morning. And the hook is anything from dance, to physics, to engineering, or-- There are many different hooks. And I've always believed that what we're not doing a good enough job at is providing enough hooks for all the fish out there -- students. We want them all to be engaged on some level. And what I see in these career academies -- which is what I think we should be calling them, or something like that -- is an opportunity for students to actually see, and do, and realize what could be, in terms of their careers, their futures. So I applaud what you do. And I think that we, as legislators, have to try to figure out how we continue to support what we have, but add to them. Because too many students in this state don't have the opportunity to make that choice. And I think all students, all parents should have the opportunity to make some choices for their students -- for what's best for their kids. And it's different from community to community, and from kid to kid.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: I just think it's--

SENATOR ALLEN: May I just ask one question?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Oh, I'm sorry, Senator.

SENATOR ALLEN: Clearly the students who are attracted are extremely bright, very focused, and are given a wonderful opportunity. But you are offering them something different as well. If we were to take your model of high engagement on a one-to-one basis -- research out in the field, more hands-on education, these kinds of things, community involvement, real-life experiences -- and take it to students who aren't as bright, would you see that they might also be far more engaged? (affirmative responses)

I mean, is this where education should be, and we're only offering it to a very few?

MS. SARGENT: Yes.

MR. WNEK: I can speak for that. In the district -- I came in and I was a marine science, shared-time instructor -- starting out with Mr. Quist also around the same time -- from the district. And we had some students that I wouldn't say were the most academically motivated or gifted, but they were decent students. And we started project-based learning. And there are few who stand out. One's name is Anthony. And he's a coordinator for an engineering firm. And another young man right now is a meteorologist. And he really was just into the subject, into the information, and found out that if he put the effort into it and got the right academic background, and really was motivated enough on his topic, he could do what he wanted to do. And they both did actually what they wanted. So I speak to them, because they are always a good model for a student who maybe didn't have all the tools right there academically.

SENATOR ALLEN: What keeps us from doing this in schools in general? What's the reason that we--

SENATOR RICE: State Legislature. (laughter)

SENATOR ALLEN: Apart from us, what keeps education from following that path? Is it just because it's not what we've done in the past, or is it money? What is it?

MS. SARGENT: I think it's a combination of a couple of things. But I also have an art degree. I was doing my student teaching in Jersey City. And I got the opportunity to visit different schools in Jersey City to teach one day a week in different schools. And you saw some schools that had the opportunity, had the money, had the funding. I mean, you could do all these great projects with that. And then you saw some that had nothing.

But it also depends on the teaching too, because you need creative teachers to give -- offer these things to the students with what you have. So it's a combination of a couple of things.

SENATOR ALLEN: The principal is the one who sets the pace for everything.

MS. SARGENT: It's important.

SENATOR ALLEN: Research has shown that principals make a significant difference in whether a school is going to be open to new and wonderful things or not.

MS. SARGENT: We're empowered in these career academies.

SENATOR ALLEN: That's important. I don't think we empower our teachers in other places.

SENATOR RICE: Madam Chair, let me add to this subject, because I've lived in Newark since 1955. And the school buildings are just as old now as they were then, it looks like. But we learned.

And the Superintendent of Education is just recently pulling our district together in the Abbott district -- Marion Bolden -- graduated with me. (indiscernible) honor roll student in math.

The difference is, I recall coming home, starting in grammar school-- We had to take a little note home to tell my parents they had to come up with a dollar or something. We were going to Bronx Zoo -- field trips. Hands-on was always important for us coming up. And I think what happened is we got away from that, statewide, and got selective about who could afford field trips, who could not.

When Liberty Science Center was put in place -- and I was around for that -- I said, "Hold it. Where are the students from Newark?" And they were kind of isolating them and couldn't get them there. They couldn't get them there because nobody wanted to pay for the transportation. Well, one of the biggest served populations now, by the Center -- and they come out -- is the Newark population. And it's amazing what those kids are doing.

