

# United Federation of Teachers

APPENDIX

Local 2, American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

280 Park Avenue South  
New York, N.Y. 10010  
(212) 777-7500

RHONDA WEINGARTEN  
Counsel to the President

TESTIMONY

BY

RANDI WEINGARTEN

Counsel to the President

United Federation of Teachers

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INDOOR AIR QUALITY TESTIMONY

RANDI WEINGARTEN

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GOOD MORNING. I AM RANDI WEINGARTEN, COUNSEL TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UFT. AS YOU KNOW, THE UFT HAS BEEN VERY COMMITTED TO UNEARTHING AND ABATING HEALTH AND SAFETY PROBLEMS AFFECTING THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS. I AM ACCOMPANIED TODAY BY ELLIE ENGLER, AN INDUSTRIAL HYGIENIST WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO RETAIN, DUE TO THE INNOVATIVE HAZARD ABATEMENT BOARD GRANT PROGRAM INITIATED BY ASSEMBLYMAN BARBARO SEVERAL YEARS AGO, AND BY MATT GILLEN, AN INDUSTRIAL HYGIENIST FROM THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH FOUNDATION.

THANK YOU FOR HOLDING THIS HEARING ON WHAT HAS BECOME A VERY PERVERSIVE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PROBLEM: INDOOR AIR POLLUTION.

IT IS FAIRLY EASY TO TELL STORIES AND QUOTE STATISTICS ABOUT PROBLEMS IN OUR SCHOOL BUILDINGS. IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND THE HUMAN COST BEHIND THESE STORIES AND STATISTICS -- THE LOSS OF PRODUCTIVITY FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS TRYING TO TEACH AND LEARN UNDER IMPOSSIBLE CONDITIONS. UNCOMFORTABLE, UNHEALTHFUL, UNSAFE, DILAPIDATED OR CROWDED SCHOOLS MEAN TIRED, SICK, DISTRACTED ADULTS AND CHILDREN -- AND THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR, WHETHER DELIBERATE OR NOT: WE REFUSE TO TAKE THE NECESSARY STEPS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT.

THAT IS WHY THE UFT WELCOMES THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK AT

THIS HEARING. EACH CHILD AND ADULT IN OUR SCHOOLS MATTERS AND WE ARE HERE TODAY TO RECOMMEND AN IMPORTANT STEP THAT CAN BE TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT.

TO SOME EXTENT, THE CONDITION OF POOR AIR QUALITY IN OUR BUILDINGS IS A VICTIM OF THE CRISES OF THE SEVENTIES -- THE CITY'S FISCAL CRISIS AND THE NATION'S ENERGY CRISIS. SCHOOL BUILDINGS WERE CONSTRUCTED IN THE LATE 1960'S AND THE EARLY 1970'S WITH WINDOWS THAT DO NOT OPEN. THESE SCHOOLS, BUILT AT THE TIME OF THE FIRST ENERGY CRISIS, HAD TO FOLLOW FEDERAL ENERGY SAVINGS GUIDELINES. THEIR VENTILATION SYSTEMS WERE CALIBRATED TO USE AS LITTLE OUTSIDE AIR AS POSSIBLE, THUS REQUIRING LESS ENERGY TO HEAT OR COOL. MANY USE LESS THAN TEN PERCENT OF OUTSIDE AIR -- AND THAT IS WHEN THEY ARE OPERATING AT FULL EFFICIENCY. BUT THEY HAVE BEEN NEGLECTED FOR YEARS, SO THE VENTILATION SYSTEMS DO NOT EVEN WORK THAT WELL. IN ADDITION, BECAUSE OUR SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS ARE SO OVERCROWDED, THE ORIGINALLY-CONTEMPLATED OCCUPANCIES HAVE BEEN FAR EXCEEDED, THUS STRAINING THE VENTILATION SYSTEMS BEYOND THEIR ABILITIES TO PERFORM. AND IN SOME SCHOOLS THE SYSTEMS DO NOT WORK OR HAVE NEVER WORKED -- EITHER BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT BUILT PROPERLY, DESIGNED PROPERLY OR OPERATED AND MAINTAINED PROPERLY.

WHAT IS THE RESULT? A CONDITION KNOWN AS "CLOSED BUILDING" OR "SICK BUILDING SYNDROME." HEADACHES,

DROWSINESS, AND EYE IRRITATION ARE A FEW OF THE SYMPTOMS WE SEE IN STAFF AND STUDENTS. SOMETIMES THE PROBLEMS CAUSES STAFF AND STUDENTS DISCOMFORT; OTHER TIMES PEOPLE HAVE GOTTEN SERIOUSLY SICK AND EVEN COLLAPSED FROM THE LACK OF FRESH AIR. REGARDLESS, WITH ALL THE OTHER OBSTACLES OUR KIDS FACE, FIGHTING TO PAY ATTENTION BECAUSE OF THE DROWSINESS CAUSED BY A LACK OF FRESH AIR OR ADEQUATE VENTILATION SHOULD NOT BE ONE OF THEM.

