

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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October 19, 2016  
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HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Daniel Dromm  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

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

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

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

Jared Fox  
Department of Education LGBTQ Community Liaison

Bonnie Laboy  
Superintendent Community School District Two

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

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

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

Neil Sakar [sp?]  
NYC Public School Student

Katerina Core [sp?]  
Eastside Middle School student

Harvey Chism  
Executive Director of South Bronx Community  
Charter High School

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

Elizabeth Payne  
Queering Education Research Institute at Hunter  
College

Eliza Byard  
GLSEN

Jillian Weiss  
Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund

Gena Miller  
Advocates for Children

Evan Bernstein  
Anti-Defamation League

Jordan Greenberg  
Aram American Family Support Center

Saif Siddiqui  
Aram American Family Support Center

Debbie Almontaser  
Muslim Community Network

Ambreen Qureshi  
Arab American Family Support Center

Charlotte Pope  
Children's Defense Fund New York

Amy Leipziger  
NYCLA Education Commission

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

Elvis Miguel  
NYCLU Teen Activist Project

Paulette Johnson

Lillian Rivera  
Hetrick-Martin Institute

Robert De Sena  
Council for Unity

James Clementi  
Tyler Clementi Foundation

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

DeJohn Jones  
Parent Action Committee

Jeff Ervine  
Bridg-it School Founder

Harjot Kaur  
Sikh Coalition

Rishi Singh  
DRUM

Ivan Kristhiane Daquial  
Ugnayan

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

Athena Arielle Magno  
DRUM

Terrenze Rienton  
DRUM

Kian Anilao  
Ugnayan Youth

Camilla Bacolod  
Ugnayan Youth

Khushu Bijaz [sp?]  
DRUM



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

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



had been prevented from writing or discussing LGBT topics in class projects and assignments. Bullying can have a devastating impact on both victims and bullies. Illustrative of this are the tragic cases of bullied youth who commit suicide and of bullies who land in prison. Most of the results of bullying do not reach the news, but can still be quite devastating. Bullying leads to increased absenteeism, decreased academic achievement and greater likelihood of dropping out of school. In addition to academic difficulties, victims of bullying are more likely to experience negative health effects, such as sleep difficulties and headaches, and mental health problems including depression and anxiety which may continue into adulthood. The negative consequences extend to those doing the bullying who are more likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs, drop out of school, engage in acts of domestic violence, and have criminal convictions. Despite the extensive damage that bullying does, a number of students do not report incidents to school staff. A 2010 study based on national data found that 64 percent of students who were bullied did not report it. We've got to do a better job informing

all students about the dangers of bullying and the need to talk with appropriate school staff when incident do occur. To combat bullying, we need to obtain accurate information on who, what, where, when, and why. That brings me to the issue of under-reporting of bullying incidents in New York City schools as required by the state's Dignity for All Students, or DASA, Act, which went into effect in July 2012. A daily news analysis of DASA data from the 2012 to 13 school year showed that 80 percent of schools reported zero occurrences of bullying. An analysis of 2013-14 data by the State Attorney General found that 70 percent of city schools reported zero incidents, and 98 percent of city schools reported 10 or fewer incidents. Most recently, data for 2014 to 15 shows 53 percent of schools reported zero incidents, and 94 percent reported 10 or fewer incidents. While there has been a slight increase in reporting of incidents over these three years, the level of under-reporting is still unacceptable. The Attorney General's Report also found some confusion and uncertainty among schools about what incidents must be reported and how they should be classified. This raises serious

questions about the training that schools are receiving on DASA's reporting requirements as well as training on bullying prevention more generally. I'm interested in hearing how many incidents of bullying, harassment and discrimination, especially related to sexual orientation and gender identity, have been reported to the Office of Equal Opportunity. I am also interested in hearing about the various ways in which bullying, harassment and discrimination manifest themselves. Much of the focus is on student-on-student incidents, but what happens when the bully is an adult? This hearing will probe deeper than individual incidents to uncover the institutional homophobia and transphobia at the root of some of the problems. A key question is, how consistently and constantly is the DOE implementing in every single school anti-discrimination measures where LGBT issues are concerned. With all of these concerns, I look forward to hearing about the progress of Jared Fox, the DOE's LGBT liaison who came on board with Council funding. Jared has been working hard on fulfilling his considerable duties, very considerable, including preparing a comprehensive plan, something that surprisingly the