That's not the story that Ocean County reads about. They read about all the money that's getting poured in, and our people messed it up -- which are valid stories.

But getting to your point: Believe it or not, the reason we think the change of semantics, if you will, becomes important -- because you don't hear about the Essex County Vocational School. But believe it or not, you will hear about Science High School, which is really kind of what you have

here -- in a different aspect of it. They're connecting with NJIT, Rutgers, all these different specialties on a regular basis.

SENATOR ALLEN: Is it a magnet school?

SENATOR RICE: No, it's a high school.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Science is a magnet.

SENATOR RICE: Well, it's a magnet, yes, from that perspective -- University High.

And so when I was in school with Marion Bolden, what happened was what you see here. The better students were in college English. They gave us college math. Now, we were advanced, but we never left the school. Because being in the school, we became the role models because the next one pulls the other one up. We were so used to hanging together that if I got put over here, and I wasn't in the same class say with Maria -- right -- I'm like, "I have to go and do my homework." I didn't mean to come up short on my grades.

And so it's a State legislative thing, it's a money thing. And it may not so much be a money thing from us needing more money. It's how we're creating the priorities with the dollars we're spending. If we're going to do Abbott district dollars -- where there are mandates, I look at some of the mandates that Commissioner Davy has put on us. First of all, I don't think she should be a Commissioner. I always say that publicly so she knows. (laughter) Because the priorities there don't make sense to me -- as to what we're being tested.

Rather than talking to people, like the people here with experience from the county -- folks within the system -- I'd say, "If I'm going to spend Abbott money, I'll tell you what we're going to do. We're

going to require you to engage these students.” That has to be a part of it. And so now you have the competition. When young people are put into -- now I’m talking about the ones who are gang-banging. They come out and get -- not auto (indiscernible), but the other place up there where they set up an auto mechanic type of program. They’re actually training these same urban students to change or fix cars and giving them a job after they change them. I think (indiscernible) community was running a program with someone. So you’re not talking about a different mindset. What you’re talking about is a different technique, if you will -- a process -- for educating our youngsters. Engagement, hands-on versus hands-off and throwing a lot of stuff at me that I don’t even understand how it connects.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: I just want to say, teachers are the most important people in the classroom, in terms of motivating the kids. And you guys are just fantastic. I love teaching. And I can see in all of your eyes and faces that you love it too. And when we love it, our students get turned on. And it’s not how much money we put in the classroom, it’s the enthusiasm, the passion, the love of learning. And we learn from them sometimes as much as they learn-- I love what you just said about -- because when computers first came out, I used to sit next to a 9th grader and say, “Would you teach me how to do this?” And the kid would look at me like, “What?” And I’d go, “Hey, I can teach you some things, but you can teach me some things too.” And it’s the community of learners, and that learning is ongoing and you’re never too old to learn it. I see it in all of your faces and in all of your comments. And it makes me-- And I miss teaching a lot. So I wish-- You have a job for me? I’m kidding. (laughter)

MR. McCORKELL: I did just want to comment on Senator Allen's remark -- that in the last two years, I do want you to know that we've had more comprehensive high schools come to our career academies to look to see what we are doing. In fact, the State Department of Education, this year, has been orchestrating tours of many of the career academies around the state. So I think it is a positive side.

It isn't fair to say that nothing is happening. In fact, many school districts are starting to look at these models and incorporating them into their schools. And we are more than willing, as vocational schools in New Jersey, to lead the way.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: I'd like to introduce Kevin Drennan, who is the -- from the Department of Education.

MS. SCHULZ (Executive Director): No, he's Mercer County.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Okay. Mercer County. I'm sorry.

I couldn't read your writing.

Would you like to come up and speak?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: He stepped out.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Oh, he stepped out.

Sorry about that.

Would anyone else like to say anything? I mean, this has been a wonderful afternoon. I'd like to put it on PBS so that everybody could see what we're doing.

