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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE,
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

INTERVIEW OF: TONY B. WATLINGTON, SR.

Friday, September 18, 2026

Washington, D.C.

The interview in the above matter was held in room 2175, Rayburn House Office Building,
commencing at 9:27 a.m.

1 Appearances:

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3
4
5 For the COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE:

6
7 [REDACTED], INVESTIGATIVE COUNSEL

8 [REDACTED], CHIEF CLERK

9 [REDACTED], GENERAL COUNSEL

10 [REDACTED], INVESTIGATIVE COUNSEL

11 [REDACTED], LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT

12 [REDACTED], MINORITY GENERAL COUNSEL,

13 LABOR AND HEALTH

14 [REDACTED], MINORITY GENERAL COUNSEL,

15 EDUCATION

16
17
18 For TONY B. WATLINGTON, SR.:

19
20 RACHEL F. COTTON, ESQ.

21 PAUL J. FISHMAN, ESQ.

22 CONNOR MORGAN, ESQ.

23 JENNIFER OH, ESQ.

24 ARNOLD & PORTER

25

1 For the SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA:

2
3 HANNAH GIRER-ROSENKRANTZ, DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL

4 LYNN RAUCH, GENERAL COUNSEL

1 BY [REDACTED]. MAJORITY STAFF: We can now go on the record.

2 This is a transcribed interview of Dr. Tony Watlington conducted by the U.S. House
3 Committee on Education and Workforce. Chairman Tim Walberg requested this interview as part of
4 the committee's oversight and investigative work into antisemitism in the School District of
5 Philadelphia.

6 Would the interviewee please state his full name for the record?

7 Dr. Watlington. Tony Watlington, Sr.

8 [REDACTED]: On behalf of the chairman, I want to thank you, Dr. Watlington, for appearing
9 here today. We appreciate your willingness to appear.

10 I will now ask everyone else participating today to introduce themselves.

11 [REDACTED]: [REDACTED], minority counsel.

12 [REDACTED]: [REDACTED], majority counsel.

13 [REDACTED]: [REDACTED], general counsel for the Democratic staff.

14 Ms. Rauch. Lynn Rauch, general counsel for School District of Philadelphia.

15 Ms. Cotton. Rachel Cotton, Arnold and Porter.

16 Mr. Fishman. Paul Fishman from Arnold and Porter.

17 [REDACTED]: [REDACTED], majority legislative assistant.

18 [REDACTED]: And I'm [REDACTED], investigative counsel for the majority.

19 The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure do not apply in this setting, but there are some guidelines
20 that we follow, and I'll go over those now.

21 Our questioning will proceed in rounds. The majority will ask questions first for a maximum
22 of 60 minutes. The minority will then have an opportunity to ask questions for an equal period.
23 Rounds shall continue until there are no more questions from either side.

24 A 10-minute break shall be taken after the majority's questions and before the minority's
25 questions in each round, and a 10-minute break shall be taken following each round before the next

1 round begins. The majority and minority may authorize a lunch break.

2 We have an official reporter taking down everything we say here today to make a written
3 record, so we ask that you give verbal responses to all questions.

4 Do you understand?

5 Dr. Watlington. Yes.

6 [REDACTED]. To ensure the reporter can take down a clear record, we will do our best to
7 limit the number of people asking questions during any given time to just those people whose turn it
8 is. It's also important that we don't talk over one another or interrupt each other if we can help it,
9 and that goes for everyone present at today's interview.

10 All interviewees who appear before the committee are encouraged to consult with counsel.
11 Interviewees may also appear without counsel.

12 It is my understanding that you chose to be accompanied today by counsel. Is that correct?

13 Dr. Watlington. Yes.

14 [REDACTED]. We want you to answer our questions in the most complete and truthful
15 manner possible, so we will take our time. If you have any question about something you are asked
16 or do not understand one of our questions, please let us know and we're happy to repeat it.

17 If you honestly do not know the answer to a question or do not remember, it is best not to
18 guess. Please just give us your best recollection.

19 And it's okay to tell us if you learned information from someone else. Just indicate how you
20 came to know the information.

21 If there are things you do not know or cannot remember, just say so, and please inform us
22 who, to the best of your knowledge, might be able to provide a more complete answer to that
23 question.

24 You should also understand that although this interview is not under oath, that by law you are
25 required to answer questions from Congress truthfully.

1 Do you understand this obligation?

2 Dr. Watlington. Yes.

3 [REDACTED]. This also applies to questions posed by Members and congressional staff in an
4 interview.

5 Do you understand that?

6 Dr. Watlington. Yes.

7 [REDACTED]. Interviewees who knowingly provide false testimony could be subject to
8 criminal prosecution for perjury or making false statements.

9 Do you understand?

10 Dr. Watlington. Yes.

11 [REDACTED]. Furthermore, you cannot tell half-truths or exclude information that would be
12 necessary to make the statements accurate. You are required to provide all information that would
13 make your response truthful. A deliberate failure to disclose information may constitute a false
14 statement.

15 Do you understand?

16 Dr. Watlington. Yes.

17 [REDACTED]. Is there any reason you are unable to provide truthful answers to today's
18 questions?

19 Dr. Watlington. No.

20 [REDACTED]. Finally, I'd like to note that what we discuss here today is confidential. We ask
21 that you do not speak about what we discuss in this interview to anyone not present here today to
22 preserve the integrity of our investigation.

23 Once the transcript of this interview has been reviewed by the committee majority and
24 minority and you for its accuracy, and then finalized by the committee, it may be disclosed either in
25 part or fully by the committee. At that point, you are free to discuss the interview.

1 This is the end of my preamble. Is there anything my colleagues from the minority would
2 like to add at this time?

3 [REDACTED]: I'll have a brief preamble when we start, but I just want to make sure, are
4 we -- can you pick up everybody? I just saw there's two mics here.

5 The Reporter. So far, so good.

6 Mr. Fishman. Scream if it doesn't work.

7 [REDACTED]. The time is 9:30 a.m. I will now begin the first round of questioning.

8 EXAMINATION

9 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

10 Q Antisemitism has manifested in the School District of Philadelphia in many forms. I'd
11 like to ask about your views on manifestations of contemporary antisemitism.

12 Is it antisemitic to call for or justify the killing of Jews?

13 A Yes.

14 Q Is it antisemitic to deny the Jewish people their right to self-determination?

15 A Yes.

16 Q Is it antisemitic to claim that the State of Israel is a racist endeavor?

17 A Certainly a teacher has no business taking a point of view in a classroom. But I also
18 think that that might depend on circumstances and context relative to First Amendment freedoms of
19 speech.

20 Q So it's not antisemitic to claim that Israel is a racist endeavor?

21 A I don't know. I think that it would depend on context that it was -- that was shared.

22 Q Is it antisemitic to compare Israeli policy to that of the Nazis?

23 A I think it is inherently problematic. I certainly don't agree with it, would not condone
24 it. Not sure, if someone said it in a context outside of their workplace, if it might be protected.

25 Q So unsure if it's antisemitic or not?

1 A I don't know.

2 Q Is it antisemitic to apply double standards to Israel not expected of any other
3 democratic nation?

4 A Would you repeat that question?

5 Q Is it antisemitic to apply double standards to Israel not expected of any other
6 democratic nation?

7 Mr. Fishman. I'm sorry, [REDACTED]. I don't even understand what that means.

8 [REDACTED]. Applying a double standard to Israel?

9 Mr. Fishman. Applying a double standard about what?

10 [REDACTED]. About anything. About their government policy, about the country as a
11 whole, something that you would not criticize another country for but you would criticize Israel for.
12 It's part of the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

13 Ms. Cotton. That doesn't make it clear, though.

14 Mr. Fishman. Right.

15 [REDACTED]. So it's unclear? Is that the answer?

16 Mr. Fishman. I'm just telling you I don't find the question clear because I don't know what
17 double standards apply to -- applied to what?

18 [REDACTED]. A general double standard. You've not witnessed a general double standard
19 being applied to Israel as compared to other nations?

20 Mr. Fishman. I'm not the witness. I'm just saying I don't understand the question.

21 [REDACTED]. Do you understand the question, sir?

22 Dr. Watlington. I don't understand the question.

23 [REDACTED]. Okay. Leave it at that.

24 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

25 Q What happened on October 7th, 2023?

1 A I recall on October 7th, 2023, there was a Hamas terrorist attack on Israel.

2 Q On October 12th, 2023, you sent an email to the district that included resources from a
3 group known as Learning for Justice. Are you familiar with this email?

4 A I recall sending a communication to district staff.

5 Q Did you review the resources in this email before sending it out?

6 A While I reviewed the email, I do not recall checking the links that were attached.

7 Q Okay. I'd like to introduce exhibits 1 and 2.

8 [Watlington Majority Exhibits Nos. 1.

9 And 2 were marked for identification.]

10 [REDACTED]. This is your email and a screenshot of the first resource linked in it.

11 Ms. Cotton. Can I just ask a question? I know there was some dispute as to whether the
12 link changed.

13 [REDACTED]. This is an archived version from the date that this was sent out.

14 Ms. Cotton. Sorry. I see the date as May 19th, 2021.

15 [REDACTED]. It has not changed between then and October 7th, 2023.

16 Ms. Cotton. I'm sorry. I'm just confused about the dates here. So this email which is
17 screenshotted has the date September 12th, 2024, on it, which doesn't match the date --

18 [REDACTED]. October 12th, 2023?

19 Ms. Cotton. No.

20 [REDACTED]. What are you looking at?

21 Ms. Cotton. It says 9/12/2024 on the top of it. Do you see that?

22 [REDACTED]. No, that's just when --

23 [REDACTED]. That's just when it was captured.

24 [REDACTED]. Yeah. That's just when it was captured. If you look at when it was sent, it
25 says October 12th, 2023.

1 Ms. Cotton. Okay.

2 [REDACTED]. On the date line.

3 Ms. Cotton. Okay. So this was just screenshotted on that date?

4 [REDACTED]. Yes.

5 Ms. Cotton. Okay.

6 Mr. Fishman. Just so the record's clear, so what you're telling the witness is this is an email
7 that you believe he sent on October 12th --

8 [REDACTED]. Yes.

9 Mr. Fishman. -- or someone sent on his behalf through the system --

10 [REDACTED]. Yes.

11 Mr. Fishman. -- on October 12th of 2023 --

12 [REDACTED]. Yes.

13 Mr. Fishman. -- but you all captured it on September 12th of 2024?

14 [REDACTED]. We were provided this screenshot of this email, and it has this date on it.

15 Mr. Fishman. Okay. Was it captured by the staff? Or was it captured by somebody else?

16 [REDACTED]. I'm going to leave it at that.

17 Mr. Fishman. Okay.

18 Ms. Cotton. The more important point that I just want to clarify is I know there was some
19 question about whether this content changed between the time the email was sent --

20 [REDACTED]. Uh-huh.

21 Ms. Cotton. -- and -- sorry -- the time the email was drafted and when it was actually sent.

22 [REDACTED]. Uh-huh.

23 Ms. Cotton. And I'm curious when this capture was from.

24 Mr. Fishman. Of exhibit 2?

25 Ms. Cotton. Of exhibit 2.

1 [REDACTED]: You mean this?

2 Ms. Cotton. Yes.

3 [REDACTED]: We used Web Archive.

4 Ms. Cotton. But for what day?

5 [REDACTED]: October 10th, 2023.

6 Ms. Cotton. So this would be the content 2 days before this was sent?

7 [REDACTED]: Yes.

8 Ms. Cotton. So we don't actually know that this was the content linked that day.

9 [REDACTED]: I'm going to ask about the content --

10 Ms. Cotton. Okay.

11 [REDACTED]: -- regardless of the date that it was on the website.

12 Mr. Fishman. Okay.

13 Ms. Cotton. Okay.

14 [REDACTED]: This resource opens by stating, "We know this conflict," the Israeli-Palestinian
15 conflict, "connects to imperialism and other oppressive systems...We know that people are dying,
16 fighting for their lives and engaging in liberation movements to be heard and treated with
17 dignity -- and that they've been doing so for decades."

18 What are the liberation movements that this statement refers to?

19 Ms. Cotton. He didn't author this statement, just to be clear. You're asking him to
20 speculate as to --

21 [REDACTED]: I'm asking him to -- about his opinion on a statement that is linked in an email
22 that he sent out.

23 Ms. Cotton. The content of which was 2 days before when he sent it out.

24 [REDACTED]: Okay. We will get another screenshot of this from 2 days later and it will be
25 the same, and we will come back to this question.

1 Ms. Cotton. Okay.

2 Mr. Fishman. But to be clear, are you asking him to opine on the content of a document
3 that he says he didn't remember reading?

4 [REDACTED]. That he sent out.

5 Mr. Fishman. He didn't send -- he sent the link and he said he didn't remember reading the
6 link.

7 [REDACTED]. I think it still matters that he sent out the link. If he doesn't remember the
8 content of a document which he sent out, then he can say that.

9 Mr. Fishman. I think he testified he didn't remember reading it at all.

10 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

11 Q You don't remember reading this at all?

12 A I did not -- I do not recall reading the links, this link or any link, prior to sending -- prior
13 to our staff sending the message out.

14 Q Got it. So you sent the email without looking at any of the links in it?

15 A I read the contents of the email but not the links --

16 Q Okay.

17 A -- is my recollection.

18 Q When did you become superintendent?

19 A I was named on April 1st, 2022, and took office on June 16th, 2022.

20 Q Did you choose or approve the members of your transition team?

21 A While I had some familiarity, I did not choose the members of my transition team.

22 Q Who chose the members of your transition team?

23 A Ultimately, they were viewed by co-chairs of the transition team, who at that time was
24 Dr. Guy General, president of the Community College of Philadelphia, and Andrea Custis, who I
25 believe was the, at that time, I believe the CEO and president of the Urban League of Philadelphia.

1 Q Are you familiar with Jacob Bender?

2 A The name doesn't ring a bell.

3 Q He was on your transition team.

4 Specifically, do you recall that he was on the sub-committee on Anti-Racist District Culture?

5 A Given that there were in excess of 100 members on my transition team, I'm not
6 individually familiar with all 100.

7 Q I'd like to introduce exhibit No. 3.

8 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 3

9 was marked for identification.]

10 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

11 Q This is a portion of an SDP, School District of Philadelphia, transition team report that
12 shows all the members of the sub-committee on Anti-Racist District Culture.

13 What was the purpose of this subcommittee?

14 A All of the areas that are a part of the Board of Education-adopted goals and guardrails
15 and priorities of the school board, as the new superintendent who took office in June of 2022, I asked
16 for a team to be created to do a couple of things.

17 One, to take the feedback from my 100-day listening and learning tour and do a deeper dive
18 into what are the next steps we need to take to make the School District of Philadelphia the
19 fastest-improving large urban school district.

20 And number two, to specifically dig into the prioritized areas that the Board of Education
21 deemed important as it was explained to me upon my hiring.

22 Q And one of those areas was anti-racist district culture?

23 A One of those areas was anti-racist district culture, correct.

24 Q Are you aware that Mr. Bender was the executive director of the Council on American
25 Islamic Relations, or CAIR-Philadelphia, at the time he was on your transition team?

1 A I don't remember each individual member of the transition team, but I clearly see that
2 he is or was executive director of CAIR. It's clear to me now.

3 Q Are you familiar with the organization CAIR?

4 A I have some familiarity with the organization.

5 Q Does the School District of Philadelphia work with that organization in any capacity, to
6 your knowledge?

7 A I'll say two things.

8 One, I recall meeting -- I don't know if it was specifically with Jacob Bender, but members of
9 the CAIR group who expressed, partly because, one, I asked the team to ensure that we have a
10 transition team that reflects the diversity of our school district in the Nation's sixth-largest city where
11 nearly 160-plus languages are spoken, so we want to be responsive to our very diverse population.

12 And number two, I asked the team to be sure that we have representatives in each of these
13 subgroups.

14 I found the members of CAIR that I met with around that time to be very interested, in my
15 opinion, authentically interested in providing support to the school district as was the case with
16 several other groups.

17 Q So you said that you wanted this transition team to reflect the district's diversity. Did
18 the anti-racist culture subcommittee have a representative for the Jewish community on it, to your
19 knowledge?

20 A The short answer, I don't know. I don't know.

21 Q Does not appear that it did.

22 Mr. Fishman. Well --

23 Ms. Cotton. Yeah, I actually --

24 Mr. Fishman. When you --

25 Ms. Cotton. I don't know how people -- what their religious affiliation is, but I see at least

1 two individuals who I believe may self-identify as Jewish.

2 [REDACTED]: Just because they self-identify as Jewish doesn't mean that they are
3 representatives for the Jewish community as part of a Jewish group.

4 Mr. Fishman. That's fair, but --

5 [REDACTED]: Okay.

6 Mr. Fishman. But the general counsel of the School District is on there, and she is Jewish.

7 [REDACTED]: But she doesn't represent a Jewish group, like CAIR is a group that represents
8 the Muslim or Arab-American community.

9 Mr. Fishman. They represent certain people in that community, not everybody.

10 [REDACTED]: My question was whether there was a representative for the Jewish community
11 akin to these individuals who represent various constituencies.

12 Mr. Fishman. Got it. Okay.

13 Ms. Cotton. I also don't know what Mr. Bender's religious affiliation is.

14 [REDACTED]: He represents CAIR-Philadelphia. He represents that constituency.

15 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

16 Q Are you aware that CAIR was an unindicted coconspirator in a 2007 terrorism financing
17 case?

18 A No.

19 Q The Anti-Defamation League has described CAIR leaders as, quote, "trafficking in openly
20 antisemitic and anti-Zionist rhetoric," end quote.

21 Are you aware of CAIR's reputation for fomenting antisemitism?

22 A No. I have found the individuals representing CAIR to be authentically interested in
23 the well-being and support of our students and interested in helping the School District of
24 Philadelphia to become the fastest-improving large urban school district in the country.

25 Q Are you aware that while at CAIR-Philadelphia, Mr. Bender offered a workshop called

1 "American Jews and Political Power: Myth or Reality?"

2 A I'm not familiar with that.

3 Q Are you aware of the antisemitic conspiracy theory that Jews control governments,
4 banks, and the media?

5 A I'm sorry. Would you repeat that question?

6 Q Are you aware of the antisemitic conspiracy theory that Jews control governments,
7 banks, and the media?

8 A I'm not sure if you're asking me if I'm aware of that in association with CAIR.

9 Q Just in general, are you aware of it?

10 A Yes, I am.

11 Q Does a workshop titled "American Jews and Political Power: Myth or Reality?" raise
12 any concerns from you from the title of the workshop?

13 A Could you repeat that title?

14 Q "American Jews and Political Power: Myth or Reality?"

15 A I don't know enough about the title or the context to offer an opinion.

16 Q What kind of message does Mr. Bender's presence on your transition team send to Jews
17 in the School District of Philadelphia?

18 Mr. Fishman. How can he possibly answer that question?

19 [REDACTED]. He is responsible for the individuals on his transition team.

20 Ms. Cotton. He said he wasn't.

21 Mr. Fishman. He said he wasn't.

22 [REDACTED]. It is his transition team.

23 Mr. Fishman. He said he didn't pick the members.

24 [REDACTED]. So he's not going to opine on whether the fact that these members are on the
25 team reflect on him in any way?

1 Mr. Fishman. That's not what the question was. The question was how does he think the
2 Jewish community would react to that person's being on the thing, and he said he didn't know that
3 CAIR had the reputation that you just described.

4 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

5 Q Do you view the members on this transition team as reflecting on you in any way?

6 A I view the members of the transition team to represent the very rich diversity of the city
7 of Philadelphia.

8 Q Another member of your transition team was Sharif El-Mekki. Is that correct?

9 A Yes. I see him listed here. Yes. I recall that.

10 Q Are you familiar with Mr. El-Mekki? Do you know him?

11 A I do know who Mr. El-Mekki is.

12 Q Can you tell me more about SDP's relationship with Mr. El-Mekki?

13 A Mr. El-Mekki leads the Center for Black Educator Development and does, among other
14 things, work in the School District of Philadelphia to help grow teacher pipelines and support teacher
15 development.

16 Q I would like to introduce exhibits 4 and 5.

1 [Watlington Majority Exhibits Nos. 4

2 and 5 were marked for identification.]

3 [REDACTED]: Exhibit 4 is an Instagram post by Mr. El-Mekki where he defends district
4 employees who have been the subject of repeated antisemitism allegations. He says he would,
5 quote, "choose teachers," end quote, like them, quote, "every single year."

6 Does this endorsement reflect good judgment to you?

7 Dr. Watlington. If you'll permit me a moment to read it.

8 [REDACTED]: Yes.

9 Mr. Fishman. Can I ask a clarifying question on the date? On the bottom it says October
10 14th, 2024.

11 [REDACTED]: Uh-huh.

12 Mr. Fishman. But in the post, it says something like "92w," which I interpret to be 92 weeks,
13 if that's correct. Do we have any idea when this post of his is from?

14 [REDACTED]: October 14th, 2024.

15 Mr. Fishman. He posted on October --

16 [REDACTED]: Uh-huh.

17 Mr. Fishman. Okay. And so what does the "92w" mean?

18 [REDACTED]: I'm not sure.

19 Mr. Fishman. Because October 14th --

20 [REDACTED]: But this isn't a courtroom.

21 Mr. Fishman. No, no. I'm just trying to -- but I'm trying to figure out when it was posted.
22 If you're asking about whether he thinks it's good judgement --

23 [REDACTED]: October 14th, 2024, is when this was posted.

24 Dr. Watlington. Okay. Could you repeat the question?

25 [REDACTED]: Sure.

1 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

2 Q Do you view this endorsement by Mr. El-Mekki of the individuals listed in this post as
3 good judgment in terms of being teachers every single year for every single class that he would
4 choose?

5 A I don't know Mr. El-Mekki's thinking, and I'm unable to make a determination about
6 whether his post represents good judgment, bad judgment, indifferent judgment, or the like.

7 Q Because you aren't familiar with -- I mean, from the words on this page, you are unable
8 to make a judgment about whether you believe this is a thing that a person with good judgment
9 would post?

10 A I don't know the context with which he posted that post or what his thinking was --

11 Q Okay.

12 A -- so I can't opine on his motive.

13 Q Exhibit 5 is the first two pages of a report by Mr. El-Mekki. In it he states that, quote,
14 "Every lesson plan is a political document, and every classroom interaction a political statement."

15 Do you agree with that statement?

16 A I think in the School District of Philadelphia we are very clear: Teachers may not, shall
17 not, and should not promote any political or personal perspectives in the classroom, and our job is to
18 teach children how to think and not what to think.

19 Q So Mr. El-Mekki's statement does not reflect the district's philosophy on K-12
20 education?

21 A I don't know his intended message. Teaching the Constitution in a classroom, it's a
22 political document obviously. But I don't -- but teachers have no business teaching a political point
23 of view.

24 Q Camika Royal cochaired this subcommittee. Is that correct?

25 A I want to double-check the notes here that you shared with me so I can be sure.

1 Mr. Fishman. And by "notes," he just means the document itself.

2 [REDACTED]. That's fine.

3 Dr. Watlington. Yes. Dr. Camika Royal. Yes. She was a committee cochair.

4 [REDACTED]. I'd like to introduce exhibits 6 and 7.

5 [Watlington Majority Exhibits Nos. 6
6 and 7 were marked for identification.]

7 [REDACTED]. These are Instagram posts by Dr. Royal made on July 4th, 2023, and July 4th,
8 2024. I'll read parts of them.

9 Here she states, "In this house we believe: The American dream is a scam. Policing
10 originates from runaway slave patrols. Capitalism exploits. Colonialism is evil. The Founding
11 Fathers were racist. American imperialism must end. America was built on genocide & slavery.
12 We are on stolen indigenous land."

13 Do you agree with the content of these posts?

14 Ms. Cotton. We're here to talk about antisemitism. I'm not sure --

15 [REDACTED]. "Colonialism is evil"? I'll get to settler colonialism later on in this transcribed
16 interview.

17 Mr. Fishman. I guess the question is, if you want to find out what was going on in the
18 Philadelphia school system, that's fine, but this isn't a Philadelphia school system document.

19 [REDACTED]. This is a post made by an individual who was cochairing a subcommittee on
20 Dr. Watlington's transition team.

21 Mr. Fishman. Yes.

22 [REDACTED]. If he does not want to speak to whether he agrees with the content of these
23 posts, he can say that.

24 Mr. Fishman. I'm just not sure of the relevance of whether --

25 [REDACTED]. This is not a courtroom.

Mr. Fishman. I understand that. I'm just not sure what the relevance is.

[REDACTED]. The relevance is that this is an individual, as I just explained, who co-chaired a committee on anti-racist culture on Dr. Watlington's transition team. The post also references colonialism. As I will mention later, theories of settler colonialism often incite antisemitism. We will get to that later.

Do you agree with the content of these posts?