largest school district in the country has never had before. As of the beginning of this hearing, we do not know some of the basic facts about the situation, but I hope Jared will provide us with the necessary data, especially given how much the DOE relies on data. We need to know how many schools have programs specifically to promote gender and sexuality alliances or GSA's and how many others are being developed. How many teachers and administrators are out of the closet, and what is being done to encourage others to come out and serve as role models? In addition, I am interested in hearing how professional development of all members of the school community, curricular modernization to ensure the accurate portrayal of LGBT history and current event response are being used to tackle an issue too often shrouded in shame and silence. We are in the midst of a seismic societal shift, but do our students know the forces that led us to marriage equality and the continuing struggle for transgender rights. As far as current events are concerned, after the worst mass shooting in US history at the Pulse gay nightclub in Orlando, how did the DOE direct teachers to respond? Finally, I am interested in hearing how the new

council-funded gender equity position within the DOE will complement Jared's work. From many conversations that I've had on this topic, I know there are schools in New York City and across the country that are doing an admirable job on this issue. So, I am eager to hear how the DOE is implementing these best practices in every school. At today's hearing, the Committee will examine the DOE's current policies, practices and reporting mechanisms, as well as recommendations for improvement to ensure that every school provides a safe and welcoming climate for all students. We also look forward to hearing testimony from parents, students, educators, advocates, unions, and others regarding the concerns and recommendations of the DOE's efforts to combat bullying. I would like to remind everyone who wishes to testify today that you must fill out a witness slip which is located on the desk of the Sergeant of Arms in the front of the room, and to allow as many people as possible to testify, testimony will be limited to three minutes per person, and I have to be extra strict about that today because I think we're going to have a number of people giving testimony. And I'd like to say that we

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

16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: I do.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

families, staff, and community-based organizations.

The revised guidelines will be published soon and

accompanied by central and school-based staff

training. We've made significant strides to build a

safe, supportive and inclusive school community for

all students, especially for our most vulnerable

populations who face their own unique challenges. We

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

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

Jared Fox who will update the committee on his work.

Jared will be followed by Superintendent Bonnie

Laboy. Superintendent Laboy's work with middle

school students to expand gender and sexuality

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

Principal Notes, the Chancellor's monthly newsletter

to principals. We will then be happy to answer any

questions.

JARED FOX: Good afternoon, Chair Dromm

and members of the City Council Education Committee.

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

LGBT Community Liaison. I'm thankful for the support

of this committee and the creation of this role and

funding of several initiatives that we've undertaken,

and my gratitude mirrors that of the students,

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

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

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



orientation and gender identity in these schools.

GSA's create a space of LGBTQ students and allies to

socialize, support one another and advocate for

inclusive practices in their schools. This year,

GLSEN named the Academy for Young Writers in District

19 in Brooklyn as the GSA of the year nationwide.

This is a testament to the high-quality of GSA's

across the five boroughs. We have even started a GSA

for central office staff. The New York City Schools

Pride Employee Resource Group brings together LGBTQ

and allied staff from across all five boroughs for

social and educational events. In conclusion, we are

deeply committed to providing all of our students,

families and staff with a safe and supportive

environment where they can learn and thrive, and

we're equally committed to address the academic and

social/emotional needs of students who exhibit

challenging behaviors. While we have made enormous

progress, we recognize that there's more work to be

done. It is our mission to support all schools to

become models of positive school climate and culture

in which all students feel included, respected and

safe. To that end, we look forward to continuing to

partner with the City Council to reach this goal, and now you will hear from Superintendent Bonnie Laboy.

SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Thank you, Jared.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Sure.

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

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

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

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay.

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

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

19 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: get to those.

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

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

SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Will do.

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

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Sure.

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

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

think we can look into can we create something comparable.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Are pending at this point.