MR. QUIST: We appreciate that you care.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Oh, absolutely.

MR. QUIST: It's good to know.

NANCY GERRY, Ed.D.: My name is Nancy Gerry, and I'm the Director of School Relations at Ocean County College. But I've been working with the Ocean County Vocational Technical schools for 17 years. And John Wnek and I just said to each other, "When did we start our articulation for the MATES Academy?" which used to be in Toms River. And we figured it out that it was 1995. And a bunch of us sat around the table and said, "How can we look at this curriculum and get college credit for it or equate it to college credit?" And now those same students at this MATES building are taking 20 college credits or walk away with 20 college credits. And they're really very transferable credits.

And the other thing that is interesting about it is that we have something that we call a Jump Start Program, and it's indexed at half the college tuition. So the students are not only getting this credit, but they're getting it at a reduced rate.

And I have to tell you that we have more than 20 agreements with the Ocean County Vocational Technical Schools. We started out as tech-prep agreements, and they just expand. If the vocational school expands, we expand, and we try to encompass anything that we can.

So I have -- I must tell you that I get in the vocational schools very often. It's always a family atmosphere, and the kids are in love with what they're doing. And it really doesn't matter whether it's the academy, or a shared-time student, or anyone else.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Thank you very much.

Mr. Drennan, are you here?

Oh, I'm sorry, Mila.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: I just want to thank you so much for saying that, Nancy.

And I think two thoughts occurred to me when you were talking. The first is that I'm looking forward to us, nationally -- and especially here in the State of New Jersey -- changing the way we deliver public education, changing the way we look at it, and getting away from some of the seat-time requirements, in that students-- Kids move at different paces. And I think what we're seeing here is that students have the ability, while they're in high school, to begin their college careers. And that's really important. I mean, it's important from an economic point of view, and it's also important in terms of an engagement.

I think a lot of kids that either drop out or don't do well in high school -- it's because they're bored or they're disengaged. And these can be the very bright kids, or they can be average kids, or they can be the kids who are challenged.

And the second comment I would make is that we mentioned share time. And I think we've been focusing on the fact that so many of the students we've met today are academically gifted, and very bright, and very motivated. And I also know that there are kids -- perhaps some of the kids from the culinary program -- maybe they're not in the same academic -- at the same academic level, but they are just as engaged and just as excited about what they're doing. The conversations I had over lunch with the young lady who wants to be a pastry chef and the young man who wants to go back to Mexico and start a restaurant-- I mean, these kids are engaged. And I think that is what we really need to be focused on -- how do we use

the resources that we have to engage our kids more effectively so that they not only finish high school, but they come out of high school either already on the road to college or already directed into a career. And they're productive, tax-paying citizens. And I think that's what we, as policymakers, need to be thinking about -- how do we facilitate that. So I think that's our challenge. And I appreciate what everyone has contributed today to our education about the issue.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Yes.

MR. DENNIS: I just want to say that I saw Lorenzo in a play Friday night, and he was awesome. (laughter) When I saw him here, I was star struck. I just went up to him and-- If I had my playbill, I would have had him sign it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Wow. What role did he play?

MR. DENNIS: He was the grown-up version of the main character's boyfriend in the second act. And the play started off really bad. I mean, it was really depressing. My wife almost wanted to leave it was so depressing. After that he came on, and he sang, and he just pulled us up. And I was like, "Yes. Thank you."

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: I have to agree with Assemblywoman Jasey, in that we have to do more in terms of directing kids where their passions are and where their interests are. And this one-size-fits-all curriculum-- I mean, the hair on the back of my neck stands on end every time I hear New Jersey STEPS. And I go, "This is not going to be in the best interest of all of our children." And the diversity-- This has

been a wonderful afternoon of seeing what can be done and what should be done in all of our counties and probably in the whole United States.

Mr. Drennan, would you like to say something? (affirmative response)

KEVIN DRENNAN: I'm Kevin Drennan.