Mr. Fishman. All of them? Or do you want to go through them one at a time?

██████████. With this post, exhibit 6, the one I just read.

Dr. Watlington. There's a lot in here. And I would just note that, again, this is not a school district document, was not created by school district officials. And I don't personally use this language, don't know enough about what I agree or disagree with.

But I don't think it's my place to determine what -- or my role to determine what -- it might be protected speech, particularly -- but this would not be acceptable in a classroom in the School District of Philadelphia, to be clear.

██████████. Thank you.

BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

Q Are you familiar with the district's policy on staff social media use?

A Yes.

Q I'd like to introduce exhibit 8.

[Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 8
was marked for identification.]

██████████. This is the policy.

Did we skip 7?

██████████. Sorry? I'm just going to ask -- I just asked about 6.

BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

1 Q This policy authorizes discipline for employees' social media activity that endangers
2 student welfare, violates district policy, or harms the reputation of the school district.

3 How many employees has the district investigated for alleged violations of this policy since
4 October 7th, 2023, for social media activity relating to antisemitism?

5 A Could you repeat the question?

6 Q Sure. How many employees has the district investigated for alleged violations of this
7 policy since October 7th, 2023, for social media activity relating to antisemitism?

8 A I don't know.

9 Q Are you able to get us the answer to that question?

10 A Certainly can confer with counsel, and they will get back to you.

11 Q What is the district's process for reviewing complaints of this policy?

12 A If there were a complaint made to a school principal for a school employee, the school
13 leader would investigate.

14 If it were a district employee, then certainly their supervisor, with support from our human
15 resources department, would investigate as well.

16 Q And what would be the next steps if it was a school employee?

17 A If it was a school employee, the principal would conduct an investigation, depending on
18 the nature of that social media post, thoroughly investigate, make a determination.

19 If discipline were warranted, our expectation and procedure would require that to be done in
20 a timely manner.

21 Q So is the principal the one that would be responsible for reviewing the complaint or just
22 making the determination that you're referring to?

23 Ms. Cotton. And just to be clear, he's just talking about this policy?

24 [REDACTED]. Uh-huh.

25 Ms. Cotton. It's different if there's a harassment or discrimination --

1 [REDACTED]. Yes, just the social media.

2 Ms. Cotton. Okay. So just this policy where there's not a harassment and discrimination
3 angle? Is that your --

4 [REDACTED]. Just this policy.

5 Ms. Cotton. Okay.

6 Dr. Watlington. Would you repeat the question?

7 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

8 Q So is the principal the one that reviews the complaint or is there another individual that
9 reviews the complaint when it comes in?

10 A A principal ultimately is responsible for reviewing complaints, or his or her designee,
11 statutorily, which could be an assistant principal.

12 Q And to counsel's clarification, if there is an antisemitic component to a social media
13 post, meaning that there is a potential discrimination angle, what is the district's process for
14 reviewing such a complaint?

15 A If it were a complaint involving a student, the principal, or his or her designee, typically
16 an assistant principal, would have responsibility for investigating the complaint.

17 If it were an adult, an employee, and it was related to harassment and discrimination per our
18 policy, to include but not limited to antisemitism, the Office of Employee Labor Relations, which is
19 housed within our human resources division, would investigate that complaint.

20 Q And would that office also investigate a complaint against a -- against any district
21 employee or staff regardless of whether they are at a school or in the administration if it's a social
22 media -- if it's an antisemitic social media post complaint?

23 A If I understand the question correct, the Office of Employee Labor Relations would
24 investigate any employee related to harassment and discrimination.

25 Q Since October 7th, 2023, have any district employees perpetuated antisemitism online

1 or in the classroom, to your knowledge?

2 A Would you repeat that question?

3 Q Since October 7th, 2023, have any district employees perpetuated antisemitism online
4 or in the classroom, to your knowledge?

5 A I'm aware that there are employees in the school district who have been investigated
6 for harassment and discrimination, specifically posts to be deemed antisemitic.

7 Q Imagine an SDP teacher, School District of Philadelphia teacher, made a post on their
8 public Instagram that said, "You can't support White liberation without supporting White resistance."
9 The post featured images of Klansmen and a noose. The teacher made this post in the wake of a
10 racially motivated mass shooting event.

11 How would the district -- how would you respond to a post like this?

12 A It would be helpful if you had a copy of the post that I could review. Absent that, I'd
13 like to write that --

14 Q Sure.

15 Mr. Fishman. Or do it more slowly.

16 Dr. Watlington. Or do it more slowly.

17 [REDACTED]. Sure. So it's an Instagram post.

18 Dr. Watlington. Okay.

19 [REDACTED]. It's a district teacher. The post says --

20 Ms. Cotton. Is this a real post?

21 [REDACTED]. I will get to that. But it is -- this is not -- what I am reading is a hypothetical.

22 Mr. Fishman. Okay.

23 Ms. Cotton. Okay.

24 [REDACTED]. The post says, "You cannot support White liberation without supporting White
25 resistance." The post has images, racially motivated images, White supremacist images, Klansmen

1 and a noose, and the teacher made this post after a racially motivated mass shooting event.

2 Dr. Watlington. And you want me to --

3 Mr. Fishman. What's the question?

4 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

5 Q How would the district respond to this post? If a teacher posted this on their
6 Instagram, on their public Instagram, how would the district respond?

7 A Are you referring to if a complaint were made or if a --

8 Q Sure. A complaint is made.

9 A Absent a complaint, we very well may not know about it. But if a complaint were
10 made, depending on if a complaint were made to a principal, to someone else, ask for thinking on
11 that?

12 Q A complaint is made to the district administration directly.

13 A If a complaint --

14 Q Sent directly to you.

15 A If this complaint were sent directly to me, which is not our practice because we have
16 folks who do this work, I would very likely -- I would send this to the Office of Employee Labor
17 Relations, if it's an employee who made the complaint, and they would review it and make
18 determinations about whether or not it violated our policy or not.

19 Q Would such a post be concerning to you?

20 A I'm not sure if I fully understand what the post means.

21 Mr. Fishman. Or her description of it, anyway.

22 Dr. Watlington. I'm sorry?

23 Mr. Fishman. Her description, you mean.

24 Dr. Watlington. The description. But it's not the language I would use. But I would send
25 it to Employee Labor Relations because that would be their job, to review and make those

1 determinations.

2 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

3 Q Are you familiar with Hannah Gann?

4 A Yes.

5 Q She is a teacher in the School District of Philadelphia, correct?

6 A Yes.

7 Q I'd like to introduce exhibit 9.

8 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 9

9 was marked for identification.]

10 [REDACTED]. This is a post from Ms. Gann's public Instagram. Her user name is
11 ms.gann.on.the.gram, which makes clear that she is a teacher.

12 This post was made in 2024. I understand that there is not a date labeled on the post but it
13 is from 2024.

14 The post says, quote, "You can't support Palestinian liberation without supporting Palestinian
15 resistance," end quote. The graphic features images of terrorists and the red triangle, which is a
16 Hamas symbol used to indicate military targets. The post also says, quote, "Reject normalization.
17 Support the resistance," end quote.

18 Have you seen this post before?

19 Ms. Cotton. Wait. Sorry. I actually don't see that last --

20 [REDACTED]. It's on the very bottom, "Reject normalization. Support the resistance," in red.

21 Have you seen this post before?

22 Dr. Watlington. I don't recall seeing this post before.

23 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

24 Q Does this post endorse terrorism against Jews?

25 A I don't know.

1 Q Does this post create a safe and welcoming environment for Jewish and Israeli students
2 in Ms. Gann's classroom?

3 A I don't know enough about the post to make that determination off of this very quick
4 review.

5 Q I'd like to introduce exhibit 10.

6 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 10

7 was marked for identification.]

8 [REDACTED]: This is another post on Ms. Gann's Instagram. It features the same --

9 Mr. Fishman. One second.

10 [Discussion off the record.]

11 Mr. Fishman. Sorry.

12 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

13 Q It features the same red triangle framed by a gun and an RPG. The quote here is by Ho
14 Chi Minh. It says, "You will kill ten of us, we will kill one of you, but in the end, you will tire of it
15 first."

16 Have you seen this post before?

17 A I don't recall seeing this post before.

18 Q Is this an endorsement of violence against Jews?

19 A Doesn't matter that Ho Chi Minh said it, but I find it personally troubling and very
20 problematic. Absolutely wouldn't say it. And to be crystal clear, there's no place for this kind of
21 language in any classroom, period.

22 Q Why do you find it problematic?

23 A It's never appropriate in a classroom for an educator to speak about murder, killing
24 people, of any group.

25 Q What about --

1 A Even a veiled reference is unacceptable.

2 Q What about on their public Instagram, whose user name references the fact that they
3 are a teacher? Is it --

4 Ms. Cotton. Can I just interject? You keep saying that. How does it reference that she's a
5 teacher?

6 [REDACTED]. "Ms. Gann on the gram."

7 Ms. Cotton. I mean, if I had "Ms. Cotton" -- I just want to object to that premise, but he can
8 answer the question.

9 Dr. Watlington. Certainly, again, it's never appropriate to, in a role as an educator, my
10 opinion, to, with young, impressionable minds, to talk about or insinuate killing of any kind,
11 notwithstanding the fact that Ho Chi Minh allegedly said this. It's his name, I assume, if he said that.
12 Don't know the -- I think there was a different context. That's not important at this point.

13 And if this, like any of the posts, came to me, I would send them to the Office of Employee
14 Labor Relations. It would not be my job to make a determination even if I find the post strongly
15 objectionable.

16 [REDACTED]. Also, just to the point that it is clear that she is a teacher, she does post her
17 class schedules on her Instagram as well, as we will get to.

18 Mr. Fishman. You just said from the title of it, it was clear. I think that's all.

19 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

20 Q Do these posts, these posts exhibit 9 and 10, violate the district's social media policy by,
21 for example, damaging the district's reputation and image as an educational institution?

22 A I don't like the post either in a classroom or outside of a classroom. It's not language I
23 would use. But that's not my determination to make. That's the role of the Office of Employee
24 Labor Relations.

25 Q Has Ms. Gann been disciplined for these posts or any other social media post that she

1 has made relating to antisemitism?

2 A I don't recall being made aware of any specific discipline. I do know that Ms. Gann, as
3 well as some other individuals, are being reviewed currently --

4 Q Okay.

5 A -- by the office of human resources.

6 Q Are you able to share the other individuals that are being reviewed?

7 A I don't recall specific names, but it's certainly a part of a lookback, as I became aware of
8 some posts that caught my attention, that, if substantiated, I believe could potentially violate our
9 policy with regard to harassment, discrimination. So I personally asked the human resources office
10 to go back and take a look.

11 Q Which posts caught your attention?

12 A I don't remember the specific posts. But there were posts that teetered across that
13 line of taking a political point of view. And it's my expectation and our policy's expectation that
14 teachers teach students how to think, not what to think, and we don't teach our personal political
15 biases.

16 Q Are you concerned that these views are being perpetuated by Ms. Gann in her
17 classroom?

18 Mr. Fishman. Are you saying they are, or is he worried that they might be? The question
19 was a little unclear.

20 [REDACTED]. Are you concerned that these views are also being perpetuated by Ms. Gann in
21 her classroom in addition to -- the views that she's --

22 Mr. Fishman. No, but you said that they "are." Are you saying that they are or is he
23 worried that they might be?

24 [REDACTED]. I'm asking is he concerned that they are.

25 Are you worried that they might be?

1 Dr. Watlington. The posts are concerning to me. And it's one of the reasons why I've
2 asked our office of human resources to do a lookback, a comprehensive lookback, and to update me
3 at the conclusion of that.

4 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

5 Q When did you make that request that they do that lookback?

6 A Over the summer.

7 Q This past --

8 A This past summer.

9 Q Do you remember which month?

10 A I don't remember the day. Probably -- I hired a new chief human resources officer on
11 July 1, and that was one of her first job tasks.

12 Q Ms. Gann posts her class schedule whiteboards on her public Instagram, as I mentioned
13 earlier. I'd like to introduce exhibits 11 and 12.

14 [Watlington Majority Exhibits Nos. 11

15 and 12 were marked for identification.]

16 Dr. Watlington. And, [REDACTED], may I also just note that the lookback that I requested was
17 not specific to Ms. Gann. It's all complaints received, regardless of source, related to discrimination
18 based on national origin, shared ancestry.

19 [REDACTED]. So is it, like, a re-review of all of the complaints? Or what is the actual
20 substance of the lookback?

21 Dr. Watlington. While pursuant to the requirements in the Voluntary Resolution Agreement
22 to do that for the school year '23-'24, as I learned more, I thought it was appropriate beyond the
23 scope of that Voluntary Resolution Agreement to do a comprehensive lookback from July of 2025
24 through present.

25 Ms. Cotton. 2024.

1 Dr. Watlington. 2024. Excuse me. 2024 to present.

2 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

3 Q So your -- so the relevant offices are re-reviewing the complaints that they received
4 from 2023 to present? Is that correct? Or what is the actual substance of this lookback? What
5 are they doing? What are the actions being undertaken under this lookback?

6 A One, I want to know if anything was missed, quite frankly.

7 And number two, I've asked for a lookback to ensure that things that were investigated, that
8 we didn't miss anything and that it was done properly.

9 Ms. Cotton. Just to clarify the date, just because it's been said differently --

10 [REDACTED]. Yes.

11 Dr. Watlington. 2022-'23 was --

12 Mr. Fishman. Wait.

13 Ms. Cotton. So the VRA was the school years 2022 to 2023 and 2023 to 2024. The
14 lookback that Dr. Watlington asked for is July '24 --

15 [REDACTED]. To present.

16 Mr. Fishman. In addition to the stuff they were already supposed to do.

17 [REDACTED]. Okay. So the lookback period is looking -- in that time frame -- looking to see
18 if anything was missed, et cetera, as you just said.

19 Dr. Watlington. Correct.

20 Mr. Fishman. Whether the investigations were done right and whether they didn't do
21 something that they should have done.

22 [REDACTED]. Okay.

23 You should now have exhibits 11 and 12. Exhibit 11 is from December 2025, as you can see
24 on the whiteboard there. Gann is teaching her students in this lesson about justified violence. Do
25 you know what --

1 Mr. Fishman. Can you give him a second to look at that? Thanks.

2 Ms. Cotton. Can I just ask a question? I have seen a couple of her posts where she does it
3 as, I don't know, trolling or something, where she posts a fake schedule. Do we know if this is one
4 of those or if this is --

5 [REDACTED]: I have not seen it as trolling.

6 Ms. Cotton. Trolling, my word. I don't know if that's the right word.

7 [REDACTED]: I've only seen it as actual schedules that she posts. Like this.

8 Ms. Cotton. Okay.

9 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

10 Q What is justified violence? Do you know what that means?

11 A No.

12 Q Is it concerning to you that Ms. Gann spent this much class time on justified violence in
13 light of the social media posts that we just reviewed?

14 A On its face, I'll say, one, I don't know what "justified violence" means here. I can't
15 speak for Ms. Gann there.

16 Two, if this permeated a classroom, I would not be comfortable with a term "justified" or
17 "unjustified" violence, no different than if I'm in a classroom as a teacher myself and I'm teaching
18 what happened in the Second World War. I don't need to get into my -- I should not get into my
19 personal biases or political opinions about whether Harry Truman made the right decision to drop
20 two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to bring the Second World War to a conclusion.

21 It happened. We teach it. And we should not proselytize or teach in a manner beyond
22 teaching kids what happened and how to think and not what to think.

23 Q So does it sound to you that -- or are you saying that the term "justified violence"
24 sounds like it's teaching kids what to think rather than how to think?

25 A I think it could potentially -- ultimately, I don't know because I don't know the context.

1 But this would be something that a principal who has a responsibility for being in classrooms, to
2 inspect instruction, and to check lesson plans, would be better able to opine on than me.

3 Q I'd like to introduce exhibit 12. Here, Gann's class schedule shows that she hosted a
4 guest speaker in her class known as Mr. Ant. This is a reference to Mr. Ant Smith.

5 Are you familiar with Mr. Ant Smith?

6 [REDACTED]: Is this a post from her Instagram? Or is this someone who has commented
7 on -- is this part of the post, is my question?

8 [REDACTED]: No. No. This is a comment on her Instagram post, and then her Instagram
9 post is --

10 [REDACTED]: So this is not the Instagram post itself.

11 [REDACTED]: The Instagram post itself is the image in the middle.

12 [REDACTED]: So what's the top?

13 [REDACTED]: The top is an individual commenting on the post.

14 Mr. Fishman. Do we know who that is?

15 [REDACTED]: No. That is not part of -- I'm asking specifically about the post itself.

16 Mr. Fishman. No, I understand. But since the exhibit is ultimately possibly going to be part
17 of the record and you're asking him about it, I think it would be helpful to have clarity on who has
18 annotated or commented on her post. I want - and I just want -- to make sure that the record is --

19 [REDACTED]: Sure. This is a stakeholder who is concerned about Ant Smith's appearance in
20 Ms. Gann's class.

21 Mr. Fishman. I know what "stakeholders" mean in certain contexts. What does that
22 mean?

23 [REDACTED]: This is an individual who was concerned about the appearance of Mr. Ant Smith
24 in Ms. Gann's class.

25 Mr. Fishman. Okay. A citizen or a parent or --

1 [REDACTED]: It's a citizen.

2 Mr. Fishman. Okay.

3 [REDACTED]: Are you familiar with Mr. Smith, Mr. Ant Smith?

4 Dr. Watlington. I don't recall that name. I don't know that name. Doesn't ring a bell.

5 [REDACTED]: He is a former teacher who went to prison for flipping a cop car during a
6 protest. He has also said that October 7th represented, quote, "the chickens coming home to
7 roost," end quote.

8 Is Mr. Smith an appropriate guest speaker for a district classroom?

9 Ms. Cotton. Do we even know that Mr. Ant is actually Ant Smith?

10 [REDACTED]: It is Mr. Ant Smith.

11 Ms. Cotton. So you're representing --

12 [REDACTED]: I am representing that it is Mr. Ant Smith.

13 Mr. Fishman. Do we know what he talked about in the classroom?

14 [REDACTED]: We do not.

15 Mr. Fishman. Okay.

16 Ms. Cotton. Do we -- I mean --

17 Mr. Fishman. All right. You can answer.

18 Dr. Watlington. I'm unfamiliar with Mr. Ant Smith. I can tell you, I've been a teacher, a
19 principal, and administrator, and I can think of more than one instance where we've had individuals
20 who had some experiences on the wrong side of the law that have come into schools to encourage
21 young people to make different decisions, and I found it to be appropriate in those instances.

22 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

23 Q How is the district ensuring that Ms. Gann is not creating a hostile environment for
24 Jewish students?

25 A Principals and their designees, assistant principals, check lesson plans. They visit

1 classrooms to inspect the instruction occurring in the classrooms. They give feedback on a regular
2 basis to teachers. And they're responsible for ensuring that we follow our policy related to
3 harassment and discrimination.

4 Q Has the district continued to receive complaints about Ms. Gann since December 2024,
5 which is the date of the district's resolution agreement with OCR?

6 A I don't know the specific dates of any posts by Ms. Gann, but I do know our human
7 resources office is looking at all issues related to -- complaints related to harassment around national
8 origin, shared ancestry.

9 Q Are you familiar with Norman Shaw MacQueen?

10 A I have some familiarity. I don't know him personally, but I know the name.

11 Q He is a current district teacher, correct?

12 A That's my understanding.

13 Q I'd like to introduce exhibit 13.

14 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 13

15 was marked for identification.]

16 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

17 Q This is a July 2024 post on his Instagram, Mr. MacQueen's Instagram, that claims that
18 Zionism is racism, settler colonialism, Islamophobia, genocidal violence, and antisemitic.

19 Have you seen this post before?

20 A I recall seeing it. I think -- it rings a bell. I think I recall seeing this as a part of some
21 reviews I did this summer in preparation for this interview.

22 Q What was your reaction to this post when you saw it?

23 A I found it troubling based on my definition of Zionism. I don't agree with it. I see
24 how it can be viewed as offensive. That's my reaction.

25 Q What --

1 A And it has no place in a classroom.

2 Q What is Zionism?

3 A I'm not an expert on Zionism.

4 Q You just said you have a definition of Zionism. What is your definition of Zionism?

5 A I'm sorry. Would you repeat that question, the first part of the question?

6 Q Sure. You just said "based on my definition of Zionism" --

7 A Okay.

8 Q -- "this is concerning." What is your definition of Zionism?

9 A Again, I'm no expert. But my definition, Tony's, not the superintendent but Tony
10 Watlington, Sr., is that Zionism is an inherent belief that the state of Israel has a right to exist as a
11 sovereign nation and the Israeli people have a right to pursue their self-determination in a safe
12 manner, like any other nation-state. And to suggest that it does not is, in my definition,
13 problematic. And that's why I find this post objectionable.

14 Q I'd like to introduce exhibit 14.

15 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 14

16 was marked for identification.]

17 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

18 Q This is an April 2024 post by Mr. MacQueen. It reads, "Zionists are no different from
19 the swarms of white supremacist spectators cheering on the public lynchings of over 3,000 Black
20 people."

21 Have you seen this post before?

22 A I don't recall seeing this post.

23 Q Do you agree with this characterization of Zionists?

24 A For the aforementioned reasons, absolutely not.

25 Q So is this an appropriate comparison to make?

1 Ms. Cotton. Is it --

2 [REDACTED]: Is it appropriate to compare Zionists to the swarms of White supremacist
3 spectators cheering on the public lynchings of over 3,000 Black people?

4 Dr. Watlington. I don't like it. I wouldn't use that language. I strongly disagree.

5 As superintendent, it's not my role to make determinations about what people can or cannot
6 say, offensive or otherwise. That would be someone else's determination to make based on
7 whether or not it fits their First Amendment right to free speech.

8 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

9 Q How is the district ensuring that these views do not also translate specifically for
10 Mr. MacQueen into his classroom?

11 A Principals and their designees, assistant principals, check lesson plans -- have
12 responsibility for checking lesson plans, for visiting classes regularly on an informal and formal basis,
13 and to provide feedback to teachers relative to ensuring that we are compliant in the classroom with
14 board policy, and, at the end of the day, that we are teaching young people how to think, not what to
15 think, that we aren't bringing inappropriate material in the classroom, or, when they teach
16 controversial topics, they're doing it in a fair manner.

17 Q Has the principal of Mr. MacQueen's school checked Mr. MacQueen's lesson plans, to
18 your knowledge?

19 A With 250 district-operated schools, I can't tell you the specifics of each individual
20 principal. But it is absolutely my expectation that lesson plans are checked in all schools. I can't
21 speak to his principal specifically.

22 Q But you haven't checked as you know or had your employees check as part of their
23 lookback whether these principals are doing the classroom oversight that you described? Is that
24 part of your lookback?

25 A The human resources office, as a part of its lookback, I'm sure is looking into a wide

1 range of items consistent with my directive.

2 Q So are you aware of any specific instances of principals checking lesson plans for

3 teachers who have had antisemitism allegations made against them?

1 [10:26 a.m.]

2 Dr. Watlington. I am aware and I do know that principals check lesson plans and have
3 reviewed lesson plans relative to discrimination and harassment, not limited to, but to include,
4 antisemitism and other -- other violations of our policy, to include Islamophobia, sexism, racism and
5 the like.

6 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

7 Q Can you give an example of one of these reviews as it pertains to antisemitism, if you're
8 aware of one?

9 A One that comes to mind is a post by a teacher that is my understanding purported to
10 name individuals and also I believe a post which referenced violence.

11 Q So the principal in that school checked that teacher's lesson plans because of those
12 posts?

13 A That's my understanding.

14 Q Are you -- do you know what the findings were in that case?

15 A I don't know the findings. I know that there's a pursuant investigation and, in this case,
16 disciplinary action was taken.

17 Q What was the disciplinary action that was taken?

18 Mr. Fishman. I'm not sure he -- I'm not sure he can say that because the proceedings are
19 ongoing.

20 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

21 Q Okay. Did a classroom visit also occur in that instance, in addition to checking lessons
22 plans, if you know?

23 A I'm not sure. I can tell you that principals routinely check lesson plans.

24 Q Are you familiar with the Racial Justice Organizing Committee, or RJOC?

25 A The name rings a bell. I'm not very familiar.

1 Q How would you describe that group?

2 A I don't know enough about it. I'm familiar with the name.

3 [REDACTED]. I'm finished with this particular segment. I'll pick up where I left off the next
4 round.

5 Dr. Watlington. Okay.

6 [REDACTED]. We can go off the record.

7 [Recess.]

8 EXAMINATION

9 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

10 Q Once again, good morning, Dr. Watlington.

11 A Good morning.

12 Q I thank you again for coming in to talk to us today. My colleague, [REDACTED], covered a lot
13 of ground, and I will do my best not to be duplicative, but please understand some of the ground we
14 cover may naturally be the same.