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

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

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

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Yes, they are.

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

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

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

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: It is retaliation.

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: How do you address--

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I'm sorry.

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

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

6  
7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, just in regard to  
8 training and specific to LGBT students as well, how  
9 much training are we doing of teachers? Because I  
10 know in the past we've done guidance counselors, but  
11 the issue of teachers, because they're rally the  
12 people on the front lines, how are we getting to  
13 teachers and what are we teaching and training them  
14 to do?

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

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

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

back to back? Because one I thought was not enough. One was like let's tip toe and get our feet wet a little. The second one was a little bit more. We've also done full-day trainings. So, what we realized, especially our transgender students, is that principals needed to be able to be empowered to have these difficult conversations that may come. So we partnered with the Hetrick-Martin Institute to develop a full-day training specifically for school leaders, and it goes through terminology, role-plays, it goes the policy. I mean, it's in-depth. We offered to about 150 school leaders in May and June of last year, took that feedback and now have tweaked it, and we'll be offering it this year twice a month for the rest of the year starting November.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, who--

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Who does that?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: So, we have--

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

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay.

SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Thank you.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

UNIDENTIFIED: Yes.

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

-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: [interposing]  
16 Okay.

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

21 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Okay.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And--

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Yes,  
yes.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: for joining us  
today.

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

SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thanks--

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: [interposing] His district.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

12 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Absolutely.

13 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Two principals.

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

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

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Do we have a  
24 specific type of number or what we're looking at?  
25

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

6 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Okay, no worries.

7 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: That's okay.

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

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

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] And  
24 is this district-wide or is this just for one campus?  
25



SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: My students are advocating for this citywide.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So--

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

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

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

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

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

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

SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And do we have support--

1  
2 SUPERINTENDENT LABOY: [interposing] The  
3 bill is still in draft, so don't get nervous, but  
4 it's coming your way soon, yeah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

21 KENYATTE REID: Sure.

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

KENYATTE REID: Yes, I do.

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

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

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

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

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

1  
2 Whenever there is a report of a bullying incident,  
3 both the parent of the victim and the perpetrator are  
4 called in so that the principal can meet with the  
5 parents and discuss the issues with them, and we have  
6 both in-person or phone translation services  
7 available to support the families who don't speak  
8 English.

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

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

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

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

13 KENYATTE REID: [interposing] Right.

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

23 KENYATTE REID: Right.

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



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

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

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

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: That's right.

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

disconnect and this parent didn't know where to go.

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

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

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

1  
2 name of the person to contact in the event that you  
3 would like to report something or need somebody to  
4 speak to. So, if the student is in school they can  
5 look for that, or if the parent comes to the school,  
6 it's something that should be visible for them.

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

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Good, thank you. And  
21 I have just a few more questions, actually. Do you  
22 have a current list of Respect for All liaisons that  
23 you can provide the Council with, a current list?

24

25

KENYATTE REID: Yes. We have over 3,000 DOE employees that have been trained in Respect for All. We can--

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

18 LOIS HERRERA: Yes, I do.

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you.

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

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

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

LOIS HERRERA: We also--

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1  
2 creating professional development for staff, specific  
3 programming for students and creating resources for  
4 all. The Gender Equity Liaison will ensure a focus  
5 on intersectionality of lots of identity  
6 characteristics for in both gender identity and  
7 gender non-conforming students looking at ethnicity,  
8 race, religion, and sexual orientation. This Gender  
9 Equity Liaison will focus on prevention and awareness  
10 of dating violence, sexual consent, women's  
11 empowerment in areas of education, career, expanding  
12 opportunities for all gender with pointed attention  
13 on the intersectionality and vulnerable populations.

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

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

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



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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Is that the Vader [sic]?

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

1  
2 related. Yes, we do look at our numbers very  
3 closely, and we are concerned about schools that  
4 don't report incidents or seem not to have numbers  
5 that would-- you know, at different points on a  
6 monthly basis we look at the numbers of reported  
7 incidents.

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Excuse me. Okay.

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

23 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR ROSE: Thank you very  
24 much.