THE UFT CONSULTED WITH TEACHERS, PARAPROFESSIONALS, CHAPTER LEADERS, GUIDANCE COUNSELORS, SECRETARIES AND OTHER MEMBERS WHO WORK IN SCHOOLS. WE HAVE ALSO RETAINED AN INDUSTRIAL HYGIENIST TO INVESTIGATE THE PROBLEM CITYWIDE. AS A RESULT OF OUR RESEARCH, WE DEVELOPED A COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF ALL THE CLOSED SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND BUILDINGS WITH INNER CORES (PARTIALLY CLOSED) CITYWIDE, AND OUR RESEARCH UNCOVERED FIFTY CLOSED SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND TWELVE PARTIALLY CLOSED SCHOOL BUILDINGS IN NEW YORK CITY.

ONE OF THOSE CLOSED BUILDINGS IS P.S. 290 IN BROOKLYN. THIS FOUR-STORY BUILDING IS VENTILATED BY 9 SUPPLIED AIR HEATING SYSTEMS. BECAUSE OF THE NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED FROM TEACHERS IN THAT BUILDING, WE CONDUCTED A COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF ALL ITS STAFF. FORTY-TWO RESPONDENTS SAID THE PROBLEM CONCERNING AIR QUALITY DATED BACK TO THE OPENING OF THE BUILDING. SYMPTOMS DESCRIBED INCLUDED UPPER

AND LOWER RESPIRATORY COMPLAINTS; DISORDERS OF THE CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM; AND A VARIETY OF SKIN CONDITIONS. THE MAJORITY REPORTED THAT THE CONDITIONS "MIRACULOUSLY" DISAPPEAR DURING TIME SPENT AWAY FROM THAT BUILDING. APPROXIMATELY HALF OF THE RESPONDENTS HAVE WORKED IN THE SCHOOL FOR MORE THAN TEN YEARS. NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE STAFF IS EXTREMELY CONCERNED ABOUT THE LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF AN INADEQUATE SUPPLY OF FRESH AIR FOR BOTH THE STUDENTS AND THEMSELVES.

LAGUARDIA HIGH SCHOOL, MURRY BERGTRAUM HIGH SCHOOL AND NORMAN THOMAS HIGH SCHOOL ARE WELL-KNOWN EXAMPLES OF THE PROBLEMS OF CLOSED SCHOOL BUILDINGS. BUT THERE ARE MANY MORE. IN THE BRONX, LOOK AT HARRY S. TRUMAN HIGH SCHOOL, P.S. 153, P.S. 163, P.S. 178, P.S. 180, P.S. 181, P.S. 91 ANNEX AND THE COMMITTEE ON SPECIAL EDUCATION IN DISTRICT 10. IN BROOKLYN, EDWARD R. MURROW HIGH SCHOOL IS PARTIALLY CLOSED, AND I.S. 324 AND I.S. 390 ARE COMPLETELY CLOSED. AND IN MANHATTAN, PARK WEST HIGH SCHOOL AND THE COMMITTEE ON SPECIAL EDUCATION IN DISTRICT 6 OPERATE IN CLOSED BUILDINGS, WHILE LOUIS BRANDEIS HIGH SCHOOL IS PARTIALLY CLOSED. IN ALL OF THESE SCHOOLS THE UFT HAS RECEIVED COMPLAINTS FROM STAFF SIMILAR TO THOSE RECEIVED FROM P.S. 290. THESE MAY WELL BE JUST THE TIP OF THE "CLOSED BUILDING SYNDROME" ICEBERG.

IT BECAME CLEAR THAT THE LACK OF AIR IN SCHOOL BUILDINGS

HAD TO BE CORRECTED. THE FIRST STEP WAS TO CONVINCED THE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO STUDY THE HEATING, VENTILATION AND AIR CONDITIONING SYSTEMS IN SCHOOLS WE IDENTIFIED AS SUFFERING FROM INDOOR AIR POLLUTION.

THE BOARD HIRED VENTILATION CONSULTANTS TO EXAMINE AND EVALUATE THE SYSTEMS OF ALL OF THE SCHOOLS IDENTIFIED IN THE UNION'S COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF CLOSED AND PARTIALLY CLOSED BUILDINGS. 30 REPORTS HAVE BEEN COMPLETED TO DATE, AND EVERY SINGLE REPORT HAS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT UNFORTUNATELY WE WERE RIGHT -- THESE BUILDINGS SUFFER FROM POOR AIR QUALITY.