15 And just, again, to go over the staff representing the minority side of the committee, I'm
16 [REDACTED], and this is my co-counsel, [REDACTED]. While I anticipate asking you most of the
17 questions for the minority today, [REDACTED] may stand in at some point to ask a question or two. You
18 may see us talking and passing notes back and forth. That's completely natural, and I ask you to not
19 let that distract you. And if something, again, in one of our questions doesn't make sense or you're
20 confused as to what I'm asking, please don't hesitate to ask me to repeat or clarify. Does that all
21 make sense?

22 A Yes.

23 Q Great. And, again, I'll remind you that all your responses to questions must be verbal.
24 The transcript cannot pick up nods, hand gestures and the like.

25 Do you have any questions of me before we start?

1 A No.

2 Q Great. Oh, and also, we made five copies of exhibits, we don't have 10, and our
3 anticipated circulation was one for the majority, one for the minority, one for the witness, one for
4 the witness' counsel, and one for stenographers.

5 Does anybody anticipate that will be an issue?

6 Mr. Fishman. That's fine.

7 [REDACTED]. Okay. Great. We can go ahead and start the clock.

8 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

9 Q Before I get into my prepared questions, I wanted to just cover a few things related to
10 some of the exhibits that were offered in the first part of this round of questioning. I believe, and I
11 might be paraphrasing, that the interview began on the record with a majority statement, counsel's
12 statement that antisemitism, quote, had manifested in the School District of Philadelphia.

13 Just yes or no, do you agree with that characterization of antisemitism manifesting in the
14 School District of Philadelphia?

15 A Would you repeat that question?

16 Q Sure. The first statement I believe we started with that was not a question was just
17 the statement that antisemitism, quote, had manifested in the School of Philadelphia. And just a
18 yes or no, I just want to know if you agree with that characterization.

19 A No.

20 Q Okay. The first exhibit I want to turn to was exhibit 3 that was introduced. I believe
21 that was the list of transition team participants. We spent a bit of time talking about Mr. Jacob
22 Bender, the executive director of CAIR-Philadelphia. And I think you stated you did not appoint
23 members to your transition team and were not familiar with all of them. To that end, were you
24 aware that Mr. Bender is Jewish?

25 A I don't remember the name Bender. I remember meeting with an individual who

1 represented CAIR, not name specific, who I did recall hearing a Jewish reference before.

2 Q So I am guessing you were not aware that on CAIR-Philadelphia's website that lists his
3 bio, it stated that Jacob Bender brings decades of activism promoting mutual respect and
4 understanding between Muslims, Christians, and Jews around the world and on behalf of peace and
5 justice movements in the U.S.

6 Were you aware of that statement?

7 A I was not aware of that statement. I was aware that the reputation I had heard at that
8 time was consistent with that description.

9 [REDACTED]. I would like to introduce -- and I know this is going to be a little out of
10 order -- but this is exhibit D that we are going to be submitting.

11 [Watlington Minority Exhibit D

12 was marked for identification.]

13 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

14 Q This is an article from I believe 2013 from the Jewish independent nonprofit media site
15 Forward on the event of Mr. Bender's appointment as executive director of CAIR-PA where I think he
16 was the first Jewish representative and executive director of that organization in the country. You
17 can take a look at that and become familiar with it as you need.

18 I'd like to draw your attention to a few excerpts from that article. First, he is quoted as
19 saying that, quote, "his Jewish faith, Bender believes, can only help him do the job effectively."
20 Further, he is quoted as saying, "The Muslim community is under attack from Islamophobic forces,
21 and it is the obligation and responsibility of people of good will to stand up and say this is a bigoted
22 attack." He's also quoted in the article saying, "This is fully in keeping with his life goals" -- or "my
23 life goals" -- sorry.

24 Recognizing again that you did not appoint your transition team committee, would such
25 statements be consistent with his placement on a subcommittee on antiracist district culture?

1 A I would think, yes.

2 Q I want to draw your attention back to exhibit 4 that was circulated. I believe this was a
3 Instagram post by another member of the transition team, Mr. -- or Sharif El-Mekki. Do you have
4 that in front of you?

5 A Exhibit 4?

6 Q Yeah.

7 A Yes.

8 Q Okay. It appears that this is a picture of someone standing in front of a truck that I
9 think is familiarly considered or called a doxxing truck. Are you familiar with doxxing trucks?

10 A I've seen a doxxing truck; this one in particular, as a matter of fact.

11 Q Are you familiar with the company Accuracy in Media?

12 A I've heard the name.

13 Q Okay. Are you aware that since October 7th, 2023, Accuracy in Media has been using
14 these trucks to share names and faces of students, professors, teachers, and other individuals who've
15 expressed protected political opinions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

16 A Uh --

17 Q I can repeat that, if you'd like.

18 A Yes, repeat the question, please.

19 Q I was just asking, are you aware that since October 7, Accuracy in Media has been using
20 these trucks to share names and faces of students, professors, teachers, and other individuals who
21 have expressed protected political opinions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

22 A While not familiar with the name, I did know that there had been examples of these
23 trucks in the city.

24 Q Sure. In your opinion, do you believe that sending doxxing trucks to drive around
25 campuses or schools is a productive response to dealing with antisemitic harassment in education

1 centers?

2 A No, I don't believe doxxing is ever appropriate.

3 Q Okay. Thank you.

4 I wanted to now draw your attention back to exhibits 9 and 10, which I believe were
5 Instagram posts by Ms. Gann -- ms.gann.on.the.gram. I know that we briefly -- there was discussion
6 on both sides of -- both the majority and you as the witness and your counsel --

7 [REDACTED]: Oh, I apologize.

8 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

9 Q The majority stated that the name on the post ms.gann.on.the.gram was sufficient to
10 identify her as a teacher. And I believe you were on the record saying that that characterization of
11 a screen name being sufficient was not sufficient to identify her as a teacher.

12 In your opinion, if a person -- if all a person saw was this name on that post, would it be
13 reasonable to automatically assume the person's a teacher?

14 A I don't think so.

15 Q Putting aside the content of the post, which I believe you've already said is abhorrent
16 regardless of the context, in your opinion, is there anything on the face that would convey -- the
17 actual post itself, not the screen name -- that would convey to anyone that the creator of the post
18 was a teacher?

19 A As a lifelong educator, I would -- just looking at the post, I would not determine or make
20 a determination this was a teacher.

21 [REDACTED]: I believe my colleague, [REDACTED], has questions about posts -- or excuse me,
22 exhibits 11 and -- 10 and 11 or 10 physically?

23 [REDACTED]: Ten. I want to go back to something we discussed with majority counsel.
24 When asked about exhibit 10, you said something to the effect of -- and I'm paraphrasing, not
25 quoting -- discussion of killing any group is never appropriate in the classroom. Do you wish to

1 clarify your response in any way?

2 Dr. Watlington. Yes. What I intended to say was that history is replete with examples of
3 war, certainly violence. Our job in the classroom is to teach what happened and to do so in a
4 manner that we don't take -- we don't make opinions, we don't -- and we teach students what
5 happened, how to think about it but not what to think. And that would be consistent with whether
6 we're teaching, you know, World War II -- or there was a previous post I believe about maybe John
7 Brown or -- whether it was John Brown or Nat Turner in the American South, World War II, or the
8 Boston Massacre. I think history is replete with examples of warfare.

9 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

10 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

11 Q Okay. So I'm now going to turn back to some of the questions that I prepared for you.
12 I think we've already established you're the superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia.
13 But prior to your service in Philadelphia, in what school districts have you previously held
14 administrative positions?

15 A I started as superintendent in the Rowan-Salisbury schools in North Carolina and chief of
16 schools in the Guilford County schools in North Carolina.

17 Q So you've -- about how long of your professional career have you served as a head of a
18 school system, give or take?

19 A I've been leading school systems now for approximately about -- just shy of 7 years.

20 Q Okay. Thank you.

21 I want to ask about your initial response to the October 7th attacks -- I think we talked about
22 it a little bit with exhibit 1 that was shared -- your email supporting our community and each other in
23 this difficult time. What was your initial response in the few weeks immediately following the
24 October 7th attacks in regards to the school system?

25 A Certainly, the day of the attack, I was horrified to see that on CNN while being out of the

1 district visiting family. It was a weekend, as I recall. In the days that followed, I wanted to
2 understand the high -- very high emotions that lots of children and families were expressing and to
3 make sure that we could do our very best job of providing support and this notion that, not limited to
4 in our classrooms, ensuring that we provide support to teachers so they can know how to talk about
5 current events, but at the same time to provide a sense of support so that all of our diverse
6 communities could work through these challenging times.

7 Q Would it be fair based on that statement to characterize your actions as being ones that
8 you thought did your best job of providing support to teachers and students during the time --

9 A Yes.

10 Q -- in total -- not getting into individual, that was your goal throughout that period?

11 A Yes.

12 Q Okay. Do you think that the district's response was affected by factors like the size of
13 the school system with the resources available to it?

14 A Could you repeat that question?

15 Q Do you think that your school -- the school district's response was somehow affected by
16 factors like the size of the school system or the resources available to it?

17 A Yes, in part. Given that the School District of Philadelphia is the Nation's ninth largest
18 school district, with an incredibly large geographic footprint, a city of neighborhoods -- and there are
19 lots of -- we affirmed that diversity, but given the sheer size and scope, getting an understanding of
20 what's happening across communities from the north, south, east, west in 250 district operated
21 schools was something that we were paying attention to and we wanted to be responsive within the
22 week to providing that support referenced.

23 Q I'd like to direct your attention to an exhibit we're about to introduce, exhibit A. This is
24 the resolution letter, dated December 18th, 2024, from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for
25 Civil Rights, or OCR. I believe it was actually addressed to the general counsel, Ms. Rauch, who's

1 here with us today. Please take a chance -- and we're going to circulate it -- to familiarize yourself
2 with it and let me know when you're ready.

3 [Watlington Minority Exhibit A
4 was marked for identification.]

5 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

6 Q This letter outlines the disposition of complaints filed with OCR against the school
7 district, alleging it did not meet the requirements of a recipient of Federal financial assistance under
8 Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in regard to discrimination on the basis of shared ancestry,
9 namely antisemitism.

10 Page 4 of the letter states that during the period of time referenced in the complaints, the
11 compliance officer/Title IX coordinator was responsible for responding to Title VI complaints
12 involving students, while the chief of employee and labor relations handled complaints of Title VI
13 discrimination laws against employees.

14 Is that consistent with your understanding of how these complaints were handled at that
15 time?

16 A Yes.

17 Q After describing many of the incidents in depth, the letter goes on to state on page 23
18 that while the incidents referenced in the complaint to OCR could --

19 Mr. Fishman. Could you give me a second to get to --

20 [REDACTED]. Oh, sure, sure, sure. Sorry, sorry, sorry. It's a long one.

21 Mr. Fishman. Where are you on page 23?

22 [REDACTED]. That's a good question. Page 23, the section titled Legal Analysis.

23 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

24 Q The first sentence, at least -- and I might be paraphrasing here -- the complaint to OCR
25 could create a hostile environment. While it could create a hostile environment, the district has not

1 demonstrated it fulfilled its Title VI obligation to evaluate whether a hostile environment existed
2 based on these incidents.

3 Is that your understanding of what the letter's conveying?

4 A That is my understanding.

5 Q You understand that based on certain factors, the Office for Civil Rights could not make
6 a determination whether a hostile environment existed in the School District of Philadelphia. Is that
7 correct?

8 A That's my understanding.

9 Q The letter then briefly outlines the terms of a separate document, the resolution
10 agreement between the Office for Civil Rights and the district.

11 The letter concludes on page 25 that, quote, "When fully implemented, the agreement will
12 address the evidence obtained and the allegations investigated."

13 Is it your understanding that successful implementation of the voluntary resolution
14 agreement described in this letter would resolve the complaint made against the district from the
15 view of the Office for Civil Rights?

16 A Yes.

17 Q I would now like to enter into the record the actual resolution agreement itself. I will
18 be entering it into the record as exhibit B and circulating it. Again, please take a chance to find it
19 and familiarize yourself with it. And please let me know when you're ready to continue. Oh,
20 sorry, we are circulating it now.

21 [Watlington Minority Exhibit B

22 was marked for identification.]

23 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

24 Q Are you ready?

25 A Yes.

1 Q Great. Section A of the resolution agreement on page 1 requires you as
2 superintendent to issue an antiharassment statement posted in prominent places in every school in
3 the district. The antiharassment statement must express that the district does not tolerate
4 incidents of harassment.

5 Did you issue that statement?

6 A Yes.

7 Q Did the School District of Philadelphia provide a copy of this statement to the Office for
8 Civil Rights?

9 A Yes.

10 Q To your knowledge, has the Office for Civil Rights provided any communication to the
11 district that the antiharassment statement you issued does not fulfill the requirements listed in
12 section A of this agreement?

13 A I'm not aware of any communication to indicate that any responses were objectionable.

14 Q If in the future the Office for Civil Rights did communicate to you concerns about the
15 statement or its required dissemination, is the district ready and willing to make changes necessary
16 to comply with the office's requests?

17 A Yes. In fact -- yes.

18 Q Section B on page 2 of the resolution agreement requires the district to review its
19 nondiscrimination and reporting policies and procedures, as well as its complaint procedures to
20 ensure that they adequately -- quote, "adequately address the Title VI prohibition on discrimination,"
21 end quote.

22 Has this policy review begun?

23 A Yes. Policy 248, the policy, as well as the administrative procedures, have been
24 updated.

25 Q And so that review in section B is complete, in your understanding?

1 A 248 is complete.

2 Q So do you think there's anything else that needs to be done on part of the school district
3 to fulfill its obligation?

4 A We thought it was important also to take a look at other policies, among them 350 and
5 348 related to employee conduct is -- the administrative procedures have been done and the policy is
6 also nearing completion.

7 Q I don't need a specific date, but do you know roughly when that policy review was
8 completed?

9 Mr. Fishman. For 348 or 248?

10 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

11 Q So for everything that you would consider responsive to section B.

12 A I don't recall the date that 248 was completed. I do know the policy and procedure are
13 completed. The procedure for policy 348 -- 248 involved students, 348 involved staff. The
14 administrative procedures were completed subsequent to the implementation of the voluntary
15 resolution agreement in December 2024, I just don't recall the exact date.

16 Q So the end of 2024 would be a rough --

17 Ms. Cotton. No --

18 Mr. Fishman. No, that's when it began.

19 [REDACTED]. When it began.

20 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

21 Q Okay. Well, I'll ask, has it been a considerable period of time since that review was
22 completed?

23 A I just don't recall the exact date at the moment. Certainly, with the -- 248 got done
24 quicker, the policy related to students expressly written here. The staff policy 348 is nearing
25 completion in part because policies require multiple reads, public input, but it's important and we

1 expect the Board of Education to complete that policy revision very soon.

2 Q To your knowledge, has the Office for Civil Rights provided communication to the
3 district that its policy and procedure review as it stands for what has been completed and what is
4 nearing completion is not in compliance with section B of this agreement?

5 A It's my understanding that we've not received any feedback from OCR relative to what
6 you just said.

7 Q But, again, if the Office for Civil Rights did communicate to you concerns about the
8 district's compliance with section B, is the district poised to be responsive to those concerns in order
9 to be fully compliant?

10 A Yes, absolutely.

11 Q Section C starting at the bottom of page 4 of the agreement dealt with recordkeeping.
12 The resolution letter focused heavily on the failure of the district to keep records necessary to
13 document the date and substance of reports or complaints of harassment and the actions taken in
14 response to those complaints. The resolution agreement required the district to develop or revise
15 its recordkeeping procedures.

16 Has this work to develop or review recordkeeping procedures begun?

17 A Yes.

18 Q Section C of the agreement also requires the district to provide detailed descriptions of
19 its system for tracking and reviewing records and to implement them upon OCR's approval thereof.

20 Has the district implemented the new recordkeeping procedures required under section C of
21 the resolution agreement?

22 A Yes. And they are -- the new system and procedures are operational.

23 Q To your knowledge, has OCR contacted the district to let it know it is out of compliance
24 with section C of the resolution agreement?

25 A It's my understanding that we've received no feedback from OCR defining our steps.

1 Q But if they did communicate to the district concerns about the compliance of section C,
2 would the district be responsive to those concerns in order to be fully compliant?

3 A Yes, certainly.

4 Q Section D beginning on the middle of page 5 requires the district to annually train all
5 school staff and full-time district employees on seven different aspects of Title VI compliance,
6 including Title VI's prohibitions on discrimination, revised policies and procedures taken as a result of
7 this agreement, the district's definition of harassment with examples, the district's duty to report
8 incidents of possible harassment, and the district's duty to let parents know about formal complaints
9 of seizures and harassment cases and other requirements.

10 I know that was a lot to digest, so my question is simply, has the process of complying with
11 section D begun?

12 A Yes.

13 Q Is it complete yet or is it still under review?

14 A The required training has been completed. It is operational for all district employees,
15 including the superintendent. In fact, I've personally taken the training twice over the past 2
16 consecutive years.

17 Ms. Cotton. Some parts can't be completed, the completion date has not passed yet.

18 [REDACTED]. Right.

19 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

20 Q But you're on track to complete in -- as contemplated by the agreement?

21 A The -- correct.

22 Q Yeah, recognizing that some of the --

23 A Noting that some items need to be ongoing --

24 Q Yes. Yes. Thank you.

25 A -- as referenced.

1 Q And if the Office for Civil Rights did communicate to the district concerns about your
2 compliance with section D, the district would be responsive to those concerns in order to be fully
3 compliant with section D. Is that correct?

4 A Yes.

5 Q Turning now to section E, page 7 of the resolution agreement, which speaks to the
6 investigative training of district school-level administrators. The agreement mandates training on
7 the new policies and procedures contemplated in the agreement to ensure that complaints are
8 thoroughly investigated.

9 Has this process of complying with section E begun?

10 A Yes.

11 Q Recognizing -- go to section E -- that there are some ongoing requirements and some
12 that end in November of '26 -- excuse me, November of 2026, is the district on track to be fully
13 compliant with this section?

14 A Yes, recognizing, as you said, that some of the requirements are ongoing through -- are
15 ongoing.

16 Q And again, if the Office for Civil Rights did communicate to the district concerns about
17 the district's compliance with section E, would the district be responsive to those concerns and work
18 with OCR to be fully compliant?

19 A Yes.

20 Q Section F, page 8 of the resolution agreement, outlines a student informational
21 program. The district is required to implement training for all 6th through 12th grade district
22 students to address discrimination and harassment based on race, color, national origin, or shared
23 ancestry and ethnic characteristics.

24 Has the process of complying with section F begun?

25 A Yes.

1 Q To your understanding, is that process complete?

2 A The age-appropriate informational program for students in grades 6th through 12th is
3 complete and launched.

4 Q To your knowledge, has the Office for Civil Rights contacted the district to let it know
5 that it is out of compliance with section F of the resolution agreement?

6 A To my knowledge, we've received no feedback from the Office for Civil Rights in that
7 regard.

8 Q If the Office for Civil Rights did not communicate to the district concerns about the
9 district's compliance with section F, would the district be responsive to those concerns and work with
10 the OCR to be fully compliant with section F?

11 Ms. Cotton. I think you had a double negative in there.

12 [REDACTED]: I probably did.

13 Ms. Cotton. Yeah.

14 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

15 Q And before I go to that question, I want to go back to the last question you asked,
16 because -- or the last question I asked. Because I don't want to get into the questions of your
17 ongoing communications with OCR because I understand that could be back and forth and don't
18 want to -- I just really want to drill down on the question as to whether or not they have contacted
19 you specifically about the compliance, and that's what I'm asking about on all of these sections. Has
20 there been any kind of a statement from OCR that you've not been in compliance with a section?

21 A Our staff and counsel have been providing ongoing updates to the Office for Civil Rights
22 and the Department of Ed, and my understanding is there's been no feedback to suggest that
23 anything is inappropriate.

24 Q Great. And, again, like I've asked on previous sections, if for some reason they did
25 communicate concerns with your compliance with section F, would the district be responsive to

1 those concerns and work with OCR to be fully compliant with section F?

2 A Yes.

3 Q Okay. Section G, page 9 of the agreement, requires an audit for the 2022-2023 and
4 2023-2024 school years of reports of discrimination and harassment on the basis of shared ancestry
5 to determine whether conduct alleged in reports has created a hostile environment.

6 Has the process of complying with section G begun?

7 A Yes.

8 Q Is that process completed yet?

9 A The required reviews are complete. It's my understanding that the
10 requirement -- both the reviews are complete as well as reviewing the determinations from those are
11 complete. I'm awaiting at this time the summary of those materials and expect that to be
12 completed very shortly.

13 I do want to acknowledge that there were some -- and it's no excuse, not acceptable, and I
14 own it -- there were some delays relative to missing data. And I can tell you that, on the one hand,
15 we fixed the problem with the recordkeeping with a launch of a new recordkeeping system called
16 Guardian for both employee and student investigations, and a summary report is forthcoming. And
17 we'll get that off to the Office of Civil Rights promptly.

18 Q So it's fair to say that some of the difficulties that the district experienced so far with
19 coming into full compliance with section G relate to the state of the recordkeeping before this
20 resolution was agreed -- an agreement was entered into, correct?

21 A It's appropriate to say that, as well as that although some records were insufficient does
22 not and should not mean that in some cases investigations didn't occur.

23 Q Has the district conveyed these difficulties in compliance with section G to the Office for
24 Civil Rights?

25 A I have not personally. I do know that the Office of General Counsel has provided

1 ongoing updates to the Office for Civil Rights and not received -- it's my understanding not received
2 feedback that any of our progress updates were inappropriate or problematic.

3 Q And the district still intends to fully comply with section G in time, correct?

4 A We fully in- -- yes, we fully intend to comply.

5 Q And if OCR did communicate to the district concerns about its compliance with section
6 G, the district would be responsive to those concerns?

7 A Yes.

8 Q And work with OCR to be fully compliant with section G?

9 A Yes.

10 Q Section H of the resolution agreement outlines a required audit of the 2024-2025 school
11 year for consistence and compliance of district policies and procedures regarding nondiscrimination.

12 Has the process of complying with section H begun?

13 A Yes.

14 Q Is it complete?

15 A My understanding is item H -- you're referring to H?

16 Q Just H, yes.

17 A Yes, that's my understanding, H is complete.

18 Q And again, to your knowledge, has OCR contacted the district to let it know it is out of
19 compliance with section H of the resolution agreement?

20 A No.

21 Q And if the Office for Civil Rights did communicate -- sorry, sorry.

22 [Discussion off the record.]

23 Dr. Watlington. I do want to note relative to H, it's a substantially -- the lion's share of it is
24 complete. We still need to finalize item 2, generating a report summarizing the audit's findings.

25 [REDACTED]. Sure.

1 Dr. Watlington. I expect to receive that within the next few weeks, and we'll review it and
2 get it off to the Office for Civil Rights promptly.

3 [REDACTED]. Do you feel that -- or not feel. I'll rephrase. Are some of the recordkeeping
4 problems that were hindering completion of section G also a factor in the completion of section H?

5 Ms. Cotton. I'm actually told that I was wrong and that it is complete.

6 [REDACTED]. All right.

7 Ms. Cotton. I apologize for that.

8 [REDACTED]. No worries.

9 [REDACTED]. When you say "it" --

10 [REDACTED]. Section H.

11 Ms. Cotton. Item to the report --

12 [REDACTED]. H to the completion of the --

13 Ms. Cotton. Is complete.

14 [REDACTED]. -- the report.

15 Ms. Cotton. Okay.

16 [REDACTED]. Is that -- so H submitted -- well, let's have Dr. -- let's rephrase.

17 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

18 Q So just so we're clear, it is your statement that the district's requirements for
19 compliance with section 8 are complete -- section H, excuse me, are complete?

20 A Yes. Yes to section H.

21 Q And again, to your knowledge, has the Office for Civil Rights contacted the district to let
22 it know that it's out of compliance with section H of the agreement?

23 A No.

24 Q And if it did communicate concerns about the district's compliance with section H,
25 would the district be responsive to OCR's concerns and work with OCR to be fully compliant?

1 A Yes.

2 Q Okay. Section I at the bottom of page 10 of the exhibit requires the district to conduct
3 school climate surveys as part of a climate assessment regarding the prevalence of racial harassment,
4 the willingness of students to report incidents of harassment, perception of the district's handling of
5 these incidents, and suggestions for reducing incidents of harassment.

6 Has the process of complying with section I begun?

7 A Yes.

8 Q Recognizing that some of the reporting requirements, the deadlines for those have not
9 been met yet, is the district's compliance with section I complete, to your knowledge?

10 A My understanding is yes. And we are on track by November 2026, as referenced under
11 reporting requirements.

12 Q Again, if the office --

13 A November '26 -- yeah, November of 2026 reporting requirements.

14 Q If the Office for Civil Rights did communicate to the district concerns about its
15 compliance with section I, would the district be responsive to those concerns and work with OCR to
16 be fully compliant with section I?