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

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

11 UNIDENTIFIED: I do.

12 UNIDENTIFIED: Yes, I do.

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Respect, Acceptance and Voice through Education.

That program has been around for several years. It's been supported by the Council. Funding historically has been provided so that there's someone 24 hours a day that they can pick up the phone when there's a-- when it needs to be and to be able to--

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] So, it's an anti-bullying hotline?

STERLING ROBERSON: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: That people could call if they're being bullied?

STERLING ROBERSON: Yes. And also we also do BRAVE workshops. That's training that goes on with the schools. It's prime parcel with the Department of Education Respect for All. We've engaged in that initiative, but at the same time we roll-- we fold in our BRAVE campaign and program in that as well.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, thank you. Mr. Chism?

HARVEY CHISM: Good afternoon, Chairperson Dromm and members of the New York City Council Committee on education. My name is Harvey Chism, and I'm the Executive Director of South Bronx

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

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

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

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

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

18  
19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.  
20 My question was going to be if you had a GSA, but you  
21 answered that, and you're hoping to have one soon, am  
22 I right?

23 HARVEY CHISM: Yes, we do.

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



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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Good luck. Thank you.

HARVEY CHISM: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Alright. Yes?

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

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

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

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

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

15 NEIL SAKAR: Thank you.

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

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

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

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

people as if they are people and not statistics.

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

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

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

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

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



KATERINA CORE: I believe.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: The little red light  
is on?

KATERINA CORE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, good.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[laughter]

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

NEIL SAKAR: Still seems fun.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: There you go.  
Katerina?

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

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

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

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

NEIL SAKAR: No, it's Dgetz.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Okay. And--  
perfect. And can folks tweet you? I believe it's  
ESMS\_eagles, is that--

UNIDENTIFIED: [off mic comments]

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

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

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

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

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

13 NEIL SAKAR: 2003.

14 KATERINA CORE: 2003.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

NEIL SAKAR: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Thank you very

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

UNIDENTIFIED: I do.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Who would like to start?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Next, please?

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

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

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



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

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Next, please.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

make it easier to report bullying and harassment.

Finally, while DASA requires school districts to report only material incidents of bullying to the state, schools are also required to log all instances of bullying in the DOE's OORS system, and promptly address them. We ask the City Council to strongly recommend that district superintendents and central DOE staff better provide oversight of schools' data collection and analysis of bullying incidents. This will help the DOE to strategically allocate necessary resources. Thanks very much for the opportunity to testify. We appreciate you having us here today.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. And did Advocates for Children just create a position dealing specifically? Is that you?

GENA MILLER: Yes, that's me.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, congratulations to you.

GENA MILLER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And I look forward to continuing to work with you on these issues. Very glad to hear that they did that. So, very good. I want to throw a question out there. You know, we've been very proud to have passed, at least I was

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 might be helpful. So, I think those are the  
2 discussion that we need to have moving forward about  
3 how we deal with those other agencies, and that  
4 should occur with the other agencies within five  
5 years once this legislation is done. The other piece  
6 of the demographic legislation that we did was that  
7 all agencies will be trained in the collection of the  
8 demographic information. So, I think that was an  
9 important component in there as well, because I think  
10 just by virtue of the training of staff, how to do  
11 it, sends a clear message that these are important  
12 groups of people to all of us. So, I want to thank  
13 you for coming in, all of you on the panel today, and  
14 I'm going to ask that we stop with this panel here.  
15 I have a little bit of a dilemma. We-- this room  
16 needs to be used at four o'clock. So I'm going to  
17 ask that we move into the committee room, and we will  
18 call our next panel in the committee room. And that  
19 next panel will be Evan Bernstein from the ADL,  
20 Jordan Greenberg from the Arab American Family  
21 Support Center, Saif Shuman [sp?] from the Arab  
22 American Family Support Center, Jordan Greenberg,  
23 Arab American Family Support Center, and Doctor  
24  
25



Debbie Almontaser from the Muslim Community Network.

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

[break]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I'm sorry?

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

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

EVAN BERNSTEIN: Thank you.