I'm a member of the Mercer County Technical School Board. Here I sit with our Principal, Camille Rainiero -- one of our principals within the school.

And Assemblywoman Jasey, what you just said opened up a lot. We are a shared-time school district. We don't have any full-time programs currently, which as a lot of the curriculum -- the one-size-fits-all curriculums have come into place, and some of the stronger curriculum standards throughout the school -- it gets -- for all the regular high schools -- it gets very hard for us to continue and to attract schools. And with some of the block scheduling that has come into place, it's hurt the ability for us to attract students.

As you know, Trenton is in Mercer County, and Trenton's block school system has really impacted. And they do some good programs with their school that also are sort of competitive with what we do at the technical school. But all these things have added up to-- We do a great job, and the principals are great, and the schools are adapting to the needs of the students and the needs of the -- actually of the workforce in the State of New Jersey, and training the students for that. And so they do a lot of good work.

The school certainly, as a shared-time school district -- full-time/shared-time school district -- certainly needs help in two ways. One is

the fact that we have a lot of programs where kids -- our students can earn college credits, can earn skills -- in plumbing, electricians -- that are necessary in the workforce. But we need help in making sure that the curriculums match up, so the students in Mercer County have those opportunities -- which they have, but are limited based on the scheduling problems that we are currently facing.

Additionally, as we'd like to -- as many of the schools -- and you've heard from Ocean County, Monmouth County, Union County, Bergen County, all the schools that have -- that's probably not all the counties, but all the ones who have very successful -- and certainly very successful full-time programs, and have high-tech programs which have produced some of the best students in the state. And they go on to do some great things, as you heard from some of -- the four students here. And we'd like to be able to do more of that in Mercer County. And the support from the State, financially or curriculum-wise, would certainly be helpful.

Additionally, as many of you may know, I also served -- prior to current -- I left Governor Corzine's administration last year. And I served as the Executive Director of the Commerce Commission. I assisted with the development of the Governor's economic growth strategy. And priorities have changed as the economy has changed. But one of our priorities that was laid out there was development of -- workforce development. And vocational schools and technical schools were identified within the Governor's economic growth strategy as something we need to focus on, specifically the development of math and science in the schools, in the curriculums, and what the technical schools-- And Judy Savage, at that time, invited myself and Commissioner Socolow to visit the Union County

school system to see what they were doing there. And they were doing some great work. It was a great tour that we were able to see. And I'm sure that's -- again, the school that we visited. I'm sure that many of these schools are doing some really good things.

SENATOR ALLEN: I would just like to ask you one question. You're talking about wanting more money. And you've worked in Trenton, so you know it's not there. (laughter)

But my question is about the difference in the different vocational technical programs. Is it because the counties -- the freeholders of the different counties have had a different commitment to this in each county? Is that the real difference?

MS. SARGENT: Extremely important. The freeholders have to buy into it.

SENATOR ALLEN: Okay. So it's not all our fault. (laughter)

MS. SARGENT: I didn't say that. (laughter)

MR. DRENNAN: Certainly not.

I just wanted to add some of the great things, again, that we've worked on, if you don't mind, on some of what Mercer County is doing -- since you can't visit every school, which we understand.

The Mercer County Technical School District is working with the State of New Jersey and the Southern Regional Educational Board to implement the High Schools That Work/Technology Centers That Work model to increase students' achievement and rigor in all programs. High Schools That Work is based on the belief that most students can master complex academic and technical concepts if schools create an environment

that encourages students to make the effort to succeed, which many of the schools here in New Jersey have been doing.

Technology Centers That Work school improvement initiative was formed in 2007 and designed specifically to assist these shared-time centers in reviewing and implementing actions needed to produce high-demand, high-wage graduates who will be leaders in their selected careers.

As a member school, we are implementing the 10 key practices for changing what is expected of students, and what they are taught, and how they are taught. Two of these key practices deal with academic studies and career technical studies.