17 A Yes.

18 Q Thank you.

19 Finally, section J at the bottom of page 11 of the resolution agreement requires the district to
20 hire at least one consultant with expertise on the issue of harassment of students based on national
21 origin, including shared ancestry.

22 As the agreement contemplates the consultant acting to help the school come into
23 compliance with multiple action steps we've already talked about, specifically sections D, E, F and I, is
24 it safe to say that the process of complying with section J has begun?

25 A Yes.

1 Q Is that complete?

2 A Yes.

3 Q What consultancies -- consultancy or consultancies is the district working with?

4 A The district has entered into a consulting agreement with Facing History and Ourselves.

5 Q To your knowledge, has OCR contacted the district to let it know it is out of compliance
6 with section J?

7 A No.

8 Q And if the Office for Civil Rights did communicate to the district concerns about its
9 compliance with section J, would the district be responsive to those concerns and work with OCR to
10 be fully compliant?

11 A Yes.

12 Q Is there anything about the district's work to faithfully execute the requirements of this
13 resolution agreement that we've now gone through that you'd like the committee to know or
14 understand as the process has gone forward?

15 A Could you repeat the question?

16 Q Sure. Is there anything about the district's work to faithfully execute this agreement
17 that you feel the committee should know?

18 A Yes. I would say, one, certainly the lion's share of the provisions in the voluntary
19 resolution agreement are complete, recognizing that some of the items have continued timeline
20 expectations. And recordkeeping was a barrier, a problem for getting it done sooner for item G.
21 We own that, don't make excuses. And -- but I am glad that we've procured a system and we fixed
22 the problem going forward.

23 Q And before I close up this round, is there anything that you would like to say for the
24 record in regards to the school district's response generally, like a statement of the experience you
25 had shepherding the district in the wake of October 7th and forward? Like a statement for the

1 record, for example, or anything of that nature?

2 A The safety and well-being of all of our students is our top priority in the school district.
3 And we're committed to being fully compliant with the provisions in the voluntary resolution
4 agreement, not just because we're required to do so by the Office for Civil Rights. We also believe
5 it's the right thing to do relative to protecting the safety and well-being of all of our students in the
6 school district.

7 Also, the recordkeeping system and processes and process gaps within the district have been
8 given attention. We fixed that problem going forward.

9 While it's no excuse, I inherited some antiquated systems in a large district and our resources
10 were prioritized among a number of opportunities for improving systems in the district to procure
11 this new Guardian system. And I'm certainly happy that it's launched and functional this school
12 year. I wish we had done it much sooner.

13 Q Would you consider that implementation an iterative process in that, as you go on, if
14 there are challenges, improvements, things that can be done, the district will be responsive and
15 make improvements as needed as you go on?

16 A Yes. It's an iterative process; we'll make changes as needed going forward. And I
17 want to be very clear that as superintendent I'll be paying closer attention, particularly to
18 recordkeeping on a quarterly basis. I've assigned senior staff who will provide updates to me
19 relative to our full compliance with recordkeeping.

20 Q One more exhibit. Recognizing that -- turning back to I believe it was exhibit A, the
21 letter that accompanied the resolution agreement. The letter, starting on page 18, highlights
22 complaints against staff that were included in the initial complaint by the OCR that was investigated,
23 that would be resolved.

24 Recognizing that the resolution agreement and the letter contain many redactions and
25 anonymizations of identities of different teachers, does this letter, in your understanding of it,

1 contemplate some of the -- not all, but some of the incidents that were discussed previously in the
2 earlier round of questioning?

3 A Would you repeat that question?

4 Q Sure. Recognizing that this letter has redacted portions and the names and identities
5 that are not listed but does describe actions taken or some, for example, specific incidents as it
6 relates to social media, is it your understanding that some of the -- but not all -- some of the incidents
7 that we have discussed today are contemplated in this resolution letter and resolution agreement?
8 Like --

9 Ms. Cotton. Do you mean if --

10 [REDACTED]. Would you like an example?

11 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

12 Q On page 22, for example, it says, "Teacher 2 wrote, These Zionists are no different from
13 the swarms of White supremacist spectators cheering on the public lynchings of over 3,000 Black
14 people." And I believe we talked about that statement earlier.

15 I just want to make sure that we're -- is it your --

16 A Yes.

17 Q -- understanding that that's what we were referring to?

18 A Yes. Upon review of the letter and the contents here, yes. That's my recollection,
19 yes.

20 Q I'm not planning to go through all of them, but there are some others here that
21 are -- either have been discussed or I assume will be discussed today.

22 Is it your understanding that if the district complies with the resolution agreement, those
23 complaints as referenced in this letter will be resolved in the mind of the Office for Civil Rights?

24 A Yes. As the concluding -- conclusion says on page 25, "When fully implemented, the
25 agreement will address the evidence obtained and the allegations investigated," consistent with the

1 context of this letter.

2 [REDACTED]: I think that will be my stopping point for the end of this round, and we can stop
3 the clock.

4 Oh, sorry. Excuse me. Start the clock back up.

5 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

6 Q Okay. I also -- going back to discussion of CAIR Pennsylvania and Mr. Bender. I
7 believe that the majority referred to CAIR as an unindicted co-conspirator in a 2007 case. Is it -- do
8 you have knowledge of whether or not that was the CAIR-Philadelphia that was an unindicted
9 co-conspirator or are we talking about a national affiliate organization? Do you have any
10 understanding of that?

11 Mr. Fishman. If he knows.

12 [REDACTED]: If you know, yeah.

13 Dr. Watlington. I don't know. What I can tell you is that my experience has been that it is
14 a reputable organization in the city of Philadelphia that expressed interest in being an appropriate
15 supporter of young people of diverse backgrounds in the School District of Philadelphia.

16 [REDACTED]: And with that -- oh, sorry.

17 [REDACTED]: For the record, we have not seen anything that suggests that
18 CAIR-Philadelphia has ever been called an unindicted co-conspirator.

19 [REDACTED]: And with that, I think we can stop the clock and go off the record.

20 [Recess.]

21 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

22 Q Dr. Watlington, you said in response to questioning from the minority that antisemitism
23 has not manifested in the School District of Philadelphia. Doesn't saying that invalidate the
24 experiences of Jewish students and employees in your district?

25 A You're referring to the previous question?

1 Q Yes.

2 A Of course, antisemitism incidents have occurred and have been investigated in the
3 school district. I think I misunderstood the question as to whether or not there was a systemic
4 problem across the district with antisemitism which I don't believe to be the case.

5 Now, it's unacceptable, even one incident, to be investigated -- having to be investigated is
6 unacceptable. But yes, antisemitism incidents have occurred in the district with, you know,
7 hundreds of thousands of children and 20,000 employees, no different than racism and Islamophobia
8 and some other forms of hate.

9 Q What would it look like to have a systemic problem with antisemitism?

10 A Documented cases -- I would think documented cases of antisemitism where clearly the
11 district chooses not to address it.

12 Q Okay. Back to Mr. MacQueen, I had asked you about the Racial Justice Organizing
13 Committee. Did you know that Mr. MacQueen, who is a teacher in your district, is a member of the
14 Racial Justice Organizing Committee, or RJOC?

15 A I'm not familiar with RJOC and did not have knowledge that he was a member -- would
16 not have knowledge.

17 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 15
18 was marked for identification.]

19 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

20 Q I would like to introduce exhibit 15, a November 2025 Instagram post by RJOC, Racial
21 Justice Organizing Committee. In this post, RJOC declares that they believe that, quote, "All
22 resistance is righteous."

23 Ms. Cotton. Hold on.

24 Mr. Fishman. Here. Because he --

25 [REDACTED]. Oh, you have your --

1 Mr. Fishman. Yes, [REDACTED] handed it out while he was talking to you --

2 [REDACTED]: Yes.

3 Mr. Fishman. So I took it away from him --

4 [REDACTED]: Oh, I see.

5 Mr. Fishman. -- so he wouldn't be distracted by that.

6 [REDACTED]: You have one.

7 Mr. Fishman. Thank you.

8 Ms. Cotton. Let me take a look.

9 And are you representing that racialjusticephilly --

10 [REDACTED]: Yes.

11 Ms. Cotton. -- is RJOC's handle?

12 [REDACTED]: Yes.

13 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

14 Q So this post states that all resistance is righteous. Again, Racial Justice Organizing
15 Committee is a group made up primarily of district employees, including teachers and administrators.
16 Are you aware of that?

17 A I'm sorry, would you repeat that question?

18 Q Are you aware that RJOC is made up primarily of district employees, such as teachers
19 and administrators? Do you know that?

20 A I'm not aware of their membership. I've heard of the organization, but I don't know
21 their membership rules, guidelines, or participants.

22 Q This post says, "All resistance is righteous." What do you interpret this to mean?

23 Mr. Fishman. As he sits here seeing it for the first time?

24 [REDACTED]: Uh-huh.

25 Dr. Watlington. I don't know.

1 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

2 Q In this post, RJOC also claims that, quote, "There is no 'both sides' to apartheid,
3 occupation, and genocide."

4 Does this appear to you to be a pledge to be one-sided rather than unbiased and balanced?

5 A Could you give me a moment to read the --

6 Q Sure.

7 A I want to read both posts so I can --

8 Q Sure.

9 A -- best respond to that.

10 Okay, I've read it. If you could ask me the question again.

11 Q Sure. So there is no both sides to apartheid, occupation, and genocide. That's what
12 they say they believe, no both sides. Is this a pledge to be one-sided rather than unbiased and
13 balanced with regard to this controversial issue?

14 Mr. Fishman. Where?

15 [REDACTED]. On this page.

16 Mr. Fishman. No, no. Unbalanced -- unbalanced where?

17 [REDACTED]. With regard to -- in general. This is a general pledge. As a member of this
18 group, this group believes this. So is this a pledge by this group to be unbalanced because they are
19 pledging that there is no both sides to apartheid, occupation, or genocide?

20 Mr. Fishman. So, first of all, I don't know -- you're saying it's a pledge. I don't know that
21 that --

22 [REDACTED]. It says "What do we believe?"

23 Mr. Fishman. I understand that. That's what it says. I'm not sure whether a pledge --

24 [REDACTED]. Okay.

25 Mr. Fishman. -- and belief is right. I'm just asking you if -- your question seems to me to be

1 not clear in that regard. And you're also asking him does it pledge to do something, and the
2 question is, where? In the classroom, out of the classroom? That's the question.

3 [REDACTED]: This appears to be a general pledge. A general statement of beliefs, if you
4 will.

5 Mr. Fishman. Okay.

6 [REDACTED]: There is no both sides to apartheid, occupation, and genocide.

7 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

8 Q Does that appear to be a statement of beliefs that is unbiased or does it appear to be
9 biased?

10 A I'll say two things. Number one, I don't know. This -- if this content were taught in a
11 classroom, I would certainly expect it to be taught in a manner -- any concept to be taught in a
12 manner that is not purporting one person's or individual's political or personal beliefs.

13 Second, the other reason I don't know is similar to what the -- our Declaration of
14 Independence says when it says we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created
15 equal, et cetera. And it goes on to say that when any government becomes obstructive -- or
16 destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it. The declaration
17 doesn't say how. It doesn't say that -- but certainly in a classroom you might teach the American
18 Revolution and how people thought about addressing that, but I can't opine on this. But if we were
19 in a classroom, I would expect a teacher not to take a political or personal point of view.

20 [12:03 p.m.]

21 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

22 Q So, are you giving the revolution as an example -- the American Revolution as an
23 example of righteous resistance or --

24 A In some -- in some circumstances, it absolutely could be, yes.

25 Q Okay. But is all righteous -- is all resistance righteous?

1 A I can't speak to what they are referring to because I don't know.

2 Q Okay.

3 Given that this group has teacher members, and it states here that they believe there's no
4 "both sides" to this controversial issue --

5 Mr. Fishman. Which controversial issue is that?

6 [REDACTED]. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

7 Mr. Fishman. You're saying that this is about that?

8 [REDACTED]. Apartheid occupation and genocide. It is about that. There's Palestinian
9 flags all over the top of it.

10 Ms. Cotton. If you actually read the caption, it's talking about -- I'm just reading this for the
11 very first time, but it's actually talking about European colonizers.

12 [REDACTED]. It is a broader -- they would view -- many people who hold these views view
13 Israelis as European colonizers.

14 Mr. Fishman. That may be right, but the question is what his reading of this
15 particular -- you're saying what this particular post is about. You may be right, and I'm not -- we're
16 not here to debate what it's about. You're asking what his understanding of the post is, and he says
17 he hasn't seen it before and doesn't know what it means or what they're talking about.

18 So, I guess, what's the question you're -- what's the information from Dr. Watlington that
19 you're trying to get about the post?

20 [REDACTED]. The information that I am trying to get from him is whether he believes
21 individuals who hold the beliefs that all resistance is righteous and that there is no both sides to
22 apartheid occupation and genocide -- his employees who believe that, is he confident that they are
23 upholding the district's controversial issues policy in their classrooms? That's the question I was
24 about to ask earlier.

25 Mr. Fishman. Okay.

1 Dr. Watlington. I think, one, the information about the post about the Lenape people, my
2 knowledge of history tells me that those were the original inhabitants of what is currently
3 Philadelphia. I find that to be historically accurate.

4 Second, controversial -- our board-of-education-adopted policy with respect to controversial
5 issues certainly allows a teacher to discuss controversial issues in a classroom. It requires teachers
6 to do it in a manner that does not teach one's personal or political points of view.

7 I, quite frankly, expect our teachers to draw on their knowledge and expertise and creativity
8 to get our young people actively involved in current events because it's appropriate. What we can't
9 do, what they should not do and may not do is to teach particular points of view.

10 We teach children how to think in the school district of Philadelphia, not what to think.

11 [REDACTED]. And are you confident that a member of this group that holds these beliefs
12 written here would comply with the district's controversial issues policy in the classroom?

13 Dr. Watlington. I can tell you that I'm confident that principals and their designees, assistant
14 principals, inspect lesson plans in their schools, visit classes formally and informally to ensure that
15 teachers are teaching in a way that's consistent with our expectations and board policy, and that they
16 frequently give feedback to teachers.

17 [REDACTED]. Okay.

18 I'd like to introduce exhibit 17.

19 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 17

20 was marked for identification.]

1 Ms. Cotton. Wait. Did we skip 16?

2 [REDACTED]: We did.

3 This email exchange shows that, in January 2025, the district selected Mr. MacQueen to serve
4 as a social science curriculum writer. Were you aware of this?

5 Dr. Watlington. May I take a moment to read?

6 [REDACTED]: Yes.

7 Ms. Cotton. You're not on this email.

8 Dr. Watlington. Okay.

9 Mr. Fishman. But you can read it.

10 Ms. Cotton. Yes, but you can read it. Yeah.

11 Dr. Watlington. Thank you.

12 I'm sorry, could you repeat the question?

13 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

14 Q Were you aware that Mr. MacQueen was selected by the district to be a social science
15 curriculum writer in January of 2025?

16 A No.

17 Q As we stated before the break, Mr. MacQueen has posted online, prior to his selection
18 in 2024 -- that Zionism is racism, settler colonialism, Islamophobia, genocidal violence, and
19 antisemitic. He has also stated that "Zionists are no different from the swarms of White
20 supremacist spectators cheering on the public lynchings of over 3,000 Black people."

21 Why did the district select someone as a curriculum writer who has made these statements?

22 A I don't know any of the details about how or why Mr. MacQueen was selected to serve
23 as a social science curriculum writer, outside of the email you just provided me that I was not copied
24 on originally.

25 Q Did this -- knowing what you know now, after we read some of the posts, did this

1 selection show good judgment, in your view?

2 Mr. Fishman. Are you assuming that people knew about those posts?

3 [REDACTED]. I'm saying Dr. Watlington knows about them now.

4 Mr. Fishman. No, no. What I'm asking is -- you asked if the selection was good judgment,
5 but your question assumes, I think, that whoever in the school system --

6 [REDACTED]. They may or may not have.

7 Mr. Fishman. Okay. So, you're asking is he a good choice, or was there good judgment to
8 pick him? They are two different questions, that's all.

9 [REDACTED]. I'll ask both.

10 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

11 Q Was he a good choice?

12 A Let me be clear. I don't know enough about the selection process, nor do I know if
13 individuals who selected him to be a part of their committee reviewed his posts, were aware of his
14 posts. I just can't speculate on that.

15 Your second question was?

16 Q I'll just go off of that. Should -- regardless of whether they did or not, should his posts
17 and other applicants who wish to write curriculum for the district -- in light of the controversial issues
18 policy, should their social media posts be considered when the district is selecting them for this
19 position?

20 A I'm not being resistant. I just want to make sure I fully understand your question.
21 Would you ask me that again?

22 Q Should the district consider the social media activity of applicants, such as whether it
23 shows bias or discrimination or other -- such as whether it shows bias or discrimination, in selecting
24 curriculum writers? Should that post history be considered?

25 A I think reasonable steps should always be taken to vet curriculum writers, no different

1 than teachers. I don't know if there ought to be a comprehensive review of all social media posts
2 that people have made in their personal capacity. Somebody may know, but it is not my job to do
3 that.

4 Q Do you feel confident that someone who has described Zionists and Zionism in the way
5 that he has, which, I believe, you personally rejected and found deploring -- do you feel confident
6 that such a person would be unbiased in writing social science curricula?

7 A Ask me that question again.

8 Q Do you feel confident that an individual who holds the views that we've discussed and
9 who has expressed them publicly, on Zionism and Zionists, would serve as an unbiased social science
10 curriculum writer? Would they be able to fulfill that responsibility?

11 A I don't know. I don't know.

12 I can tell you that, you know, Lyndon Johnson -- former President Lyndon Johnson espoused
13 some pretty racist views as a young man and former teacher out in Texas. He spent a lot of years in
14 this building doing some awful good work getting a civil rights bill passed. So, I don't know.

15 Q Has the district disciplined Mr. MacQueen for any antisemitic conduct, including any
16 conduct described in the Anti-Defamation League's July 2024 complaint against the district?

17 A I'm sorry, would you ask that again?

18 Q Let me ask you first: Are you familiar with the Anti-Defamation League's July 2024
19 complaint against the district?

20 A Yes, I am.

21 Q Okay. Has the district disciplined Mr. MacQueen for any antisemitic conduct,
22 generally, or the conduct described in this complaint -- and/or the conduct described in this
23 complaint?

24 A I am familiar with the ADL complaint letter. I believe it was addressed to me. I am
25 not aware of any discipline regarding Mr. MacQueen.

1 As I shared earlier in my testimony, I am aware that as part of my preparation for -- not
2 limited to my preparation for this interview, earlier this summer, I directed the new chief human
3 resources officer that I hired, who took her permanent role on July 1, to go back and do a
4 comprehensive list, a comprehensive review of any complaints related to shared ancestry that might
5 violate policy 348, Harassment and Discrimination.

6 Q And has the district reviewed or changed anything about its process for selecting
7 curriculum writers since October 7th?

8 A The school district, yes. The school district of Philadelphia, on an ongoing basis, has
9 frequent, many touchpoints, informal reviews of various curricula, to include social studies and
10 others. And we are currently under the leadership of a new chief academic officer that I hired,
11 effective July 1, doing a comprehensive review of their curriculum, K-12 curriculum, such that we
12 intend to --

13 Mr. Fishman. For social studies.

14 Dr. Watlington. For social studies. K-12 social studies curriculum, such that we intend to
15 launch a standardized curriculum that is no longer written by teachers or administrators but written
16 by and created in partnership with national experts, similar to what we've done with the math
17 curriculum 3 years ago, the reading curriculum 2 years ago, and the science curriculum last year.

18 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

19 Q And when did that review begin?

20 A It launched over the summer.

21 Q Do you know the month, roughly? July?

22 A Shortly after my appointment of a new chief academic officer on July 1.

23 Q Okay. And then, which national experts are -- is the district working with on the
24 standardized curriculum?

25 A Our initial expert, with more to come, is Dr. Sheila Brown, who was once a deputy

1 superintendent in the Boston Public Schools and trained chief academic officers, big-size and midsize
2 school districts, at the Aspen Institute in Colorado for a number of years.

3 Q And what is the goal of -- what are you hoping for in terms of changes from the current
4 teacher- or curricular specialist-written curriculum to the new standardized curriculum?

5 A I would say a couple of things. On the one hand, when I came to Philadelphia, the
6 School District of Philadelphia, being the ninth-largest school district in the sixth-largest city, had
7 some of the lowest performance in reading and math on the Nation's Report Card -- the Nation's
8 Report Card compared to other big cities across the country.

9 So, we eliminated various curriculum, some of which were developed within the district, so
10 that we could get the very best quality curriculum available so that we can, on a faster basis,
11 accelerate and improve academic achievement. So, that's one.

12 By the way, a report from Harvard and Stanford researchers in May told us that compared to
13 8,147 school districts, nationally -- that includes rural, urban, and suburban school districts -- our
14 students in grades three through eight in the school district, for the period 2022 to 2025, had a faster
15 learning-rate improvement than 84 percent of those districts, nationally.

16 Among the 25 largest school districts -- New York City was not included, but Chicago, L.A.,
17 many others were -- our third through eighth grade students had the fastest-improved learning-rate
18 improvement.

19 So, part of that strategy has been validated. It's working.

20 We want to do the same thing with social studies because kids, young people improve their
21 reading proficiency through social studies as a content. Although, social studies is not a tested area,
22 reading is. So, social studies is a preparation for that.

23 Two, we want to make sure that in the -- we want to sunset individuals in the district writing
24 curricula. We don't think it's appropriate, and we think that national experts, quite frankly, are
25 better trained to do this.

1 Q Why isn't it appropriate?

2 A Uh, I'm sorry?

3 Q Why isn't it appropriate?

4 A It's not appropriate for us, going forward, because history -- we want to have national
5 experts who have deep knowledge -- a deeper knowledge of various touchpoints over 2,000 years of
6 human history.

7 And in a city with such high poverty rate, I want the curriculum to be standardized among all
8 250 district-operated schools. We've done that in math. We've done that in reading and language
9 arts. We've done that in science. We're in the process of doing that in social studies next.

10 And then, certainly, I've been very clear. I want to make sure the curriculum is -- all of our
11 curriculum materials are appropriate as we get more information from a number of sources -- from
12 teachers, from parents, from community members, from outside entities.

13 I've instructed the team to take a look at all of the feedback we've got and make sure that we
14 procure nationally created curriculum that take all of that feedback into account and give our
15 children in Philadelphia the very best social studies curriculum possible.

16 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

17 Moving to exhibit 18. Are you --

18 Mr. Fishman. Hang on. We don't have 18 yet.

19 [REDACTED]. I know, but I'm going to ask two questions first.

20 Mr. Fishman. Okay.

21 [REDACTED]. I just want you to have it.

22 Mr. Fishman. Okay.

23 [REDACTED]. Are you aware that, in 2025, district teachers started an anti-Israel group chat
24 on an encrypted messaging platform?

25 Dr. Watlington. No.

1 Mr. Fishman. I'm sorry, what was your question?

2 [REDACTED]. I said, "Are you aware that, in 2025, district teachers started an anti-Israel
3 group chat on an encrypted messaging platform?" He said, "No."

4 Mr. Fishman. Okay.

5 [REDACTED]. Are you aware that current district students were also in that chat?

6 Dr. Watlington. I don't have knowledge to the -- what you're referring to.

7 [REDACTED]. I'd like to introduce exhibit 18. These are two screenshots from the chat that
8 we were provided. Student names are redacted.

9 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 18]

10 was marked for identification.]

1 Ms. Cotton. I'm sorry, how did you describe the --

2 [REDACTED]: These are two screenshots from the chat. This is a district -- a chat started by
3 district teachers and Philly Educators for Palestine on Signal, an encrypted messaging platform.

4 This is a screenshot of the chat that shows student participation.

5 The other screenshot in this exhibit, on the backside, shows Ms. Gann, who we discussed
6 earlier, advertising a, quote, "Rally for Rage and Resistance" on October 7th. The advertisement
7 shows a bulldozer breaking through a fence, as Hamas did during the October 7th attacks.

8 Is it appropriate for district teachers to share images like this with students in private chats
9 online?

10 Mr. Fishman. Are you talking about the one on the back?

11 [REDACTED]: Mm-hmm.

12 Ms. Cotton. I'm sorry, I'm just trying to follow along. This is the same chat on both the
13 front and the back? Even though one is black and one is white, it's the same chat?

14 [REDACTED]: Yes, it's the same chat. Signal does that at -- sometimes at night, and different
15 people have different color schemes on their phones.

16 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

17 Q So, my question is: Is it appropriate for district teachers to share images like this with
18 students in private chats online?

19 A Absolutely not. There is -- let me be crystal clear, teachers have no business, under
20 any circumstances, communicating with children on private chats. Period.