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

EVAN BERNSTEIN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Next please?

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Doctor  
22 Almontaser?

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

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

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

1 but that never happened. Nadine went to the Dean and  
2 nothing happened. Her parents went up to the school,  
3 and they did not get the courtesy as parents to speak  
4 to the Administration, leaving us to bring this case  
5 to the Mayor's Office to address. Since the  
6 beginning of 2016 there have been five additional  
7 bullying cases of Muslim students that the Council on  
8 Islamic-- the Council on American Islamic Relations,  
9 CAIR, has represented students and their families.

10 I'd like to just give you these cases quickly.

11 First, there was a girl in hijab where her hijab was  
12 snatched off her head, and she was put in a head lock  
13 and punched. Another middle school student girl who  
14 wanted to go into law enforcement as a career draws a  
15 picture of an investigation investigating a crime  
16 scene, which gets interpreted as doing-- as wanting  
17 her to do something to harm others. Another student,  
18 a high school boy, was constantly called Bin Laden  
19 because his first name was Osama. Another young high  
20 school Muslim girl is told her religion is dumb by  
21 her gym teacher because she can't wear shorts to gym  
22 class. And lastly, young Muslim girl who had her  
23 books thrown on the ground and pushed, and her hijab  
24 was pulled off while also using derogatory terms  
25



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

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

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

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

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

DEBBIE ALMONTASER: Thank you.

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

UNIDENTIFIED: [off mic comments]

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

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

UNIDENTIFIED: [off mic comments]

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Next, please?

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

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

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

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

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

ELVIS MIGUEL: Yes.

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

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

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

ELVIS MIGUEL: No.

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

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

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

8 ELVIS MIGUEL: Yeah.

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

11 ELVIS MIGUEL: Not through school.

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

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

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

18 ELVIS MIGUEL: Yeah.

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

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

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

25 ELVIS MIGUEL: Yeah.

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

ELVIS MIGUEL: Yeah, for sure.

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

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

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

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



CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Is marriage equality discussed?

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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: She did, oh, okay.

ELVIS MIGUEL: Yeah.

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

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: But not in class.

ELVIS MIGUEL: No, no, unfortunately.

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

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

ELVIS MIGUEL: Thank you.

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

PAULETTE JOHNSON: Good afternoon.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Good afternoon.

PAULETTE JOHNSON: Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yes, I can.

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

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

coming home with a black eye, it's not acceptable.

So, he must have called the school, and they became angry. But how do you think I'd feel if he had lost his eye. This was other children that were injured.

I hold the school administration accountable. I think that what should happen is like we have a 311 link to the Mayor's Office with complaints that he's aware of. There should be a link that the parents can get through to you guys here at City Council, because you guys here are the ones that make laws. I've sat here in this Council room a many years on different testimonies, when there was one over the toilet paper not being in the school bathrooms. I go way back.

But to think that children are in school, coming home injured, afraid to speak, the principal's making the teachers instruct the children don't defend themselves. So when he gets a punch coming at him, he's afraid to block it, because he thinks that he's doing something that the teachers don't want him to do. These are children. They're human beings. Not one should ever have to feel in a classroom that there life is at jeopardy. And Thomas, does he look like he deserved to be attack. And I brought him here today because now we have other issues. He came

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

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

1 PAULETTE JOHNSON: Great.

2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Great grandson.

3 Congratulations on that, too.

4 PAULETTE JOHNSON: Thank you. Twenty--

5 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] I really  
6 appreciate it.

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

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Wow.

10 PAULETTE JOHNSON: Yeah, nine of my own.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Amazing.

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

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: No, and that's  
15 terrible, and I take that very, very seriously. And  
16 I want to tell you something, it hurts me very much  
17 to hear that a victim of bullying gets revictimized  
18 by the system when people don't believe that they  
19 have been a victim of bullying. That is the purpose  
20 of this hearing today, is to draw that out, to let  
21 the public know that we're not going to tolerate  
22 that, and to push the DOE in the direction that  
23 you're talking about. Fortunately, we've been able  
24 to make some changes. More work is needed to be  
25

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

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

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

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

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

PAULETTE JOHNSON: Thank you very much.