In the first instance, academic studies, we are integrating reading literacy and essential mathematical concepts into CTE curriculum by encouraging teachers to apply academic content and skills to real-world problems and projects. In the second instance, career and technical studies, we are providing students access to challenging career and technical studies in high-demand fields that emphasize the higher-level mathematics, science, literacy, and problem-solving skills needed in the workplace and in further education.

With training and resources, we will enable teachers and leaders to take the steps necessary to change school and classroom practices, and raise student achievement. Research proves that career and technical education engages and motivates students by offering them real-world learning opportunities, leading to lower dropout rates and greater earnings for high school graduates. When CTE courses also incorporate academic rigor, research shows that student achievement significantly increases.

These findings suggest that CTE should be an important aspect to the State's broader high school redesign strategy.

So just some of the things in the programs -- and we've worked with national programs -- that we've been able to bring to our school. But, again, with your assistance, we certainly believe we can do more; with freeholder assistance -- that's helpful as well. But as the curriculum, a lot of ways, really comes from the State, the Federal government-- And the problems that we have currently, as a shared-time school district -- where we provide a great resource for high school graduates, whether they're going to go on to a more -- in the plumbing, sciences type of career, or whether they're going to go on and become a doctor or a lawyer -- we can provide this opportunity to them. But scheduling conflicts right now, because of the curriculums that the high schools have to keep, are really one of our biggest impediments.

But thank you for your time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Senator.

SENATOR ALLEN: I have one other question for all of you -- for anybody, actually, who can answer this: We have a growing gang problem in my district. And some of my towns that are not related to any big city -- towns of 20,000, 5,000, 40,000 -- huge, growing gang problems. And I'm wondering if-- We're looking for answers on how we can keep these children -- steer them from this huge mistake. And I'm wondering if this is a great part of the answer -- the real-life experience, and giving them this kind of educational experience, perhaps.

I wonder if any of you have any experience in dealing with a group of youngsters who are potentially looking at going toward gangs.

MR. QUIST: Before I came to the career academies, we had a program called the Enrichment Center. It was for at-risk high school kids who were going to drop out. It was like their-- They weren't delinquents. They were just not motivated at all.

SENATOR ALLEN: Where was this?

MR. QUIST: In Lakehurst. And it was project-based, hands-on. We would engage them. And they were from all over Ocean County. It was an incredible program. We'd center a project on like -- they built an airplane -- a Styrofoam airplane that actually flew. I couldn't believe it. (laughter) They did. And I put-- Wilbur and Orville Wright went in there, the (indiscernible) principal, the science teacher. These kids didn't want to be in the classroom. And they were, potentially, gang-type guys and gals. And it was a tremendously successful program. And because they were engaged, and they felt worth-- And I'll tell you, you won't see a kid with tie-dyed purple hair sitting next to a guy with a pocket protector in a normal school. I saw it all the time. It was quite remarkable. So it goes back to the hands-on.

SENATOR ALLEN: It really does, doesn't it?

MR. QUIST: It does. And the dedication of the staff, as well.

SENATOR RICE: Senator, let me just say to you that a couple of years ago -- in fact, Principal Ras Baraka was over at Central. We brought the Crips and Bloods together and had the different sects call a truce.

(indiscernible) and got the gangs. We made an example by getting them engaged and even getting a couple employed just to show the life. We don't always have them. But once again, it goes back to this whole

notion of engaging. But it has to start down here. I think we're looking at how to-- We spend a lot of time trying to figure out how to deal with this population. And oftentimes I say, "You know what? We just have to corral some of these folks and just keep them focused, and let them grow into age, and out of it, and start down here to prevent all this stuff here." I do think it's very important. We keep hearing this *engagement*, and we all know it. But we don't want to pay for it.