21 Q So, facially, does this chat violate any district policies, such as the social media policy,
22 which states what you effectively just said, which is that district employees should not communicate
23 with students who are currently enrolled?

24 A While I don't recall if our social media policy specifically prohibits a teacher from having
25 communication with a student or group of students on social media, among our 350 board policies

1 and voluminous procedures and code of ethics, this is not allowed.

2 Q I --

3 A Period.

4 Q Okay. I believe it does specifically prohibit that.

5 Mr. Fishman. He's saying it's not allowed anyway.

6 [REDACTED]. Okay.

7 Has the district taken any action in relation to this chat, to your knowledge -- investigative or
8 disciplinary or otherwise?

9 Dr. Watlington. I'm unaware of this chat. I can tell you that -- I'm unaware of this chat
10 and -- and don't know.

11 [REDACTED]. Would you have your team look at it as part of their look back?

12 Dr. Watlington. If it's not already a part of that look back when things come to my attention,
13 absolutely, and we'll do so and confer with counsel.

14 Ms. Cotton. Can I just say, for the record, I see how one side of this shows the participation
15 of a student. It is not at all clear from the face of this document that there were students who saw
16 this. His testimony stands, but I just want to make clear for the record that I accept your
17 representations, but that's not evident to me from the face of the -- the back page of this that any
18 students saw this.

19 [REDACTED]. I'd like to ask about another district employee, Ismael Jimenez. What is Mr.
20 Jimenez's --

21 Dr. Watlington. May I just ask a question?

22 [REDACTED]. Sure.

23 Dr. Watlington. Since I've been tasked with checking in with this, are you sure -- so I can
24 know how to appropriately --

25 [REDACTED]. I can provide you with more information on this.

1 Mr. Fishman. Why don't we do that offline? Anything you have that relates to this, we will
2 accept as counsel --

3 [REDACTED]: We are in touch with people who --

4 Mr. Fishman. That's fine.

5 [REDACTED]: -- were involved in this chat.

6 Mr. Fishman. That's fine.

7 [REDACTED]: Ismael Jimenez. What is Mr. Jimenez's current role with the district?

8 Dr. Watlington. Mr. Jimenez --

9 [REDACTED]: Oh, is it Jimenez -- or Jimenez?

10 Mr. Fishman. He pronounces it -- apparently, he pronounces it Jimenez with a harder "J."

11 [REDACTED]: Thank you. Jimenez.

12 Dr. Watlington. Mr. Jimenez is in a termination proceeding.

13 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

14 Q What was his most recent role with the district?

15 A Director of social studies.

16 Q And how long did he hold that position?

17 A I don't know exactly, but he was in the role when I started.

18 Q Our understanding is that he has held the position since August 2022, for the record.

19 A Then his hiring would have been shortly around the time of my beginning in the school
20 district then.

21 Q What was his role in the district prior to that position?

22 A I personally don't know.

23 Q Our understanding is that he was, from September 2009 to February 2021, a teacher in
24 the district; and then, from February '21 to August '22, a curricular specialist; and then, in August '22,
25 he became director.

1 Mr. Jimenez was promoted to director of social studies curriculum under your administration,
2 correct?

3 A I took office on June 16th. I heard you say he moved into the role in August. I'm
4 unaware of that.

5 Q Okay.

6 A So, I can't confirm or refute whether or not that's accurate. I can tell you that I did not
7 hire the director of social studies. So, I just don't have the knowledge.

8 Q Okay. We do have his LinkedIn page if you'd like confirmation.

9 Mr. Fishman. I think his point is -- he is not involved in the hiring, is his point, regardless of if
10 he was there.

11 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

12 Q Even for the director of a discipline in the district, the director of writing a discipline for
13 the district?

14 A I personally interview every principal in the district before they're hired. I personally
15 interview every deputy superintendent, chief officer, and without -- with rare exception, deputy
16 chiefs. I don't interview directors before their hiring.

17 Q Who interviews directors before their hiring, regularly?

18 A Certainly, that would be within the purview of the chief academic officer or some chief
19 in their curricular areas -- or former chief in the curricular areas.

20 Q Are you familiar with what kind of vetting this position entails?

21 A I'm aware that our human resource office function has, as appropriate, some vetting
22 functions. I don't know the specific details of it.

23 Q How would you describe the job responsibilities affiliated with this position, director of
24 social studies curriculum? What are the job responsibilities for that position?

25 A I would expect -- as superintendent, I would expect a director of social studies to

1 provide leadership and support to a dedicated curriculum staff, as well as social studies teachers
2 across the district, in terms of support for the content in the curriculum they taught, as well as
3 pedagogy, how to actively engage our young people to be engaged in the learning.

4 Q How would you describe Mr. Jimenez's approach to social studies education?

5 A Overall?

6 Q His general philosophy on it.

7 A I was not Mr. Jimenez's supervisor, so I don't know.

8 [REDACTED]. Okay.

9 I'm going to introduce exhibits 19, 20, and 21. You can just focus on 19 for now. I just
10 thought it would be easier to give them all to you at once.

11 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 19

12 was marked for identification.]

1 Mr. Fishman. Okay. You want him to just look at 19 for now?

2 [REDACTED]. Yes.

3 Mr. Fishman. Okay.

4 Dr. Watlington. May I take a moment to just review?

5 [REDACTED]. Yes.

6 So, this is exhibit 19. In 2020, as you can see, Mr. Jimenez posted online, stating, "Israel is a
7 terrorist state."

8 Have you seen this post before?

9 Dr. Watlington. I don't recall this particular post. I have seen some posts, but I don't recall
10 this one.

11 [REDACTED]. This is 2020. So, when he posted this, he was a district employee. Is that
12 correct, going by the timeline that we mentioned?

13 Dr. Watlington. I was not employed in the district in 2020. I was in another State, actually,
14 but I do see that it's noted November 27th, 2020, here.

15 Mr. Fishman. We'll accept your representation that he was in the district. That's fine.

16 [REDACTED]. Is this post concerning to you?

17 Dr. Watlington. Yes, absolutely.

18 [REDACTED]. Were you aware -- or what -- to your knowledge, was anyone in your
19 administration, including those that hired him and promoted -- correction, promoted him -- were
20 they aware of this post when he was promoted to director for social studies curriculum?

21 Dr. Watlington. I don't know.

22 [REDACTED]. I'd like to introduce exhibit 20.

23 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 20
24 was marked for identification.]

1 [REDACTED]: This is a 2014 post by Mr. Jimenez. This is a tweet that he reposted that says,
2 "Blaming Hamas for firing rockets at Israel is like blaming a woman for punching her rapist."

3 Have you seen this post before?

4 Dr. Watlington. No.

5 [REDACTED]: Do you agree with this statement?

6 Dr. Watlington. No.

7 Ms. Cotton. Sorry, "this statement" being Ms. Gadd's statement here?

8 [REDACTED]: Yes, and his reposting of it.

9 Dr. Watlington. I'm sorry?

10 Mr. Fishman. There are two different questions. Does he agree with the statement that
11 she posted? The answer is no. Right?

12 [REDACTED]: Okay. That's fine.

13 Mr. Fishman. Yeah. Does he think he should have reposted it? You can ask him that
14 question. But I just want to make the record clear, that's all.

15 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

16 Q Again, to your knowledge, was the district aware of this post when Mr. Jimenez was
17 promoted?

18 A I don't know.

19 Q If you had known about these posts and had been involved in the process of choosing
20 and/or promoting a director for social studies curriculum, would you still have -- would you have
21 chosen or promoted Mr. Jimenez?

22 A I'll say two things. One, I want to be clear that I don't hire curriculum directors.
23 There are staff that do that. If something like this came across my desk, I would absolutely flag it --

24 Q So --

25 A -- if it were a district employee.

1 Q Why would you flag it?

2 A I would flag it. I would send it to the appropriate individuals whose job is to
3 investigate it; not mine, as superintendent. Notwithstanding how objectionable I might find the
4 content -- the content, I would send it to the appropriate people to investigate, given that, in a
5 curriculum sense -- both in the classroom or in curriculum development -- our role is not to take
6 positions on -- our job is to teach kids how to think, not what to think, and to provide the appropriate
7 curriculum materials in a manner that's consistent with that and not inconsistent with that.

8 Q Are you familiar with the antisemitic terror attack that occurred in Boulder, Colorado, in
9 June of 2025?

10 A I don't know if I remember that.

11 Q There was a firebombing during an event in Boulder, Colorado.

12 A I do recall, but I don't recall the details now that you --

13 [REDACTED]. I'd like to introduce exhibit 21.

14 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 21

15 was marked for identification.]

1 [REDACTED]. After that attack, on June 4th, 3 days after the attack, Mr. Jimenez made a post
2 online --

3 Mr. Fishman. Hold on. He doesn't have it yet. Hang on. Okay. Go ahead.

4 [REDACTED]. And I'm aware that the date is not exactly labeled on this, but it has been
5 reported elsewhere.

6 Mr. Fishman. What's the date?

7 [REDACTED]. June 4th.

8 Mr. Fishman. Of?

9 [REDACTED]. 2025.

10 Ms. Cotton. And are you representing that is- --

11 [REDACTED]. Yes. That is his Instagram handle -- or was.

12 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

13 Q After the attack, Mr. Jimenez made a post online that said, "The groups who align
14 themselves with American savageness should not be surprised when the savageness is turned on
15 you."

16 Have you seen this post before?

17 A I have not.

18 Q You have not seen it?

19 A No.

20 Q Didn't multiple Jewish groups contact your office, and, potentially, you directly, with
21 concern about this post?

22 A I don't recall seeing this specific post. Perhaps, I did. I just don't remember.

23 Q Okay.

24 A You should know that there are a number of items that come across my desk.

25 Q Okay.

1 A And I just don't remember.

2 [REDACTED]: What was the date on this?

3 [REDACTED]: June 4th, 2025.

4 [REDACTED]: June 4th, 2025?

5 [REDACTED]: Yes, 3 days after the firebombing.

6 [REDACTED]: Three days after what?

7 [REDACTED]: The firebombing. The terror attack.

8 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

9 Q This tweet caused significant public backlash. Is that correct?

10 A I don't recall.

11 Q If this post is responding and speaking to the terror attack, is this post antisemitic?

12 A Just looking at this, with no other information or context, I'm not sure -- I can't draw the
13 conclusion that the words in this post are a response to a terrorist attack any more than my
14 understanding of -- I'm not sure. I'll stop there. I don't know.

15 Q Jewish groups did write to the district and write broadly, describing this post with grave
16 concern.

17 Mr. Fishman. What does it mean, "wrote to the district"?

18 [REDACTED]: They -- I can get you more information on that.

19 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

20 Q But I do believe that they wrote you directly, and they did post letters online, expressing
21 grave concern about this post and other comments made by Mr. Jimenez, but especially this post and
22 its -- as a response to the terrorist attack.

23 So, I'd like to ask whether you think this post makes Jewish students and families in the
24 district feel welcome and safe?

25 A I certainly am not qualified to speak for what -- about what a wide range of Jewish

1 families in Philadelphia think or feel. I certainly want them to feel safe and supported under my
2 leadership as superintendent.

3 The second thing I want to say is that I held over 25 meetings with both Jewish and Muslim
4 leaders and community members in the school district. So, I just don't remember every post that
5 was shared with me during that.

6 And then, finally, if I might just say, you know, reading a post that says -- if I take the name
7 off, or whomever -- "The groups who align themselves with American savageness should not be
8 surprised when the savageness is turned on you," I just don't have enough information to know what
9 that means.

10 Q Okay. And just to clarify my earlier statement, it was an open letter signed by
11 many -- a number of Jewish groups -- JCRC, ADL, AJC, StandWithUs -- open letter to Mr. Jimenez and
12 the school district of Philadelphia.

13 Is Mr. Jimenez still writing curricula for SDP?

14 A No.

15 Q Is Mr. Jimenez still involved in professional development sessions for the district?

16 A No.

17 Q Is he involved in orientation for new employees for the district?

18 A No.

19 Q Has the -- I'll move on.

20 Are you familiar with Keziah Ridgeway?

21 A Yes.

22 Q She is a district teacher currently, correct?

23 A Yes.

24 Q Is she currently teaching students?

25 A That's my understanding, yes.

1 Q Do you know where? Which school?

2 A Yes.

3 Q Which school?

4 A It's my understanding, West Philadelphia High School.

5 [REDACTED]. I would like to introduce exhibits 22 and 23.

6 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 22

7 was marked for identification.]

1 [REDACTED]. Exhibit 22 consists of so-called "social media rules" that Ms. Ridgeway posted
2 on her Instagram 1 month after October 7th. These rules state that her current Instagram
3 posts -- I'm sorry, that her Instagram posts can be discussed in class if they are about a current event.

4 That's number two -- and then -- I'll let you take a look at that.

5 And then, exhibit 23.

6 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 23]

7 was marked for identification.]

1 [REDACTED]. In this exhibit, Ms. Ridgeway is communicating a message to her class, IB
2 Anthro -- anthropology -- about where to pick up certain items at school.

3 These posts appear to be directed at students, correct?

4 Dr. Watlington. I've not read them yet.

5 [REDACTED]. Okay. I'll let you take a look.

6 Ms. Cotton. And I'm not sure he has 23.

7 Mr. Fishman. I just gave him 22 because I thought you were talking about 22.

8 [REDACTED]. Give him both.

9 Mr. Fishman. Oh, okay. Sorry. Here's 23. Typically, I've been just waiting to --

10 Dr. Watlington. You want me to do 22 first?

11 [REDACTED]. You can look at them both at the same time.

12 Mr. Fishman. Does 23 have a date?

13 [REDACTED]. It does not.

14 Mr. Fishman. Do you know when it's from?

15 [REDACTED]. I don't have that on me right now.

16 Dr. Watlington. Okay. I've reviewed the posts.

17 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

18 Q Do these posts appear to be directed at students?

19 A They certainly suggest such.

20 Q Does -- have you seen these posts? Have you seen them before?

21 A I'm unfamiliar with the posts.

22 Q Have you seen other posts of Ms. Ridgeway's that appear to be directed at students,
23 online posts?

24 A I have been made aware of posts and seen posts that appear to involve or impact
25 students.

1 Q Does Ms. Ridgeway's use of personal social media to interact with students in this way
2 violate any district policies?

3 A I don't like teachers or district employees interacting with students at all on social
4 media. Certainly, I'd want to know -- I think there's -- I personally think there's a difference
5 between what people do outside of school with their own personal social media and what they do
6 inside school and in district social media.

7 Whether or not they violate School District of Philadelphia policies, that's a determination
8 that I don't make, that certainly the Office of Employee Labor Relations would make, notwithstanding
9 whether I agree with it or not.

10 Q So, should teachers use their personal social media accounts to communicate with
11 students?

12 A I think it's a bad idea. I think it's rife with problems. It's one of the reasons we're
13 taking a review. We're conducting a review of our social media policy.

14 Look, in 2026, we want teachers to engage students actively to become civic-minded, to pay
15 attention to current events. We absolutely want to teach about controversial issues.

16 Whether district emails or ClassDojo, whatever, there's a ton of technologies out there, and
17 we're constantly needing to upgrade how we, quite frankly, ensure that we're communicating
18 appropriately. That's our expectation.

19 But I don't like it. I want to be clear. I don't like it.

20 [REDACTED]. Introducing exhibit 24, which you will have in a moment.

21 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 24

22 was marked for identification.]

1 [REDACTED]: This is a 2024 post by Ms. Ridgeway that calls for deleting Israel's name forever.

2 Have you seen this post before?

3 Dr. Watlington. I have not.

4 [REDACTED]: Excuse me.

5 [REDACTED]: Yes?

6 [REDACTED]: What was the date?

7 [REDACTED]: 2024. I don't have an exact date.

8 [REDACTED]: Thank you.

9 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

10 Q Under Ms. Ridgeway's social media rules, which we just reviewed, couldn't this post be
11 the subject of discussion in class as a quote, "current event"?

12 A I'm not sure I understand your question. It's a hypothetical. I want to be careful.

13 Q Sure.

14 Does this Instagram post pertain to a current event?

15 A It certainly could.

16 Q So, Ms. Ridgeway says that her Instagram post can be discussed in class only if they
17 pertain to current events.

18 A Uh --

19 Q Could this post be discussed in her class, under her rules?

20 Mr. Fishman. You're referring back to exhibit 22?

21 [REDACTED]: Yes.

22 Mr. Fishman. Because he doesn't have that in front of him anymore.

23 Dr. Watlington. In her exhibit 22, November 1, 2023, post, I made note just a few minutes
24 ago that she shared, and I quote, "My views on social media are my own and are not a reflection of
25 my employer. It also does not in any way preclude me from being objective. In class, I center

1 student voice, not my own."

2 I do recall there being a board policy around disclosing if using your personal, or something
3 like that, in one of our policies. To that extent, I don't know if the context for which -- when or how
4 or where this may or may not have been shared, and I don't want to speculate.

5 [REDACTED]: Okay.

6 Just quoting back to you from exhibit 22, "Do not bring up anything I post on" -- social
7 media -- "SM in class unless it's a current event."

8 You said that this appears to be a current event. So, deducing from that, this would be
9 something that students could bring up in class with Ms. Ridgeway.

10 Mr. Fishman. Are you asking whether he agrees with you, or are you just --

11 [REDACTED]: I mean, I think that's where we're at. Would you agree with that?

12 Dr. Watlington. I don't know. Perhaps, it could be consistent with item number two that
13 says, quote, "Do not bring up anything I post on social media in class unless it's a current event." It
14 would suggest to me that, potentially, something outside of class could have been brought up by a
15 student. I'm not aware if this one actually was.

16 Mr. Fishman. And he's not saying it's okay.

17 [REDACTED]: Yeah.

18 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

19 Q On that note, does this post about deleting Israel's name forever contribute to a safe
20 and welcoming environment for Israeli or Jewish students in Ms. Ridgeway's classroom?

21 A This post is very concerning to me, let me be very clear, as superintendent and as a
22 private citizen in the United States of America and as a citizen of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

23 And, yes, I would answer that question -- ask me the specific question you asked.

24 Q Does it -- yeah. Does this post contribute to a safe and welcoming environment for
25 Jewish and Israeli students in her classroom?

A From my perspective, it does not help a sense of safe environment. Although, I can't speak for students.

Q Are you aware of whether the district has investigated this post?

A I don't know. I really --

Mr. Fishman. I think he said -- he hadn't seen it before, he thinks. So --

██████████. Are you aware of whether -- I apologize if this is a repeat, but are you aware of whether the district has investigated other social media posts by Ms. Ridgeway?

Dr. Watlington. Yes.

██████████. I'm sorry, "Yes, you're aware" or, "Yes, they have"? Let him clarify that, please.

Dr. Watlington. I am aware that the district staff have investigated other posts regarding

Ms. Ridgeway, yes.

BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

Q Do you know which posts?

A I'm not sure if I know all of them, but I do know that posts have been investigated.

Q Are you aware that Ms. Ridgeway's posts have, in fact, made Jewish students feel unsafe in the district?

A I am aware of complaints made regarding that, as you describe it, yes.

Q Are you aware that Ms. Ridgeway has repeatedly threatened Jewish community members on her Instagram?

A I'm aware that one or more complaints have been raised with that sentiment, yes.

██████████. I'd like to introduce exhibit 25.

1

was marked for identification.]

1 [REDACTED]: This first image does have some redactions. It's from the ADL complaint, but
2 we understand that it is Ms. Ridgeway's post. It is alongside this second post, which is also in the
3 ADL complaint, and we have an unredacted version of that.

4 So, this exhibit includes some of Ms. Ridgeway's threatening posts. I can just read to you
5 parts of them.

6 Ms. Ridgeway has warned, "When it comes to Zionists, it's up" --

7 Mr. Fishman. Can you give us 1 minute to consult?

8 Ms. Cotton. Could we go off the record for -- could we go off the record, just take a quick
9 break?

10 Mr. Fishman. Just a quick consult, not with the witness, about whether he can answer these
11 questions or not.

12 [REDACTED]: Okay.

13 Mr. Fishman. Okay?

14 [REDACTED]: We can pause. Just for 1 -- literal 1 minute?

15 Mr. Fishman. Yes, it will be just 1 minute.

16 [REDACTED]: Okay.

17 [Discussion off the record.]

18 [REDACTED]: Are we back on the record?

19 Mr. Fishman. We're back. We're back on the record.

20 [REDACTED]: Okay.

21 Mr. Fishman. I just want to note, on the record, and I think you probably know, that
22 Ms. Ridgeway is in active litigation with the district.

23 [REDACTED]: Mm-hmm.

24 Mr. Fishman. And so, if you want to go through these slowly, I'm not sure that he -- I'm not
25 sure which ones he recognizes and which ones he doesn't, but we want to be very careful to make

1 sure that he's not intruding in an area, at this point, which would compromise the litigation in any
2 way, that's all.

3 [REDACTED]: Understood.

4 So, exhibit 25, as I mentioned, includes some of her threatening posts. I'm just going
5 to -- you don't have to read all of them. I'll just read you some snippets.

6 She's warned, "When it comes to Zionists, it's up." "Tread lightly."

7 In another quote, she says --

8 Mr. Fishman. That's the first one? It's on the --

9 [REDACTED]: Yes. The first one is "When it comes to Zionists, it's up." The second one is
10 "Tread lightly."

11 Mr. Fishman. Where is that?

12 [REDACTED]: It's toward the bottom, the third sentence up.

13 Mr. Fishman. Of the --

14 [REDACTED]: Of the second post. "Tread lightly and go ahead on and unfollow and block
15 me. This is not what you want. It's summer and I have" --

16 Mr. Fishman. I need you to slow down. That's really -- we see the words.

17 [REDACTED]: Okay.

18 Mr. Fishman. We see the words "tread lightly" and "go ahead." Okay?

19 [REDACTED]: And then, the last thing -- the last snippet is "Now, I'm taking the gloves off,"
20 and that's the second paragraph on the third page.

21 Mr. Fishman. Okay. We see those posts.

22 [REDACTED]: Okay.

23 Amid this string of post -- posts, Ms. Ridgeway also posted about any Black-owned gun stores
24 in or near Philadelphia.

25 Does the district tolerate retaliation against individuals who report harassment?

1 Mr. Fishman. As a general proposition?

2 [REDACTED]. As a general matter.

3 Mr. Fishman. As a general proposition, irrespective of the content of these particular texts?

4 [REDACTED]. Yes.

5 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

6 Q Does the district tolerate retaliation against individuals who report harassment?

7 A Irrespective of the content of these particular texts -- texts --

8 Q Posts, yes.

9 A Posts. No.

10 Q The district has received complaints about Ms. Ridgeway's posts. Is that correct?

11 A Yes.

12 Q How did the district respond to these complaints?

13 Mr. Fishman. Again, we need 30 seconds to consult.

14 Ms. Cotton. Can you repeat the question?

15 [REDACTED]. How did the district respond to these complaints about Ms. Ridgeway's posts?

16 Ms. Cotton. I think he can answer the question.

17 Mr. Fishman. Okay. That's fine.

18 [REDACTED]. Can you re-add it?

19 Mr. Fishman. We wouldn't complain about an extra minute.

20 [REDACTED]. I mean, don't worry, we have a lot more than that left.

21 Mr. Fishman. We'll give you 2 minutes, and then we'll go.

22 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

23 Q Okay. How did the district respond to these complaints?

24 A Recognizing a need to be thoughtful about my responses, given active litigation that

25 Ms. Ridgeway has against the school district of Philadelphia at present, I'll say, one, I'm not familiar

1 with the number of these posts and can't tell you what the district did or did not do because I don't
2 conduct investigations.

3 Two, you referenced -- I believe you referenced an item about guns.

4 Q Mm-hmm.

5 A I am aware that -- and this is -- I am aware that there was a post or posts related to
6 guns, a number of posts that were investigated and related to Ms. Ridgeway, and disciplinary action
7 occurred.

8 Q I'm going to ask this. Can you share what the disciplinary action was?

9 A I'm not sure.

10 Mr. Fishman. It's in her civil litigation complaint. It's public. I'm just not sure he
11 remembers, but you can ask him.

12 [REDACTED]: Okay.

13 Mr. Fishman. You can ask. Do you remember what the discipline was?

14 Dr. Watlington. I do.

15 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

16 Q What was the disciplinary action that was taken?

17 A Ms. Ridgeway was suspended without pay and transferred to a new work location.

18 Q Just with regard to these posts, what is your reaction when you see a district teacher
19 making posts like this?

20 A I'd like to take a moment. If you would like me to react to them, I would like to read all
21 of them, so I can --

22 Q Sure. Sure.

23 A Unless you just want me to --

24 Q No, no. You can read them.

25 A I'll take the posts one at a time, if I might?

1 Q Sure.

2 A On the first post, that says, "Zionism is White supremacy," absolutely don't agree with it,
3 based on my definition of Zionism. I suppose I'm aware that other people have different
4 definitions. That's not mine, but -- certainly not.