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

1  
2 today. I really deeply appreciate it. Thank you  
3 very much. I'm going to call my next panel.

4 PAULETTE JOHNSON: Say thank you, Thomas.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

24 JAMES CLEMENTI: We have won a few.  
25

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

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

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

JAMES CLEMENTI: [interposing] Yes.

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

JAMES CLEMENTI: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you for coming  
in.

JAMES CLEMENTI: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Much appreciated.  
Hi.

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

9 LILLIAN RIVERA: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Next, please?

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

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



even greater impact on this type of work than much of the work that we're doing, because of the level of contact that Lady Gaga makes because of the media.

And I remember when I was younger Madonna was kind of in the same league in terms of those of us who loved Madonna, and yes-- she had that similar impact, and it seems to me that Lady Gaga through her foundation and the work that Cynthia and you all have done is taking us to the next step. And so thank you for the work that you do. Thank you. Yes?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

21 ROBERT DE SENA: Thank you.

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

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

14 DEJOHN JONES: [off mic]

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

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

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

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

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

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

25 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



JEFF ERVINE: What? The Aspen Institute.

The whole goal now is to be able to measure the whole students, the positive, the negative, and find out what's missing, because every student can learn equally. There's always some support that's missing, and we want to give these tools to everybody, and we beta tested long enough, and the response from superintendent to the heads of schools is, "Wow, this is incredible." I met with David Hockman in Albany. He's like, "This is the most incredible thing I've ever seen, most comprehensive product ever created. Go ahead and do whatever you have to do."

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

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: There are.

KAREN MARTER: Okay, good.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And you're on camera.

KAREN MARTER: That's fine with me.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yeah.

KAREN MARTER: So, I am--

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13 KAREN MARTER: right.

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

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

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

21 KAREN MARTER: Okay.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7  
8 KAREN MARTER: Thank you.

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

17 KAREN MARTER: Thank you.

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

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



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

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

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

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

HARJOT KAUR: Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RISHI SINGH: Yeah.

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

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

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

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

TERRENZE RIENTON: My name is Terrenze.

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



into the school to prison pipeline.

Institutionalized bullying targets our black and Latino peers in this particularly violent way.

Though we are reported to experience a high rate of interpersonal bullying, we're also regularly given lesser punishment than our black and Latino kin for the same action. Asian American Pacific Islander, or API, youth experience oppressions in a different way than our black and Latino kin. While API youth experience the highest rates of bullying in schools, 54 percent of high school youth who reported they had been bullied in NYC were Asian-American in March 2014, we are conditioned to become the middle people who may be able to benefit from the status quo or the model minority. API students often become a wedge used to criminalize our black and Latino kin, divide us from them, and fuel the school to prison pipeline. We will not stand for this. As Asian students, we want all bullying to end, and this cannot mean implementing policies that target and then criminalize our black and brown peers. We want an end to institutionalized bullying which is toxic to all people in our education system from teachers to students. We need to take action to undo this

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

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



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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Anyone else?

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ATHENA MAGNO: I started in 2008.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: 2008--

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And is that principal still there?

ATHENA MAGNO: I don't know.

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

: I have a testimony.

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

IVAN DAQUIAL: Hi, my name is Ivan

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

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



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

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

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

IVAN DAQUIAL: Francis Lewis High School.

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

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Oh, this is your first year.

IVAN DAQUIAL: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And this happened at Francis Lewis?

IVAN DAQUIAL: Yeah.

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

ATHENA MAGNO: No.

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

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

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

UNIDENTIFIED: Yeah.

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

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

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And where did you go to school?

UNIDENTIFIED: IS61 Leonardo Da Vinci.

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

UNIDENTIFIED: Yeah.

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

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

5 [video presentation]

6 [applause]

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

14 UNIDENTIFIED: It's not discussed.

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

18 UNIDENTIFIED: No.

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

21 UNIDENTIFIED: No.

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

24 UNIDENTIFIED: No.  
25

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

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

14 [applause]

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

17 [gavel]

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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION



C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date November 1, 2016