Also, I think we need to take a look at your freeholders' budgets, in terms of education versus what the State does. Because we still put some money into these systems. And we're going to have to be a little clearer on what we expect from our dollars going into the system, and maybe make certain that the freeholders -- and we count everything else, we do this-- Maybe we need to make it clear that there are some things you can't even do with your own budget. "You do this. We're going to do this."

I don't know. And that's why these discussions are very important -- this whole vocational area. I don't see it as vocational anymore. I'm hearing college mixed in with career opportunities and things of that magnitude. And so we're going to have to talk about the new construction. We're doing new construction, and we're going to do new construction. Because there are going to be those of us who understand that some buildings have got to come down, regardless of how we do it. You can't teach a kid in a 100-year-old building.

But then maybe we should go back and have some discussions about, "We're going to build the building anyway. What exactly is going to be in that building? What's the relationship going to be?" So maybe they

can't do this whole MATES thing, in terms of a new structure. But maybe we can have a partnership -- because there's limited space here -- with a couple of rooms in a new building where we can get more out of it for those who have certain career paths they want to follow. Because we're saying *academies* in these buildings anyway. And I think we're saying, in the urban areas, *academies* just to make the young people feel good about something. We may tweak it a little bit, but it's really not what we're talking about when we say an academy, but it's a good start. But there was actually a place and a space for certain things. And I think it's going to make a difference.

And gangs are just-- All gangs are subculture groups with their own set of subculture values -- they conflict with the norm and general from greater society. We can go in there and put them right in here.

You have gangs in here. They just don't call themselves gangs. You have these subculture groups with value systems that are a lot higher than the (indiscernible) in society sometimes. But they're grouping together and interacting for a common cause, but a greater thing.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Senator, one of the things that Bergen County had -- a huge seminar on gangs, because every single town, probably, in the State of New Jersey has gangs. They're infiltrating every place. And it's really frightening because some of these gangs transcend several generations. Grandma was a member of the gang, mom and dad are members of the gang, kids are born into the gang. And one of the things I think we have to focus on is -- and I'm a big proponent of having some of the children go to school from early in the morning until like 6:00 at night. I know that in some of the inner cities, the children are going to school

because they get breakfast and lunch. Well, they can also get a lot more than just nourishment in that time. And I think that if we start with the little ones, eventually we may phase them out. But our schools are failing them, because once they get into middle school and high school, they're not getting the kind of education that we're talking about here that is relevant to them, so that they can go out and make a living so that they're not fighting against society -- they want to become part of society. So it's got to be something that's an ongoing thing.

But it's so frightening because it does transcend generations. It's not something that just happened. It's been going on, I guess, since the '50s, the '60s. And as I said, sometimes grandma and grandpa were part of the Crips, and the Bloods, and stuff like that. And they're born into this environment. How do we take them out of that? And education is the way, and it has to start young. And that's why it's so important that we spend money on preschool, because these are the babies that we will be able to really have more effect on. Because when we start trying to do things once they're in high school, it's not effective. But we really have to revamp, I think, our whole education system to be more relevant to the needs of the kids.

MS. SARGENT: I think there should be some social skills training that's mandated to the elementary school. Because I see it with some of the students now. I mean, I see it with my son and his friends. We never would have spoken to our parents like they do. And I think that it goes back down to the elementary school -- that they don't have those social skills anymore. And I think that should be a necessary part of the curriculum.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: I just read in the paper -- I don't know if it was Wal-Mart, or Target, whatever -- that they have to have training programs for their staff to say, "Thank you, may I help you, please come back again," things that we thought were just standard etiquette. And they have to have in-service training programs in many of these places. I think we're dumbing down our society instead of elevating it.

So that's my pontification for the day. (laughter)

Anybody else like to say something? I mean, we could talk about this all day.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Yes. I'd just like to say goodbye. Thank you for coming. (laughter)

Thank you very much for coming. It's been very important for us, and I think, hopefully, it's been important for you. And we'll keep in contact.

Right, Judy?

MS. SAVAGE: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: I will bang the gavel. We are finished.

Thank you so much.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)