5 Q Can I ask you really quickly -- on that, do you believe it's antisemitic to say that Zionism
6 is White supremacy?

7 A Based on my definition that the State of Israel absolutely has a right to exist, to pursue
8 the Israeli people's right to self-determination in a safe and secure manner, yes.

9 Q So, it is antisemitic to say that Zionism is White supremacy?

10 A I'm saying that's my belief.

11 Q Okay.

12 A But I don't get to make that determination.

13 Q Okay.

14 A And that trained investigators look at a number of factors -- are able to do that.

15 Also, in the first post, I think it's a matter of the historical record that early Presidents of the
16 United States were, indeed, slave owners, and the question about morality of people owning other
17 people at any point in human history seems an appropriate question.

18 I also wondered if this --

19 Mr. Fishman. An appropriate.

20 Dr. Watlington. An -- it strikes me as an -- a-n -- appropriate question.

21 I don't know, but I wonder about -- when I saw -- I wonder about Ms. Ridgeway's earlier posts
22 that you shared me -- shared with me that said her views are her own and don't represent her
23 employer. I don't know if that's something that came in the classroom or she did in her own
24 external, out-of-school time. That would be up to a trained investigator to look into and -- and
25 should.

1 I'll take a moment to read the second post.

2 I've reviewed the second post, and, quite frankly, I don't understand it. May I go on to
3 three?

4 [REDACTED]. I will just note, as you're reviewing that, that this image associate here, it was
5 on the same --

6 Dr. Watlington. I think I'm on the --

7 [REDACTED]. It's the same post.

8 Mr. Fishman. That just continues the post?

9 [REDACTED]. Yes. It cuts off, but the relevant part is that she's posting the names of Jewish
10 leaders on that single post.

11 Mr. Fishman. This is the more part?

12 [REDACTED]. There is more text, but this is appended to the post.

13 Dr. Watlington. I do know -- as I read this, recall that this is a post that was investigated and
14 resulted in employee discipline.

15 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

16 We can go off the record.

17 [Recess.]

1 [1:38 p.m.]

2 [REDACTED]: Okay. If we could start the clock, please.

3 Thank you for coming back.

4 I just want to reiterate for the record that the statements of Mr. MacQueen that were
5 referenced, again, by the majority in the last round equating Zionists with lynching and White
6 supremacy were referenced in both the OCR resolution letter and the voluntary resolution
7 agreement. And again, we state that according to that agreement, compliance with that agreement
8 would be considered resolution of the incidents in that letter. That is your understanding as well,
9 correct?

10 Dr. Watlington. Yes.

11 Mr. Fishman. Vis-à-vis the United States Government.

12 [REDACTED]: Vis-à-vis the United States Government, yes, and the investigation as well.
13 Thank you.

14 Mr. Fishman. Well, at least the executive branch.

15 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

16 Q Earlier in that last round, the majority counsel contextualized one of Mr. Jimenez's
17 posts -- I believe it was exhibit 21 -- based on an event that happened on that day, a terrorist attack
18 in Boulder, Colorado.

19 Recognizing that nothing can excuse a person's posts, especially if they are espousing violence
20 or retaliation, I think it is safe to say that there was an inference in that question that
21 Mr. Jimenez -- and I think we can expand this to most people on social media -- often post things on
22 social media in response to the events of the day. Is that an inference you would generally agree
23 with, that people, when they're posting on social media, oftentimes are posting in response to things
24 that happened that day?

25 A Generally, it's my understanding.

1 Q Generally, yeah. I'm not trying to -- and in that light, I wanted to look back at at least
2 one other post that we -- or excuse me -- one of the other exhibits, which was exhibit 19. That was
3 another post made by Mr. Jimenez.

4 I just wanted to ask for the record, were you aware that on the date of that post, November
5 27th, 2020, that exhibit 19 was posted, the chief scientist with the Iranian state nuclear program was
6 assassinated by Israeli forces using -- and I'm quoting The New York Times here -- an AI-assisted
7 remote control killing machine?

8 A No, I was not aware.

9 Q Okay. Again, recognizing nothing can change or excuse a post, would it be reasonable
10 to infer that the assassination of an Iranian scientist by an AI-assisted remote control killing machine
11 would be an act that could invoke a feeling of terror among at the least other Iranian scientists?

12 A I don't know. I would suppose it's possible.

13 Q Earlier, the majority counsel referenced allegations made --

14 Mr. Fishman. But I think he's --

15 [REDACTED]. It's a possibility.

16 Mr. Fishman. Like, he's not suggesting --

17 [REDACTED]. I'm not asking you to form an opinion --

18 The Reporter. I can't understand both of you at the same time.

19 [REDACTED]. Oh, I'm sorry.

20 Mr. Fishman. I'm not suggesting that he thinks it's right or that it's his opinion. You asked
21 him if it's possible. He's saying it's possible.

22 [REDACTED]. I understand completely. I'm not asking it for his opinion or his expertise on it,
23 but --

24 Mr. Fishman. He's not a social media guy.

25 [REDACTED]. Understood.

1 Dr. Watlington. And may I just say, outside of posting anything on my district social media
2 related to children and the good work that's occurring with teachers and leaders and school
3 buildings, I don't post things and, quite frankly, don't understand why people do that. Not Tony
4 Watlington.

5 [REDACTED]. Understood, sir. Thank you.

6 Earlier, my colleague with the majority referenced allegations made I believe against Keziah
7 Ridgeway in a complaint the ADL submitted in the summer of 2024. I believe that was an -- was
8 that an exhibit or did we just reference --

9 Mr. Fishman. The ADL complaint is not an exhibit --

10 [REDACTED]. Not an exhibit, just referenced it. Okay.

11 Is it your understanding that the resolution agreement touched on any of those allegations
12 raised by ADL?

13 Dr. Watlington. Yes.

14 [Watlington Minority Exhibit E
15 was marked for identification.]

16 [REDACTED]. At this point I'd like to introduce an exhibit. I believe it's exhibit marked E.
17 This is a press release from the ADL on the announcement of the resolution agreement that the
18 School District of Philadelphia reached with OCR. And I would direct your attention to a quote.
19 And I'll have to pull up exactly -- I think it's about halfway down -- a paragraph that states --

20 Mr. Fishman. On what page?

21 [REDACTED]. Oh, I'm sorry. I'm looking at the electronic version. Could I --

22 [REDACTED]. Sure.

23 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

24 It starts at the top of page 2. "This resolution agreement resolves the allegations raised by
25 ADL, represented pro bono by the law firm Mayer Brown LLP."

1 Skipping ahead, the complaint alleged that SDP knowingly allowed its schools to become,
2 quote, "viciously hostile" environments for Jewish students while failing to address numerous
3 incidents of antisemitic harassment, bullying, and discrimination.

4 And then skipping down a little bit further, in the next paragraph, "It is clear from the
5 resolution that OCR identified multiple ways the SDP wholly failed to meet its Title VI obligations, and
6 it is our hope that this resolution will ensure the district embraces a long-overdue commitment to
7 preventing Jewish students from being harassed and targeted in the future."

8 So based on that release and your earlier statements expressing the school district's
9 willingness to comply and complete the resolution agreement with OCR, is it your understanding
10 that, based on this, the ADL would also consider a resolution of the complaints it made if the district
11 was committed to fully complying with the voluntary resolution agreement?

12 Mr. Fishman. Are you asking him to hypothesize what the ADL would think?

13 [REDACTED]. Based on what is in this statement, the fact that they welcomed the resolution
14 and mentioned that its complaint was encompassed in the resolution of that agreement.

15 Dr. Watlington. I want to make sure I understand the question.

16 Mr. Fishman. Yeah.

17 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

18 Q Based on the press release we have here that ADL welcomes resolution, exhibit E,
19 resolution of its complaints against the school district, is it your understanding that they expect their
20 complaints to be resolved by a successful completion of the resolution agreement?

21 A To the extent that this resol- -- quote, the language around "This resolution agreement
22 resolves the allegation raised by ADL," I take a little interpretation of that to suggest yes.

23 Q Okay. We have discussed multiple incidents involving SDP employees, and I want to
24 make sure we're examining those incidents placed in the proper scope. While I think everyone here
25 would agree that one incident of harassment or discrimination is too many, I want to make clear and

1 I want to make sure that this interview does not give the impression that such conduct is rife
2 throughout the system. I think we kind of got into that -- discussions of the word "manifest" in the
3 last round.

4 Approximately how many students does the School District of Philadelphia serve?

5 A There are 200,000 public school children in Philadelphia, less than 120,000 -- short of
6 120,000 that are in district-operated schools directly under my purview.

7 Q And approximately how many employees does the School District of Philadelphia have?

8 A There are some 20,000 employees serving 250 district-operated schools, more
9 employees when you include the non-district-operated schools.

10 Q But those are -- employees under your purview would be --

11 A That's correct.

12 Q They would be under the policies and procedures of the district as well?

13 A Under my purview and the board's policies and procedures, 20,000 employees.

14 Q I would like to --

15 A Inclusive of 9,000 teachers.

16 Q So 9,000 teachers, and then the total number of employees was --

17 A Approximately 20,000.

18 Q 20,000. Thank you.

19 I would like to enter into the record a complaint letter that was sent to the School District of
20 Philadelphia's Office of General Counsel from The Deborah Project and designated as exhibit C.
21 Please take your time to get acquainted with the document and let me know when you are ready to
22 proceed.

23 [Watlington Minority Exhibit C

24 was marked for identification.]

25 Ms. Cotton. Is there a part that he should focus on?

1 [REDACTED]. Yes. I would say the second paragraph of the first page.

2 BY [REDACTED]: MINORITY STAFF:

3 Q Are you aware -- or were you aware of this complaint that was made by The Deborah
4 Project on behalf of the School District of Philadelphia Jewish Family Association?

5 A I became aware of this document in concert with several other documents, yes.

6 Q Would it be fair to say on the face of this document The Deborah Project is deeply
7 concerned about the presence of antisemitism in district schools?

8 A Could you repeat that?

9 Q Sure. Would it be fair to say The Deborah Project is deeply concerned about the
10 presence of antisemitism in district schools?

11 A Yes.

12 Q Based on your understanding of their complaint, would The Deborah Project have any
13 reason to undercount or underexaggerate the state of antisemitic harassment in Philadelphia
14 schools?

15 A I'm not aware of any reason.

16 Q I turn your attention now to the second paragraph on page 1, and I quote, "The School
17 District of Philadelphia Jewish Family Association is an organization of Jewish parents with children in
18 Philadelphia public schools who opposes efforts by a tiny minority of teachers, including Ridgeway, to
19 insert into the district's community and curriculum a hatred of Zionism, the national liberation
20 movement of the Jewish people."

21 Is the description of actions being committed by a, quote, "tiny minority of teachers,"
22 unquote, consistent with your assessment of the faculty behavior of the district?

23 A As I'm in schools regularly in my role as superintendent and as I observe good teaching
24 to very good teaching and leadership among our teachers and leaders and 250 district-operated
25 schools, with rare exceptions, the language "a tiny minority of teachers" is consistent with what I see

1 on a day-to-day basis in schools. And that said, incidents of discrimination and harassment, to
2 include antisemitism, is unacceptable even among a tiny minority.

3 Q And then, again, is there anything from the previous period of questioning with the
4 majority where you feel you did not get a chance to fully explain yourself? Or if you would like to
5 give a statement for the record at this time, I would give you the opportunity to do so now.

6 A I'll just restate the former statement.

7 I'm proud to serve as superintendent in the School District of Philadelphia. Our teachers and
8 leaders are doing their level best to teach our young people in an appropriate manner and a fair
9 manner where they don't interject in the aggregate personal or political viewpoints into the
10 curriculum. And I want to note that as they go about their duties, I find that the overwhelming
11 majority are following applicable Board of Education-approved policies and our professional code of
12 conduct.

13 That does not obscure the fact that when a small minority out of 9,000 teachers, whether it's
14 less than a dozen out of 9,000, any acts of discrimination and harassment, whether antisemitism,
15 Islamophobia, racism, sexism, gender discrimination, et cetera, has no place in the School District of
16 Philadelphia and is unacceptable.

17 [REDACTED]. Okay. We can stop the clock. Off the record.

18 [Discussion off the record.]

19 [REDACTED]. We can go back on the record.

20 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

21 Q With regard to the ADL, is it your understanding that the ADL is satisfied with SDP's
22 handling of antisemitism since the signing of the OCR agreement in December 2024?

23 A I'm unable to speak to the sentiment of the ADL. I can tell you that I've engaged in
24 good-faith meetings with the ADL. I believe our conversations have been, not only amicable but
25 productive, and we've done our level best to ensure the ADL that we take both its letter and the

1 Office of Civil Rights guidance seriously.

2 Q Have any of the employees cited in the ADL's July 2024 complaint been fired?

3 A I'm not aware at the moment of any employee cited in the ADL complaint being fired, to
4 date. I am aware of an employee who was cited in the ADL letter who is in an active termination
5 proceeding at present.

6 Q Are you familiar with a district professional development session that was planned for
7 2 months after October 7th titled, "Decolonizing the Curriculum: Brief History of Palestine and the
8 Creation of Israel: Contextualizing the Current Conflict and Genocide"? I can read that again if
9 you'd like.

10 A Yes, if you would, please.

11 Q "Decolonizing" --

12 A Slower.

13 Q Sure. "Decolonizing the Curriculum: Brief History of Palestine and the Creation of
14 Israel: Contextualizing the Current Conflict and Genocide."

15 A I want to make sure I write down the full title --

16 Mr. Fishman. You don't have to write down the title. She just wants to know if you
17 know --

18 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

19 Q Are you familiar with it?

20 A I'm not sure. There were a number of things occurring, some of which did not occur,
21 some that did. So I want to make sure I can parse out the difference.

22 Q So --

23 A The short answer is --

24 Q This is the session that did not occur.

25 A Okay.

1 Q Do you remember this session?

2 A Now I do.

3 Q Okay. Are you aware of who planned the session? Who planned it before it was
4 canceled?

5 A I don't immediately recall. However, if I'm remembering the same -- if this is the
6 session I'm recalling, it may be one that I had a personal hand in indicating that it's inappropriate and
7 not occur. I can't remember if this is that one or not.

8 Q This was a session planned by Mr. MacQueen and Ms. Ridgeway with the support of
9 Mr. Jimenez. It was 2 months after October 7th, and it was ultimately canceled.

10 If you can recall, I'm interested in how you reacted when you learned about the session.

11 Mr. Fishman. Assuming it's the same one --

12 [REDACTED]: Assuming it's the same one.

13 Mr. Fishman. It's a little speculative, so I just want to --

14 [REDACTED]: Yeah.

15 Dr. Watlington. Assuming that it's the same one?

16 [REDACTED]: Yes.

17 Dr. Watlington. I had enough information that told me clearly this doesn't meet the bar "we
18 teach children how to think and not what to think."

19 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

20 Q Since this incident, has the district modified its procedures for vetting professional
21 development sessions to ensure that they comply with district policy, including the controversial
22 issues policy?

23 A One, the district has continued to ensure that curricular and curriculum programming
24 are not left to one person. There are multiple people who are involved.

25 Two, the district has continued a process by which both curriculum and professional

1 development opportunities related to the curriculum are approved -- have approval levels.

2 And three, the district has discontinued the process of staff writing curriculum. While we
3 participate in professional development, there are some new and additional oversight processes
4 under the leadership of a new chief academic officer.

5 Q Can you elaborate on those processes insofar as they relate to staff-led professional
6 development sessions?

7 A Yes. In a curriculum area, there'll be a curriculum staff led by a director, formerly
8 Mr. Jimenez. Mr. Jimenez then had a supervisor, an executive director that would have oversight of
9 approving not just curriculum but also professional development opportunities.

10 The next level included a chief of curriculum, who is no longer in that role but was in the role,
11 I believe, during that time period. So it required multiple levels of reviews.

12 Q For the professional development sessions?

13 A For professional development. And I believe, if indeed this is the professional
14 development I'm remembering, I recall having a conversation directly with the former chief of
15 curriculum about said professional development opportunity prior to its cancellation.

16 Q Expressing that it should not occur?

17 A It did not meet the bar for "we teach students how to think and not what to think."

18 Q I would like to introduce exhibits 26 and 27.

19 [Watlington Majority Exhibit Nos. 26

20 and 27 marked for identification.]

21 [REDACTED]. Okay. So let me explain this one.

22 Mr. Fishman. Do you want him to look at them together or separately?

23 [REDACTED]. Just 26 first, and I'll explain what it is.

24 So exhibit 26 is a screen grab of Ms. Gann commenting on a post by Ms. Ridgeway. So
25 Ms. Ridgeway posted, "The way folks just be lying and playing the victim really needs to be studied,"

1 which you can see she posted in exhibit 27. But exhibit 26 is Ms. Gann commenting on that post in
2 her own Instagram story and saying, "Imagine the level of privilege it takes to feel like artwork made
3 by a child is an actual -- quote -- 'threat to your safety' or cause of suffering right now." That's
4 exhibit 26.

5 Exhibit 27 shows Ms. Ridgeway again claiming that folks be lying and playing the victim. This
6 was posted after a Jewish employee in the district filed a complaint against the district. And
7 Ms. Gann was referencing -- appears to be referencing some of the allegations in that complaint
8 related to artwork.

9 You can see ishx19 is Mr. Jimenez's handle. He has commented "White tears" on this post.

10 Mr. Fishman. So if we can -- if I understand this -- because Dr. Watlington is confused.

11 [REDACTED]. Okay.

12 Mr. Fishman. The first thing that got posted is exhibit 27?

13 [REDACTED]. Exactly. Yes.

14 Mr. Fishman. That the -- which was from --

15 [REDACTED]. Ms. Ridgeway.

16 Mr. Fishman. Ms. Ridgeway.

17 [REDACTED]. Teachkizzyteach.

18 Mr. Fishman. And then Ms. Gann either reposted or commented on it.

19 [REDACTED]. She reposted it --

20 Mr. Fishman. Or commented on it.

21 [REDACTED]. -- with this comment, like, making fun of it.

22 And then Mr. Jimenez commented on the initial post saying "White tears."

23 Mr. Fishman. Mr. Jimenez commented on saying "White tears."

24 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

25 Q Have you seen any of these posts before?

1 A I don't recall seeing these posts.

2 Q Are Jewish employees in your district who experience antisemitism playing the victim?

3 A I don't know how to answer these questions because I don't understand the posts.

4 Q Just on its own. Posts aside, are Jewish employees in your district who experience
5 antisemitism playing the victim?

6 A If a Jewish employee in the school district felt that they experienced discrimination and
7 filed a complaint, we are to investigate that complaint. And the appropriate officials in the
8 Employee Labor Relations Office would make a determination pursuant to that investigation.

9 Q But when somebody -- when a Jewish employee comes to you with complaints of
10 antisemitism, is your reaction, "Oh, you're playing the victim"?

11 A When any employee, including a Jewish employee, comes to me with a complaint, I'm
12 going to send it to the Office of Employee Labor Relations, because it's -- whether I agree or disagree,
13 even when I agree or disagree, it is not my call. That's the role of the trained investigators in ELR to
14 make those determinations.

15 Q Does a district employee making fun of another employee's complaint of antisemitic
16 harassment violate any district policies?

17 A Would you ask me that question again?

18 Q Does a district employee publicly making fun of another district employee's complaint of
19 antisemitism, does that concern you?

20 Mr. Fishman. Is this a -- is this public for the entire world to see or is this a --

21 [REDACTED]. Public for the entire world to see.

22 Ms. Cotton. But this is a hypothetical, right? Because you've made a lot of representations
23 about what this post is actually doing, but we don't know that to be the case, and it's certainly not
24 evident from the face of it.

25 [REDACTED]. That is what the post is about.

1 Mr. Fishman. But he can't testify about things that he doesn't know.

2 [REDACTED]. Well, then the question -- but the question stands, regardless of whether this
3 is -- what the post is about or not. The question stands.

4 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

5 Q Does a district employee publicly making fun of another employee's complaint of
6 antisemitic harassment violate any district policies?

7 A When an employee makes a complaint of harassment or discrimination, whether it's a
8 complaint related to antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism, sexism, gender discrimination, et cetera,
9 our policy and expectation requires us, if it's an employee, for it to be sent to Employee Labor
10 Relations to investigate and act accordingly.

11 Q Do these posts set a good example for district students on how to engage with peers
12 and colleagues?

13 A Looking at them on their face, my first reaction is I don't know why people post. It's
14 not helpful. I don't do it. And it's very important for us in any respect to model what we expect
15 from young people. Beyond that, I don't know anything else about these posts at this moment.

16 Q Are these people modeling what they expect from young people?

17 Mr. Fishman. What they expect from young --

18 [REDACTED]. What he just said. Are these posts modeling expectations for young people?

19 Ms. Cotton. I think he said he doesn't even understand what this is about.

20 [REDACTED]. This is about a Jewish employee's antisemitism complaint in the district.

21 Ms. Cotton. That's what you're saying and that may well be true, but he doesn't know that.
22 We don't know that based on the face of this.

23 [REDACTED]. Words have to mean something at a certain point.

24 Mr. Fishman. They do. But you're asking him to speculate about what other people's
25 words mean. And that, respectfully, A, he can't necessarily say what's going on in other people's

1 heads; and B, it's not why he's here. What he's testified is he's hoping these things got sent to the
2 right place for investigation and that the investigation then comes out the right way. And by the
3 right way, I mean that the investigation is a thorough, complete investigation. But --

4 [REDACTED]. What I'm trying to understand is whether the leadership of the district is aware
5 of and taking seriously antisemitism complaints --

6 Mr. Fishman. Right.

7 [REDACTED]. -- and instances where a district -- multiple district employees, including an
8 administrator, appear to be making fun of an individual who filed an antisemitism complaint, and
9 therefore --

10 Mr. Fishman. And he said --

11 [REDACTED]. -- I'm asking the questions I'm asking.

12 Mr. Fishman. I know, but he said he doesn't remember seeing these before, and you're
13 asking him to reach a judgment about what other people mean when they're posting. And he
14 seems uncomfortable making those judgments on the fly.

15 [REDACTED]. Okay.

16 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

17 Q So are you uncomfortable making those judgments?

18 A I'm uncomfortable making those judgments on the fly, and I don't think it's appropriate
19 to speculate.

20 Q Does the district have any safeguards in place to ensure compliance with its
21 controversial issues policy?

22 A Yes.

23 Q What are the safeguards?

24 A Principals and their designees, typically assistant principals, inspect lesson plans of
25 teachers in their school. Principals and assistant principals conduct informal and formal classroom

1 visits to inspect what's being taught in the classroom. Principals and assistant principals provide
2 training -- excuse me -- provide feedback to teachers subsequent to those formal and informal visits
3 to classrooms.

4 All employees in the school district, to include teachers and their superintendent, participate
5 in annual harassment and discrimination training.

6 In addition, the Office of Academics provides training specifically to social studies teachers.
7 And I've paid closer attention under the leadership of the new chief academic officer who I've asked
8 to give me more frequent updates, provide appropriate training to teachers about how to implement
9 the conditions in the controversial issues policy.

10 Q And I asked a variation of this earlier, but how many instances are you aware of where
11 principals actually reach down and review curriculum or acted in some oversight fashion with regard
12 to antisemitism in the classroom?

13 A In a district with 9,000 teachers, I can't tell you specifically. I can tell you, without fear
14 of contradiction, that there are teachers in the School District of Philadelphia, although a minority -- I
15 would say a small minority -- have indeed been investigated and disciplined for harassment and
16 discrimination, to include antisemitism.

17 Q Can you say how many?

18 A I know it's -- it's not one. Off the top of my head, I remember a middle school where a
19 number of teachers were disciplined, to include being suspended. But I just don't have that total
20 number in my head.

21 Q What is your role in the curricular approval process for the district?

22 A The superintendent does not write, generate, or approve curriculum. There are
23 people who work in the administration who have that responsibility, under the leadership of a chief
24 academic officer who I hired.

25 Q The district's controversial issues policy prohibits teachers from indoctrinating students

1 to a particular point of view, right?

2 A Yes.

3 Q Has the district's social studies curriculum complied with this policy since October 7th,
4 2023?

5 A Could you repeat the question?

6 Q Has the district's social studies curriculum complied with the district's controversial
7 issues policy since October 7th, 2023?

8 A Yes.

9 Q Your testimony is that the social studies curriculum has complied with the controversial
10 issues policy?

11 A Yes.

12 Q Okay.

13 Mr. Fishman. As written, yes. But if you're asking a different question about whether
14 everybody's taught the curriculum --

15 [REDACTED]. No, no, no. Just what is in the curriculum, the curriculum that has been
16 publicly shared and shared with the committee as well.