THE BOARD'S CONSULTANT'S RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE INTERIM MEASURES RANGING FROM MINOR MAINTENANCE; REPLACEMENT PARTS; REBALANCING AND INCREASING FRESH AIR INTAKE. OTHER PERMANENT SOLUTIONS RECOMMENDED INCLUDE COSTLY MEASURES, SUCH AS INSTALLING HUMIDIFICATION SYSTEMS OR OVERHAULING THE ENTIRE SYSTEM AT SELECT SCHOOLS.

SOLVING THESE PROBLEMS WILL NOT BE WITHOUT COST. BUT THEY MUST BE SOLVED. THE HAZARDS THEY REPRESENT FOR THE CHILDREN OF THIS CITY AND THEIR EDUCATORS ARE SERIOUS AND UNACCEPTABLE.

RECOGNIZING THE FISCAL REALITIES WE NOW FACE, THE UFT HAS EMBARKED UPON A TWO-PRONGED APPROACH TO ADDRESS INDOOR AIR QUALITY PROBLEMS IN THE SCHOOLS.

OUR SHORT-TERM APPROACH, AS I JUST ILLUSTRATED, HAS BEEN

AT THE LOCAL LEVEL: IDENTIFY AND INVESTIGATE THE CLOSED AND PARTIALLY-CLOSED BUILDINGS, AND TO PRESS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERIM MEASURES THAT WILL AT LEAST INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF FRESH AIR FLOWING TO SCHOOLS. WE HAVE ALSO RECENTLY CONVINCED THE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO DEVELOP A TIMETABLE FOR INITIATING DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION IN FIVE OF THE IDENTIFIED BUILDINGS, AND WE ARE WORKING WITH THE SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY TO ENSURE THAT NEW BUILDINGS ARE DESIGNED AND BUILT WITH ADEQUATE VENTILATION.

OUR LONG-TERM APPROACH IS TO DEVELOP STANDARDS IN THIS AREA. THE PROPOSAL BALANCES THE NEED TO CREATE FLEXIBLE STANDARDS, CONTOURED APPROPRIATELY TO DIFFERENT BUILDING DESIGNS AND OCCUPANCY NEEDS, WITH THE NEED TO INCREASE FRESH AIR IN THE BUILDING AND GENERALLY INCREASE THE AIR QUALITY IN BUILDINGS. THE PROPOSAL ALSO RECOGNIZES TODAY'S FISCAL CONSTRAINTS AND THE COST OF REVAMPING ENTIRE HVAC SYSTEMS IN EXISTING BUILDINGS.

GENERALLY, THE PROPOSAL CONTAINS THREE BASIC COMPONENTS. FIRST, IT APPLIES THE AHERA CONCEPT TO THE INDOOR AIR PROBLEM AND REQUIRES THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR BUILDING TO DEVISE A WRITTEN, COMPREHENSIVE INDOOR ENVIRONMENTAL PLAN. THIS PLAN SHOULD BE A REAL TOOL TO MANAGE INDOOR AIR QUALITY, AND WOULD INCLUDE A DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING VENTILATION SYSTEMS; STATE THE OPERATING AND MAINTENANCE PROCEDURES, AND WOULD DEVISE

WAYS TO ABATE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH COMPLAINTS.

SECOND, THE PLAN PROVIDES A FLEXIBLE AIR STANDARD DICTATED BY THE NEEDS OF PERSONNEL IN THE BUILDINGS, AND ENFORCED THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL AUDITS WHICH WOULD DOCUMENT PRESENT AIR FUNCTIONING AND BRING IT TO AGREED-UPON PERFORMANCE STANDARDS.

FINALLY, THE PLAN ALSO PROVIDES A REASONABLE TIMETABLE FOR COMPLIANCE TO ATTAIN APPROPRIATE AIR QUALITY STANDARDS, COUPLED WITH INCENTIVES FOR BUILDING OWNERS TO USE INTERIM MEASURES TO AT LEAST ALLEVIATE SOME PROBLEMS.

AT THIS POINT, I WOULD LIKE TO INTRODUCE MATTHEW GILLEN, FROM THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH FOUNDATION, WHO HAS HELPED US DEVELOP THIS PROPOSAL. MATT WILL FURTHER SUMMARIZE THE MAJOR ASPECTS OF OUR REGULATORY PLAN AND IS AVAILABLE TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ON IT.