17 Mr. Fishman. Okay. Okay.

18 Dr. Watlington. Now, let me say, our curriculum, social studies curriculum, that -- my
19 understanding covers 2,000 years of human history. I've not personally reviewed every bit of that
20 curriculum over a 2,000-year period. But it's my understanding, to the best of my knowledge, that
21 the social studies curriculum in total is consistent with our controversial issues policy.

22 [REDACTED]. Are you aware of complaints since October 7th, 2023, including from the Jewish
23 community, about the district's social studies curriculum?

24 Dr. Watlington. Would you repeat that question?

25 [REDACTED]. Sure. Are you aware of complaints since October 7, 2023, including from the

1 Philadelphia Jewish community, about the district's social studies curriculum?

2 Mr. Fishman. Do you mean the whole curriculum?

3 [REDACTED]. Yes.

4 Mr. Fishman. Overall?

5 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

6 Q About the district -- so the district has a social studies curriculum that they, until this
7 point, have had teachers and curricular specialists write and that that curriculum is then taught to
8 students. I'm asking, are you aware of complaints about that curriculum lodged by the Jewish
9 community since October 7th, 2023?

10 A I've certainly been made aware of concerns either with the curriculum or how the
11 curriculum is implemented in a classroom consistent with our controversial issues policy.

12 Q Who wrote the social studies curriculum -- who has written the social studies curriculum
13 since 2024 -- the 2024-2025 school year to now, who has written the curriculum?

14 A Historically, in the School District of Philadelphia, social studies curricula -- the social
15 studies curriculum has been written by teachers and administrators, to include the curriculum -- the
16 social studies curriculum department. We've discontinued that process, but historically.

17 Q And so in terms of who will be writing it now, you said it'd be standardized. Will the
18 curriculum be updated every year, and if so, who will be involved in that process?

19 A I'd say two things. One, on an ongoing basis, it's a standard operating procedure for
20 staff and the academics department in various disciplines -- math, science, social studies -- to on a
21 routine basis be looking at the curriculum and updating it in real time as they find areas that are
22 confusing, problematic, or just better done differently. That's a routine standard operating
23 procedure, one.

24 Two, at present, there's a comprehensive review of the entire top to bottom social studies
25 curriculum under the leadership of the new chief academic officer I hired.

1 And three, upon the completion of that quarterly review -- those quarterly reviews, plural, we
2 intend to implement a standardized curriculum across all 250 operated schools similar to what we've
3 already done in math 3 years ago, in reading language arts 2 years ago, and science last school year.

4 Q So will curricular specialists be involved in any of that process?

5 A Curricular specialists, in their role, will be determined specifically by the chief academic
6 officer. But I would imagine they'll be at the table with our national experts, to include Dr. Sheila
7 Brown, who is already engaged in the school district in this work.

8 Q You mentioned earlier that you are familiar with RJOC, Racial Justice Organizing
9 Committee, correct?

10 A Very tangentially.

11 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 28

12 was marked for identification.]

13 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

14 Q Okay. I'd like to introduce exhibit 28. I don't have an exact date on this, but it's after
15 October 7th. This is an Instagram post by RJOC celebrating October 7th as "The day Gaza broke out
16 of prison."

17 On its face, is this post concerning to you?

18 A Yes.

19 Q Are you aware that core members of this group, the Racial Justice Organizing
20 Committee, have written curricula for the district?

21 A Would you repeat that question?

22 Q Are you aware that members of this group, the Racial Justice Organizing Committee,
23 have written curricula for the district?

24 A Yes, as I became aware of that over the summer and in part in preparation for this
25 interview.

1 Q Did that concern you, or what was your reaction to that?

2 A I can tell you my reaction when I look at this post is vehement and strong disapproval, as
3 is --

4 Mr. Fishman. Of the post.

5 Dr. Watlington. Of the post, of the post, as are -- when I see October 7th, the image I have is
6 the Hamas attack.

7 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

8 Q And what was your reaction when you learned that individuals who are part of this
9 group have been drafting curriculum for the district?

10 A I don't know enough about the organization. And certainly, it's my understanding, I'm
11 not -- it's my understanding we do not have a district partnership, nor do we sanction the activities of
12 this organization. Good, bad, or indifferent, we don't.

13 Q Are members of the Racial Justice Organizing Committee still involved in drafting
14 curricula for the district?

15 A Again, as I shared earlier, we have discontinued the process of having district staff write
16 social studies curriculum. We intend to launch a standardized K-12 district curriculum in
17 partnership with national experts upon the completion of a comprehensive review.

18 Q Just staying -- I'd like to ask a few questions about the district's 2024 curriculum. There
19 have been a lot of --

20 Mr. Fishman. Do you mean '23-'24 or '24 --

21 [REDACTED]. '24 to '25.

22 Are you aware that the district's curriculum for the '24 to '25 year explicitly relied on Racial
23 Justice Organizing Committee materials?

24 Mr. Fishman. I'm not sure what that means.

25 [REDACTED]. I'd like to introduce exhibit 31. We skipped.

1 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 31

2 was marked for identification.]

3 [REDACTED]: As you can see here at the bottom of the page, bottom of both pages, this is a
4 printout from the district's social studies curriculum. It states "This lesson was created using
5 materials from the Racial Justice Organizing Committee."

6 So were you aware that district social studies curricula for the 2024 year cited to this group?

7 Dr. Watlington. May I have a moment to read it?

8 Mr. Fishman. Do you have the materials that it linked to?

9 [REDACTED]: All that follows is created using materials -- I've asked -- yeah. It's all -- all that
10 follows is what was created using materials from the Racial Justice Organizing Committee. And this
11 is one example.

12 Dr. Watlington. If you're asking me to speak to the bottom of this slide, Jigsaw
13 Activity - Intersectionality, I want to make sure I understand the explicit question you want me to
14 answer.

15 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

16 Q My question is just whether you were aware that this group -- that district curricula
17 relied on materials for this group -- from this group?

18 A I was unfamiliar with this group's specific work in the curriculum, as referenced here --

19 Q Were you aware of other instances of the group's work in the curriculum?

20 A I'm not familiar with -- I don't write the curriculum, again, and I don't review and
21 approve curriculum. I think you're asking about this specific post, so I want to be really clear, I'm
22 unfamiliar with it.

23 Q By incorporating these materials --

24 Mr. Fishman. Which materials?

25 [REDACTED]: By incorporating materials from the Racial Justice Organizing Committee that

1 are referenced -- it doesn't really matter --

2 Mr. Fishman. Well, it might --

3 [REDACTED]. Let me just finish the question.

4 Mr. Fishman. Sure. Go ahead.

5 Hang on. Don't answer yet.

6 [REDACTED]. By incorporating Racial Justice Organizing Committee materials, generally, into
7 its curriculum, is the district granting legitimacy to this group? Phrased otherwise, is the district
8 endorsing this group by explicitly relying on their materials in their curriculum?

9 Mr. Fishman. Endorsing it to whom?

10 [REDACTED]. The public.

11 Ms. Cotton. This is not available to the public.

12 [REDACTED]. It is now, but --

13 Mr. Fishman. But presumably it wasn't during --

14 [REDACTED]. Endorsing it to teachers, endorsing it to anybody who -- educators, anybody
15 who would see this.

16 Dr. Watlington. I'd say two things. No. Upon my quick review of this, this is not
17 endorsement of RJOC, number one.

18 And number two, the sentence, "This particular activity asks students to look deeply at the
19 aspects of gender and sexuality, class, ability, ethnicity, language, and", has a place within a social
20 studies curriculum.

21 [REDACTED]. As we reviewed earlier, this group has made some pretty abhorrent posts
22 online, including the one that we just looked at about October 7th. Are you concerned about the
23 message sent to Jewish students and families when the district cites this group in its curriculum?

24 Dr. Watlington. I can tell you without hesitation --

25 Mr. Fishman. She's not talking about this post anymore.

1 Ms. Cotton. He might want to answer about the post.

2 Mr. Fishman. Okay. Go ahead.

3 Dr. Watlington. I can tell you that the previous post you showed me, I find it offensive and
4 abhorrent.

5 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

6 Q So what are the implications of that in terms of the message sent to Jewish families,
7 students, educators who are given this as something to teach, the fact that this group that
8 posted -- that made that post is cited in the curriculum? What is the message to the Jewish
9 constituents in the district?

10 A I can tell you the message to me, to my Jewish families and students, I abhor and find
11 this post to be troubling. And my message is that this document that you've just shared with me is
12 certainly not an endorsement of the organization.

13 Q Should this group be cited in district curricular social studies documents going forward?

14 A I think that's a matter that is appropriate for our chief academic officer and his team to
15 perhaps take a look at during their comprehensive review of the K-12 curriculum.

16 Q The district -- just staying on the 2024 curriculum, the district's social studies curriculum
17 for that year included a unit called "Struggles for liberation and social justice." Are you familiar with
18 this unit?

19 Mr. Fishman. Is that for a particular grade or is it across the entire K-12?

20 [REDACTED]. I think it was for a particular grade. But are you familiar with this unit?

21 Dr. Watlington. No. It'd be helpful if I had any material to jog my memory.

22 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 32

23 was marked for identification.]

24 [REDACTED]. Sure. I'd like to introduce exhibit 32. This is a small snippet from the
25 curriculum about this unit.

1 Dr. Watlington. [REDACTED], might I -- would you permit me to say clearly that this
2 document --

3 Mr. Fishman. That's exhibit 31 he's --

4 Dr. Watlington. The document you showed me, exhibit 31, is not an endorsement of RJOC.
5 And the district does not, I want to underscore, does not have a partnership, as best I know -- it's my
6 understanding we do not have a partnership with the organization.

7 [REDACTED]. So this is 32. If you will take a look at the transfer skills for this unit. The
8 transfer skills says that students will be taught to -- this is on the back page -- appreciate --

9 Mr. Fishman. Can he look at the entire document?

10 [REDACTED]. Sure.

11 Mr. Fishman. Because it may have some context for that.

12 Ms. Cotton. I don't think we have page 1 to it.

13 Mr. Fishman. We have page 2 and page --

14 [REDACTED]. This is just the transf- -- I'm talking about the transfer skills.

15 Mr. Fishman. No, I understand that, but -- I'm not the witness, but presumably the transfer
16 skills have something to do with the key terms and whatever was on page 1 in order to understand
17 what the transfer skills relate to.

18 [REDACTED]. I think the transfer skills will speak for themselves.

19 So the transfer skills say they will teach students to critically analyze contemporary issues of
20 dehumanization and oppression through the lens of historical colonialism and appreciate the role of
21 resistance movements in advocating for social justice.

22 Ms. Cotton. You just flipped to page 3 to see that second sentence.

23 Mr. Fishman. So you skipped --

24 [REDACTED]. The first bullet and the third bullet.

25 Ms. Cotton. So she's reading that second -- no --

1 [REDACTED]. First and third.

2 Ms. Cotton. -- first bullet here.

3 [REDACTED]. And then first on the other page too.

4 Ms. Cotton. And then the first on page 3 here. But you should take your time and review
5 all the bullets.

6 [REDACTED]. Does this sound biased to you, these transfer skills? Do they sound -- do they
7 read as though they are biased?

8 Dr. Watlington. On their faces, no. I do not view these bullets as biased.

9 [REDACTED]. Okay. Are you aware that this unit teaches students that violent resistance is
10 justified?

11 Mr. Fishman. I'm sorry. Where does it say that?

12 [REDACTED]. I will get there.

13 Are you aware that this unit teaches students that violent resistance is justified? Are you
14 just aware of that or not?

15 Dr. Watlington. I don't write or approve curriculum. I can tell you, as a social studies
16 teacher for many years and a student of history, that human history is replete with violence, and it
17 has a place to be appropriately taught about what happened in history, whether the American
18 Revolution, the French Revolution and the like.

19 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 33

20 was marked for identification.]

21 [REDACTED]. I'd like to introduce exhibit 33. Here, teachers are directed to take a deep dive
22 into the thinker Frantz Fanon, who is infamous for arguing in favor of violent resistance.

23 Ms. Cotton. Sorry, what did you say about Frantz Fanon?

24 [REDACTED]. He is infamous for arguing in favor of violent resistance. He argues that
25 decolonization is a violent process.

1 Are you familiar with Frantz Fanon?

2 Dr. Watlington. Could you give me just a moment to --

3 [REDACTED]. Sure.

4 [REDACTED]. Is this a continuation of the same document?

5 [REDACTED]. It's not directly after, but it is in the same unit.

6 [REDACTED]. It's five pages after and five pages in the Bates. Is it the same document?

7 [REDACTED]. Yes.

8 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

9 Mr. Fishman. Do you have the rest of the pages?

10 [REDACTED]. Yes.

11 Mr. Fishman. Can we have the rest of the pages? I mean, I have to say, if you're asking
12 him to draw conclusions about what is being taught and what teachers are being told to teach, not
13 having the context for the rest of the analysis seems a little unfair and maybe misleading.

14 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

15 Q Would you like the rest of the pages?

16 A Yes. It's very difficult, absent looking at a full lesson plan, which can be taught over
17 multiple days, which can be taught in one class period, it just depends. Having the full context of
18 the lesson plan, the grade taught, students --

19 Q Sure.

20 A -- age appropriateness, et cetera, really important when making determinations about
21 what's appropriate and what's not.

22 Q Just on Frantz Fanon, are you familiar with him?

23 A I have some working knowledge, but I don't feel competent to talk about it in detail
24 here.

25 Q Are you aware that his theories are used to justify the October 7th Hamas attack against

1 Israel?

2 A I don't know enough to make that determination.

3 Q Okay.

4 A I clearly hear and understand what you're telling me, but I don't have enough
5 information to make a determination.

6 Q We'd be happy to get you the full unit. The fact that this individual is taught with no
7 apparent countervailing perspective is deeply concerning. Be happy to get you the full --

8 A It would also be important for me to have perhaps a primary source document to read
9 firsthand, just like I would want to do with students sometimes, to make informed, thoughtful
10 decisions about processes.

11 Q Are you familiar with the public reporting about the resources that district curricular
12 specialists shared among themselves in the wake of October 7?

13 Ms. Cotton. I'm sorry. I didn't hear the first part of that question. Do you mind repeating
14 it? I apologize.

15 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

16 Q Are you familiar with public reporting about resources that district curricular specialists
17 shared among themselves on email in the wake of October 7th?

18 There was public reporting about district curricular specialists sending resources back and
19 forth relating to Israel. Have you seen that?

20 A Doesn't ring a bell.

21 [REDACTED]. I'd like to introduce exhibit 35. We skipped one.

22 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 35

23 was marked for identification.]

24 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

25 Q Okay. This screen grab shows a curricular specialist on the from line sharing resources

1 that she claims, quote, "shouldn't be questioned." She specifically shares the website 972mag.

2 Are you familiar with this website?

3 A No.

4 Q I will state for the record that every article on this website demonizes Israel. It's a very
5 anti-Israel website.

6 Is a website that only presents one point of view a resource that shouldn't be questioned?

7 A Would you repeat the question?

8 Q If a website presents only one point of view, is it a resource that shouldn't be
9 questioned? Like, a bulletproof resource?

10 A The best way I know to answer that question is that the teacher's job and our job with
11 folks who help develop curriculum is to provide information that exposes young people in an
12 age-dependent, age-appropriate way to diverse viewpoints, different viewpoints, one.

13 Two, I suppose in a classroom, if there was an information pull from a -- a group of materials
14 that leaned toward a point of view of the Confederacy during the American Civil War, there's another
15 website that --

16 Q But there's balance.

17 A -- leans -- as long as you expose students to multiple points of view and let them draw
18 their own conclusions and don't try to prejudice their thinking or indoctrinate them, I think it could
19 be appropriate.

20 And the third thing I would note is the last sentence says, "And the two articles attached.
21 Haven't reviewed them but were recommended." So I don't know what happened there, but there
22 seems to be some disclaimer or --

23 Q About the other articles I'm not asking about -- the two articles that -- I'm not asking
24 specifically about those.

25 A Correct.

1 Q But I appreciate that.

2 A And I'm unaware of the website, of course.

3 Mr. Fishman. By the way, are you telling Dr. Watlington that whatever the 972mag.com
4 article was actually used in the classroom?

5 [REDACTED]: I am not. The concern and the question is that a curricular specialist shared
6 this article and described it as -- shared this website and described it as one that shouldn't be
7 questioned, as in it is accurate and shouldn't be questioned.

8 Dr. Watlington. I don't know if that's true or not true. I've not reviewed the website, so I
9 wouldn't want to speculate.

10 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

11 Q Are you aware that this particular specialist also helped write the district social studies
12 curriculum?

13 A I am not aware. I can see that this person is a -- is or was a curriculum specialist. I
14 have no idea what their role was or was not with regard to curricular development.

15 Q Let me ask you, with regard to the new standardized curriculum and the curricular
16 specialists that are involved, is there any review being undertaken to ensure that the curricular
17 specialists who are involved act in accordance with district policy, including the controversial issues
18 policy?

19 A The chief academic officer -- new chief academic officer that I hired is responsible for
20 supervising the entire division and ensuring that all staff are compliant with board policies, to include
21 curriculum development, controversial issues, et cetera.

22 Q I'd like to ask you about settler colonialism and decolonization, which we had talked
23 about a little bit in the outset of this interview. Are you familiar with these concepts?

24 A I am familiar with the concept of colonialism; widely covered in most social studies
25 curricula.

1 Q To what extent has the district social studies curriculum taught these concepts, to your
2 knowledge, since October 7, 2023?

3 A Would you repeat the question?

4 Q Sure. To your knowledge, to what extent has the district social studies curriculum
5 taught these concepts, settler colonialism, decolonization, since October 7th, 2023?

6 Mr. Fishman. I'm sorry. Maybe I don't understand the question. In context with a
7 particular historical period or as a standalone concept?

8 [REDACTED]. Either way. But really as a standalone conc- -- really as a standalone concept,
9 but either way.

10 Dr. Watlington. Would you restate those two terms you used?

11 [REDACTED]. Settler colonialism and decolonization.

12 Dr. Watlington. My understanding is that, as I have visited classrooms across the district,
13 haven't -- and having not developed, reviewed -- or reviewed the entire social studies curriculum, my
14 understanding is that reference to period of -- the periods of colonialism and imperialism are
15 standard components of social studies curricula not limited to the School District of Philadelphia.

16 [REDACTED]. Are you familiar with concerns that narratives of settler colonialism foment
17 antisemitism? That the academic framework of settler colonialism -- are you aware that it is linked
18 to increased antisemitism?

1 [2:37 p.m.]

2 Dr. Watlington. I'm aware that -- I want you to ask me that question one more time. I
3 want to want to make sure I answer it specifically.

4 [REDACTED]. Sure. Are you aware that frameworks, concepts of settler colonialism, are
5 linked to antisemitism, lead to antisemitism?

6 Mr. Fishman. Can I just -- I think he said he wasn't -- he was talking about colonialism. But
7 settler colonial -- I don't think he expressed any knowledge of what you meant by settler colonialism.

8 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

9 Q Do you know what settler colonialism is?

10 A I can tell you my definition of colonialism.

11 Q Sure.

12 A Colonialism -- my definition, and I speak as a former social studies teacher and a student
13 of history -- ranges from a number of periods throughout human history where one group of people
14 have sought to overtake lands previously occupied by others, to include the age of imperialism and
15 colonialism in the 18th and 19th century, primarily led by the British, the French, and the Portuguese.

16 Q So under your definition, is it accurate to say that Israel is a settler colonial state?

17 A Repeat that question?

18 Q Under your definition, is it accurate to say that Israel is a settler colonial state?

19 A No.

20 Q Is it --

21 A Not inherently. I think I would say no, because I'm not aware anywhere in our social
22 studies curriculum where that point of view is explicitly taught.

23 Q Is it accurate to say that Jewish people are not indigenous to Israel?

24 A I think it's appropriate to say that, one, I am no expert on Israel, pre-1947 or in ancient
25 history that dates back to a very, very long time ago. And that's how I would answer that question.

1 Q I'll just explain sort of the link and tell me if this squares with your understanding.

2 Advocates of settler colonialism theory view Israel as a settler colonial state and Jews as
3 colonizers of Israel. The issue is that both deny Jewish indigeneity in Israel; it also is problematic
4 because these frameworks view violence against colonizers as justified. Are you aware of that?

5 A I -- while I don't --- I've not had that explicitly as a part of my teaching practice. I
6 suppose there are people who would take that point of view.

7 Q The district -- switching gears -- the district teaches students about the war on terror,
8 correct?

9 A It's an appropriate part of the curriculum.

10 Q Would you consider the war on terror to be a controversial issue?

11 A It can be.

12 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 36
13 was marked for identification.]

14 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

15 Q Okay. I'd like to introduce exhibit 36.

16 A May I go back to one other point?

17 Q Sure.

18 A You asked me about Israel. Let me be very clear. It will be entirely appropriate in a
19 social studies classroom, in fact I would expect this from a teacher, to teach about the establishment
20 of the modern day state of Israel that occurred after the Second World War and the social and
21 political climates that have existed in a manner that also provides some context about a long history
22 in that region of the world, to include ancient Palestine, and to do that in a way that we teach the
23 facts as best we know them and we teach our young people how to think and not what to think.
24 And I don't think it's helpful or appropriate for the teacher in the classroom to seek to indoctrinate
25 people in any particular way.

1 It can be a controversial topic, similar to I taught my students to think about this notion
2 about -- I give them a quote, "The sun never sets on the British Empire," because there was a time
3 where the British had colonized a quarter of the globe, as I understand it.

4 I could teach that concept in a manner that I didn't have to say I abhor leaders, but just teach
5 the facts and teach different points of view. I think it's appropriate to teach that and also to teach
6 the resistance that people who lived in many of these parts, to include the resistance of folks here in
7 the U.S. with the American Revolution.

8 I think you can do both in an appropriate manner. We teach students how to think, not
9 what to think. That's the gold standard.

10 Q I think that's exactly the concern about teaching controversial issues and bias.

11 Mr. Fishman. Well, what's the concern?

12 [REDACTED]: That that is not occurring. That both sides are not being taught in an unbiased
13 manner. That is the general concern when it comes to --

14 Mr. Fishman. I understand that, but I think you were asking about the actual written
15 curriculum.

16 [REDACTED]: Yes.

17 Mr. Fishman. And so I don't know if that's what's in the written curriculum. That was the
18 point, because we don't have the whole thing.

19 [REDACTED]: Sorry --

20 Mr. Fishman. Because you --

21 [Crosstalk.]

22 The Reporter. You have to speak one at a time.

23 Mr. Fishman. Because you said they were teaching Frantz Fanon and I think suggested they
24 were not teaching a different perspective as well.

25 [REDACTED]: Uh-huh.

1 Mr. Fishman. That's the --

2 [REDACTED]. And we're happy to provide you --

3 Mr. Fishman. No, that's what I'm saying, that's why I think he didn't have the benefit of
4 that. That's all.

5 [REDACTED]. Okay.

6 Dr. Watlington. And for the record, I do want to note that I disagree with your conclusion
7 that in the School District of Philadelphia in the aggregate our teachers are not teaching in an
8 appropriate manner. I can tell you that without -- with exceptions -- I see good teaching and I'm
9 proud of our employees in the school district.

10 [REDACTED]. I'm just saying it's a concern.

11 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

12 Q All right. Exhibit 36 on the topic of controversial issues.

13 These three pages comprise the district's lesson on the war on terror for the 2024-2025
14 academic year. I'll let you look over them with the remaining time that I have and then ask a couple
15 of questions.

16 A I'm going to ask for just a couple minutes to get through this, because it looks to be a bit
17 lengthy.

18 Q Okay.

19 A Do you want me to read the whole thing or do you want to call my attention to --

20 Q I'll try to call your attention to a couple things first. I mean, it would be helpful for you
21 to have the context.

22 Ms. Cotton. I think you can start here.

23 [REDACTED]. Yes.

24 We'll go off the record.

25 [Recess.]

1 [REDACTED]: Without the clock running, I just want to state for the record that the minority
2 is going to not answer questions -- ask questions this round. We reserve the right to take another
3 round after the next round?

4 [REDACTED]: And this is majority who is questioning.

5 [REDACTED]: Yes, majority questions.

6 [REDACTED]: Okay. We can begin.

7 So you just reviewed -- or you before the break reviewed exhibit 36. You're sufficiently
8 familiar with it?

9 Mr. Fishman. It depends what the question is, right?

10 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

11 Q Well, then I'll ask my question.

12 Does this lesson comply with the district's controversial issues policy?

13 A On its face, I don't see the content at first glance that would not have some appropriate
14 place in a curriculum, one. So that's the short answer.

15 If I might offer a couple of other observations?

16 Q Uh-huh.

17 A I also think that, notwithstanding the diversity of historical figures, diverse figures, from
18 Chairman Mao in the People's Republic of China to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi --

19 Q Oh, that's a different -- that's not --

20 Mr. Fishman. She's asking about the war on terror?

21 [REDACTED]: Just topic A, topic A.

22 The Reporter. You have to speak one at a time.

23 Dr. Watlington. Specific to topic A, the war on terror -- thank you, I stand corrected -- I'll say
24 that I don't think -- similarly, I don't think the content in here specifically is inconsistent with what
25 has some place in the curriculum.

1 I do have questions about the larger lesson plan, what happened before or after.

2 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

3 Q Okay.

4 A Also have a few questions at first glance about how the events, the tragic events of
5 September 11th, 2001, were treated in this lesson, not just because we just observed the 25th
6 anniversary, but I don't see it explicitly called in here --

7 Q Yes.

8 A -- called out in here about loss of -- innocent loss of life in the United States.

9 And then when I look at the shift and pivot to some of the other areas, I would have questions
10 about what happened before, during, and after.

11 I think a more comprehensive approach at first glance seems appropriate. And I feel certain
12 that this is one of the lessons that a comprehensive review of the committee would take into account
13 to ensure that while none of the content is on its face inappropriate for a curriculum, making sure
14 that how they are presented is balanced and provides multiple perspectives, to include the
15 perspective of the attack on the United States.

16 Q Just drawing your attention to the last paragraph in --

17 Mr. Fishman. On page 47?

18 [REDACTED]: On page 47, yes, "To end this lesson..."

19 Mr. Fishman. It's right there.

20 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

21 Q So the lesson closes with an exercise by the Zinn Education Project known as "Whose
22 Terrorism?"

23 Are you familiar with this exercise?

24 A No.

25 Q In this exercise, students are directed to label the United States and Israel, as well as

1 other nations, rather than actual terrorist organizations, as terrorists.

2 As written here, the district says of the exercise, quote, "further problematizes Western,
3 specifically American, beliefs around terrorism and the acts of war that these beliefs justify."

4 Does this exercise comply with the district's -- on its face -- comply with the district's
5 controversial issues policy?

6 A I certainly have a question mark. I want to learn more. Absent my ability to read this
7 link, "Whose Terrorism?" is no different -- at least in my initial thinking -- and "Whose war? Whose
8 Conflict?" -- I don't want to prejudge what it means. I don't disagree with what your understanding
9 is having -- you having read these materials. But I'd want an opportunity to read that. Certainly
10 terrorism is not something that is limited to the Western world.

11 Q Are you --

12 A Notwithstanding the phenomenon here.

13 Q Are you familiar with the W.E.B. Du Bois -- just switching gears -- W.E.B. Du Bois
14 Movement School for Abolition and Reconstruction, known as the Abolition School?

15 A Referencing W.E.B. Du Bois?

16 Q Uh-huh. It's a school -- the title of the school is W.E.B. Du Bois Movement School for
17 Abolition and Reconstruction.

18 A Not familiar with the school, certainly with W.E.B. Du Bois as a historical figure and
19 historian.

20 Q I'm going to ask this. Are you familiar with any partnership between the district and
21 the Abolition School?

22 A It doesn't ring a bell.

23 Q The Abolition School is located in Philadelphia?

24 A I don't believe it's a district-operated school.

25 Q It's not a district school, correct.

1 A Okay.

2 Q But you are -- but you -- okay.

3 By way of background, the Abolition School teaches students about resisting and staging
4 violent revolution and about the wreckage wrought by Zionist settler colonialism.

5 Are you aware that the district's social studies curriculum director is on the advisory board at
6 the Abolition School?

7 A No.

8 Q Are you --

9 Mr. Fishman. I'm sorry, by the social studies curriculum, are you talking about Mr. --
10 [REDACTED]. Mr. Jimenez.

11 Mr. Fishman. Who is not in that role anymore. Okay, just so we're clear.

12 [REDACTED]. He is not currently in the role.

13 The Reporter. You have to speak one at a time.

14 Mr. Fishman. Who is not in that role anymore.

15 [REDACTED]. The former social studies --

16 Dr. Watlington. To be clear, I was not aware that the former director of social studies was a
17 member of that board.

18 [REDACTED]. Are you aware that the district schools have collaborated with the Abolition
19 School on symposia with dozens of district students as young as seventh and eighth grade in
20 attendance?

21 Dr. Watlington. No, I am not -- was not -- am not aware of that.

22 [REDACTED]. I'd like to introduce exhibit 37.

23 [Watlington Majority Exhibit No. 37

24 was marked for identification.]

25 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

1 Q So this document consists of two symposia schedules. You can see The Workshop
2 School posted the End Incarceration Symposium in February 2025 and The Liberation Symposium in
3 May 2026.

4 Are you familiar with these events?

5 A No.

6 Q As you can see, Abolition School --

7 A May I ask, is there a particular page you want to draw my attention to?

8 Q Yes.

9 A Or is that just --

10 Q Yes. Page 4 and page -- and the final page as well, showing The Workshop facilitators
11 and adult attendees.

12 Abolition School employees have attended and taught at these events and this is --

13 Ms. Cotton. I'm sorry, are you reading from this? I'm on the wrong page.

14 [REDACTED]. Adult guest list.

15 Mr. Fishman. What page?

16 [REDACTED]. Page 4?

17 [REDACTED]. It's not numbered.

18 Mr. Fishman. Oh.

19 Ms. Cotton. Where it says adult guest list?

20 [REDACTED]. The guest list?

21 Mr. Fishman. Yes.

22 [REDACTED]. And then the very last page where their affiliations are listed as well. These
23 are two separate symposia attendee lists.

24 Mr. Fishman. Got it.

25 [REDACTED]. So Abolition School employees have attended and taught at these events.

1 And this is where I would like to focus.

2 The founder of the school, Geo Maher, has previously posted online, "All I want for Christmas
3 is White genocide."

4 Is it concerning to you that district schools are exposing their students to this individual?

5 Ms. Cotton. I'm sorry, I just don't have the spelling. Which one -- I don't know how to --

6 [REDACTED]. G-e-o M-a-h-e-r. He's under Anthony Smith, who we discussed earlier.

7 [REDACTED]. It is George on the front page?

8 [REDACTED]. Yeah, on the -- and then it's Geo on the last page.

9 Ms. Cotton. Oh, so it's kind of the very last page. Sorry.

10 [REDACTED]. And then it is George on the other page, again with Anthony Smith.

11 Ms. Cotton. So we're talking about Geo. Okay.

12 [REDACTED]. So George Maher has said, "All I want for Christmas is White genocide."

13 Mr. Fishman. In what context?

14 [REDACTED]. He tweeted it -- or he said it at an event. I'm sorry. He was disciplined for it
15 in another context.

16 Mr. Fishman. When was that?

17 [REDACTED]. I can get you the date.

18 Mr. Fishman. No, I just wanted to give to Dr. Watlington some context on what he said and
19 what --

20 [REDACTED]. He said, "All I want for Christmas is White genocide."

21 Mr. Fishman. No, I understand that, but I don't know -- I mean, did he say it at one of these
22 events?

23 [REDACTED]. No, he said it prior to these events.

24 Mr. Fishman. Okay. I'm not saying it's okay at all, to be fair. I just wanted to know, since
25 you're representing that it was said, just if we could have some --

1 [REDACTED]. It was said.

2 Mr. Fishman. -- information about it.

3 [REDACTED]. It was said.

4 My question is -- I mean, this is just one example of the types of things individuals from this,
5 the Abolition School, have said. As we mentioned earlier in the interview, Anthony Smith has
6 described October 7th as chickens coming home to roost. He was also present at these workshops
7 which were hosted by The Workshop School.

8 So is this concerning to you, that the symposia are occurring and they're connecting these
9 external teachers and educators with district students?

10 Dr. Watlington. And repeat that question, please?

11 [REDACTED]. Is it concerning to you that these symposia are connecting these sorts of
12 external speakers with district students?

13 Mr. Fishman. Okay. That was different from your first question. Your first question was:
14 Are you concerned that these symposia are occurring? And then you asked -- so I just want to know
15 if they're different things, that's all.

16 Dr. Watlington. I don't know anything about the symposia. And I don't feel qualified to
17 make an assessment of whether they should occur, what their purpose should or should not be. I
18 don't know Mr. Maher and I'm unfamiliar with the Abolition School.

19 That said, there's no place for us in the school district to have any pronouncements about or
20 advocating for the murder of anybody, period.

21 [REDACTED]. Will you commit to examining these symposia to assess whether they comply
22 with district policies, including the controversial issues policy?

23 Ms. Cotton. Wait, maybe I'm confused. I thought this was done by the school. It's not --

24 Mr. Fishman. No.

25 Ms. Bender. The Workshop --

1 Mr. Fishman. The Workshop School is theirs.

2 Dr. Watlington. The Workshop School --

3 [REDACTED]. The Abolition School employees attended, that's the issue. It is a Workshop
4 School symposia.

5 Ms. Cotton. Okay.

6 Mr. Fishman. And that's a city school.

7 Ms. Cotton. Okay.

8 Dr. Watlington. So it's your understanding, [REDACTED], that The Workshop School, their
9 faculty were --

10 [REDACTED]. Yes, were involved it.

11 Mr. Fishman. It is on Workshop School letterhead.

12 Dr. Watlington. I was unfamiliar with The Workshop School letterhead.

13 Yes, happy to take a look at it.

14 [REDACTED]. As to whether it complies with district policies, including controversial issues?

15 Dr. Watlington. That seems appropriate.

16 [REDACTED]. And just to clarify, the White genocide tweet, it was a tweet, and it was in 2016
17 and on Christmas Eve.

18 Mr. Fishman. Okay. If you could just send us a copy, that would be helpful.

19 Dr. Watlington. And if I might be clear, [REDACTED].

20 [REDACTED]. Yes.

21 Dr. Watlington. The school district and our faculty, again, I know nothing about this, what
22 you shared with me. But we certainly have no place in ever advocating for any kind of murder or
23 genocide, not for White folks, Black folks, Israeli folks, Palestinian folks, nobody.

24 Mr. Fishman. Thank you.

25 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

1 Q Today we have discussed multiple examples of outside groups, such as RJOC, influencing
2 curricula or even teaching at district schools. Do you view this as a problem?

3 A Would you repeat the question?

4 Q Do you view the examples of outside groups we've discussed today, such as the Racial
5 Justice Organizing Committee, the Abolition School, their involvement in curricula and teaching at
6 district schools as a problem?

7 A The way I'll answer that question is you shared some things with me that I'm clear that I
8 want to take a look at and want to be certain that the people who are already launching under the
9 leadership of the chief academic officer a comprehensive review of the curriculum ought to be
10 included.

11 I do not believe that the curriculum in the School District of Philadelphia is infected with these
12 kind of things. I think that the majority of teachers are doing a good job implementing the
13 curriculum. My familiarity with the curriculum tells me that it is appropriate and there's areas for
14 improvement, and we'll certainly take steps to ensure that anything that's not appropriate gets
15 reviewed.

16 Q Does the curriculum being appropriate, does that -- does your statement also apply to
17 the social studies curriculum, trying to --

18 A Yes, it applies to the social studies curriculum. There's a lot of bad stuff in human
19 history. A lot of bad stuff in American history, in the history of Israel, in the history of Palestine, in
20 the history of Europe, Asia, Africa, across the globe.

21 And it's a matter of how we take all those complex, controversial issues -- that have a place in
22 the curriculum, all of them -- and present it in a manner that's age appropriate and consistent with
23 our belief that we teach students how to think and not what to think.

24 If we don't -- we don't indoctrinate students with our own political or personal biases.

25 Q So just to clarify, the social studies curriculum, you are saying that it does not

1 indoctrinate? The social studies curriculum, to this point, I understand that it is changing, but the
2 social studies curriculum, since October 7th, you are saying that it doesn't indoctrinate students?

3 A My belief is that the social studies curriculum existing in the School District of
4 Philadelphia does not indoctrinate students.

5 Q Okay. I'd like to ask about another outside group of sorts -- sort of. What unions
6 represent district teachers and administrators?

7 A Which unions represent?

8 Q Uh-huh. What are the names?

9 A The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers represents teachers and the Commonwealth
10 Association of School Administrators, Teamsters Local 502, represents principals and some
11 administrators, but not all administrators.

12 Q What has your relationship with PFT been like when it comes to antisemitism in the
13 district?

14 A Over the past 4 years I've had an amicable relationship with the Philadelphia Federation
15 of Teachers. We've negotiated contracts, we've dealt with a lot of issues. We don't always agree,
16 but we work cooperatively for the benefit of students.

17 And relative to antisemitism, I believe the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers' president, I
18 can't speak for him, Mr. Arthur Steinberg, but I believe President Steinberg would indicate that the
19 district and superintendent work in good faith and we take seriously our responsibility to investigate
20 complaints and allegations of discrimination and harassment, including antisemitism.

21 Q So has PFT -- have PFT leaders been supportive of disciplinary action against
22 antisemitism as it pertains to antisemitism by teachers?

23 A I can't answer that question, because investigations that are conducted relative to
24 employees are done by human resources department officials, specifically in the Office of Employee
25 Labor Relations.

1 I don't make those decisions. I don't make those determinations. I don't influence those
2 determinations. And I certainly don't discuss that work with the union leadership, as it would be
3 inherently inappropriate.

4 Q Have they reached out to you with concerns about discipline as it pertains to
5 antisemitism by employees?

6 A I don't recall specifically, but I know that it is not uncommon for unions to have
7 concerns about employee discipline, not uncommon at all in Philadelphia.

8 Q So stepping back, speaking about antisemitism in the district broadly, why haven't you
9 commented publicly on antisemitism in the district generally? You just haven't -- from everything
10 that we can tell, you just haven't really commented on it publicly. Why is that the case?

11 A I think a -- two things.

12 One, our policies, 248, related to harassment and discrimination associated with students,
13 and our Policy 348, related to harassment and discrimination related to employees, includes many
14 discriminatory acts, to include antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism, sexism, gender discrimination.

15 And my role is to make sure to hire the appropriate people, ensure that they follow board
16 policy, comply with our code of conduct and other expectations, and ensure that systems are in
17 place, as we've done with the launch of a new reporting system, to make sure they get investigated
18 thoroughly and documented.

19 And, quite frankly, it's my responsibility to do a much better job with that, and I can assure
20 this committee that we will.

21 And I will say, secondly, I don't think you'll find very -- a voluminous reference to any of the
22 other forms of hate in terms of public pronouncements.

23 Q Do you acknowledge that since October 7th your office has received regular outreach
24 from Jewish and Israeli parents expressing concern about antisemitism in district schools?

25 A I recall outreach to my office specifically, as well as to other offices in the school district.

1 And I also recall having had at least 25 meetings or so myself with both leaders who are concerned
2 about -- and individuals who are not leaders in the community, in the city -- who are concerned
3 about both antisemitism, as well as Islamophobia. I've met with Muslim as well as Jewish leaders
4 and individuals related and organizations.

5 Q And did the district respond to every complaint of antisemitism that it received since
6 October 7th?

7 Mr. Fishman. What do you mean by "respond"?

8 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

9 Q If it's an email complaint, did they acknowledge the complaint?

10 A Because I am aware of recordkeeping problems, I cannot say with 100 percent certainty,
11 I can't answer that question with 100 percent certainty. I had enough of a question mark based on
12 things that have been brought to my attention that I asked the new chief of human resources that I
13 hired to go back and review to ensure that, A, did we miss anything, and B, was there integrity with
14 any investigations that did occur.

15 Q We have been told that the district is currently leaving complaints from Jewish parents
16 completely unanswered. Are you aware of this issue?

17 A I am not aware of questions from Jewish parents being completely unanswered. I can
18 tell you that for the past 2 years I've asked the current chief, new chief of human resources, to do a
19 comprehensive review of any complaints related to -- specifically not just to harassment and
20 discrimination, but specifically to shared ancestry and ethnic characteristics, consistent with Policy
21 348.

22 Q Have organizations like the JCRC and the ADL offered resources to the district pertaining
23 to antisemitism?

24 A I recall in conversations with said organizations and our Office of Diversity talking about
25 resources. I don't know which ones specifically were shared.

1 In addition, myself and leaders in the district, to include the chief of diversity, have invited
2 said groups to participate in a number of community conversations facilitated by the district in
3 partnership with the University of Pennsylvania and Temple University, as well as Facing History &
4 Ourselves.

5 Q Do you know whether the district has implemented any of the resources provided by
6 these organizations?

7 A I don't know. I don't recall off the top of my head.

8 Q Okay. I'd like to just ask some questions about the OCR agreement that my colleague
9 on the minority reviewed earlier in the interview.

10 When did the district issue a district-wide antiharassment statement as required by the
11 agreement?

12 A I don't recall that date, but I believe some time subsequent to signing the Voluntary
13 Resolution Agreement, I don't remember the date, but I knew it was issued, and I believe we shared
14 it with the Office of Civil Rights.

15 Q Okay.

16 A I mean, we did share it with the Office of Civil Rights.

17 Q How has the district revised or developed its procedures for documented complaints?
18 What has it changed or what has it developed?

19 A We've replaced the former HIBster system that documented student complaints related
20 to harassment and discrimination with a new system called Guardian, which is a far superior system
21 in terms of functionality.

22 It provides a deeper level of information and sorting features. And it also not only houses
23 complaints related to students, it includes complaints related to employees. It includes the
24 documentation of said complaints, as well as the outcomes, all in one uniform system.

25 Q Regarding the review that the district undertook for responses to antisemitism

1 complaints for the 2022 and 2023 years, what was the outcome of this review?

2 The review was supposed to ensure -- the district was supposed to ensure that it determined
3 whether conduct -- complained of conduct created or contributed to a hostile environment. What
4 was the outcome of the review of these 2 years of complaints?

5 Ms. Cotton. And just for clarity, you're talking about the audit required under step G?

6 [REDACTED]. Yes.

7 Dr. Watlington. Step G. Would you permit me to look at --

8 Mr. Fishman. Here.

9 Dr. Watlington. Just give me a moment to pull up G.

10 [REDACTED]. Sure.

11 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

12 Q I'm talking about the response to reports of discrimination and/or harassment on the
13 basis of shared ancestry received during the 2022 and 2023 school years to ensure the district made
14 a determination regarding whether the alleged conduct created a hostile environment?

15 A Well, I'm not -- I don't recall yet reviewing the final summary that I believe is finished
16 and very close to being ready for my review, such that we can get it off to the Office of Civil Rights.

17 I do recall that in some cases a determination was made relative to a hostile environment.
18 In some cases that determination was not made. But all of the complaints the reviews are
19 complete, with some being made in the affirmative and others not.

20 Q Okay. So just to clarify, in some instances for these years a hostile environment was
21 created and in other instances it was not.

22 A That's my understanding.

23 Q Do you plan to make those findings public?

24 A Certainly we'll confer with counsel and they will devise next steps.

25 Q For every substantiated antisemitism complaint now, does the district assess whether

1 the incident created or contributed to a hostile environment?

2 A Absolutely the expectation is to do just that, yes.

3 Q With regard to the audit of every middle and high school to review compliance with
4 nondiscrimination policies --

5 Ms. Cotton. You're now talking about H?

6 [REDACTED]. I'm talking about conduct an audit of each school that serves any student in
7 grades ranging from sixth through twelfth grades to review the consistency of the application of and
8 compliance with the district's policies and procedures regarding nondiscrimination on the basis of
9 race, color, national origin, including harassment on the basis of shared ancestry.

10 Mr. Fishman. That's H.

11 [REDACTED]. Okay.

12 Mr. Fishman. Subsection -- that's section H.

13 [REDACTED]. Yes.

14 With regard to that, what were the findings of this audit?

15 Dr. Watlington. I recall Section 8 being -- H being completed. Seems like I recall -- I don't
16 remember the details, but it seems like I recall there being a fairly representative response from
17 various grade bands, but I just don't remember if I know the -- can articulate the findings.

18 [REDACTED]. So you don't remember whether the policies were consistently applied, the
19 nondiscrimination policies?

20 Mr. Fishman. It's not the climate --

21 Dr. Watlington. Oh, I'm sorry.

22 Mr. Fishman. It's H.

23 Dr. Watlington. H.

24 Mr. Fishman. I think he was referring to section I, which is the climate survey.

25 Dr. Watlington. Excuse me, my bad, my error.

1 [REDACTED]. Okay.

2 Dr. Watlington. I want to be correct. I want to model correct grammar for the transcript.
3 I just don't recall.

4 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

5 Q Okay.

6 A But I know it's done.

7 Q Sorry?

8 A I know it's done. I just don't recall.

9 Q Okay. Would you be open to publicizing those results from that audit?

10 A Certainly will confer with counsel regarding next steps.

11 Q The OCR agreement stated that the district hired an external law firm to evaluate
12 conduct and social media posts by the teacher we discussed -- teachers we discussed today. Is that
13 correct?

14 A Would you repeat that question?

15 Q Sure. The OCR agreement states that the district hired an external law firm.

16 Ms. Cotton. The OCR agreement states that?

17 [REDACTED]. Earlier, before the agreement in the legal analysis and facts, statement of facts,
18 there is discussion about the district hiring an external law firm to evaluate conduct on social media
19 posts by teachers we discussed today.

20 [REDACTED]. Is this page 23?

21 [REDACTED]. It's referenced multiple times.

22 [REDACTED]. The letter, right?

23 [REDACTED]. Yes, it's in the letter.

24 Mr. Fishman. It's in the letter.

25 [REDACTED]. In the letter, yes.

1 Mr. Fishman. Yes.

2 [REDACTED]: It's the bottom of page 23 --

3 [REDACTED]: It's in the letter.

4 [REDACTED]: -- of the letter.

5 [REDACTED]: Thank you.

6 [REDACTED]: No problem.

7 Mr. Fishman. It says Teachers 2 and 3.

8 [REDACTED]: Yes.

9 Mr. Fishman. Yes. Right here.

10 Ms. Cotton. I think you clarified, but just for the record, this is not the agreement, this is a
11 letter.

12 [REDACTED]: This is a letter.

13 Mr. Fishman. It's previously been marked as exhibit A from the minority, I think.

14 [REDACTED]: Do you recall the district hiring this law firm?

15 Dr. Watlington. I want to take a moment to refresh my memory. I'm not sure I remember.

16 This is something I may go to confer with counsel to refresh my memory. I just don't --

17 Mr. Fishman. You don't mind if he takes --

18 [REDACTED]: Oh, no, no. Take a minute.

19 Mr. Fishman. Go talk to them.

20 [Discussion off the record.]

21 Dr. Watlington. At the moment, I just don't remember.

22 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

23 Q Okay. So you're not able to share the firm's findings?

24 A Not at this time. I just don't remember.

25 Q Would you potentially be open to sharing those findings with the committee?

1 A Certainly will confer with counsel and they'll get back to you on that.

2 Q You are familiar, as we mentioned earlier, with the ADL's July 2024 complaint against
3 the district, correct?

4 A Correct.

5 Q Has the district independently investigated every allegation in the ADL's complaint?

6 A I've asked the chief human resources officer, who I hired, new chief human resources
7 officer, to go back and take a look over the past 3 years to, one, to ensure we did not miss anything,
8 inclusive of items referenced in the ADL letter, Anti-Defamation League's letter, certainly OCR
9 complaint and others, not limited to those two; and to also take a look at investigations that
10 occurred, because I'd like to have -- be sure that there was integrity with all the investigations.

1 [4:00 p.m.]

2 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

3 Q Since entering the OCR agreement, have antisemitic incidents continued to occur in the
4 district?

5 A Since entering into the agreement, I am aware of complaints related to -- I believe I'm
6 aware of complaints related to antisemitism in the school district. My knowledge is about a small
7 minority of faculty, certainly not the overall majority.

8 Q Are you aware of any Jewish employees who have left the district due to antisemitism
9 during your tenure?

10 A I -- I don't believe I'm aware of any faculty, at the moment, who left because of
11 antisemitism. It seems like I recall there being one employee, or maybe it was a student -- I don't
12 remember -- who had a concern and ended up leaving the district, but my understanding is they just
13 chose to do something different but not expressly because of that, if my memory is correct.

14 Q Are you aware of any Jewish students who have left district schools due to antisemitism
15 during your tenure?

16 A I can't remember if there -- the one incident that I have vague recollection of was a
17 student or a staff member. I apologize. I just don't remember. But I -- I remember asking,
18 and -- was that the express reason. But either a student or staff member chose to do a different
19 assignment or different school. I just don't remember.

20 Q Will you commit, now, that every principal, every teacher, and every district employee
21 will receive clear, written guidance stating that antisemitic harassment, discrimination against Jewish
22 or Israeli students, classroom indoctrination regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and employee
23 social media conduct that targets or intimidates students or other employees will not be tolerated
24 and result in prompt investigation and appropriate discipline?

25 A I'm going to ask if you wouldn't remind repeating that, because I want to make sure I

1 understand your question.

2 Q Sure.

3 Will you commit now that every principal, every teacher, and every district employee will
4 receive clear, written guidance stating that antisemitic harassment, discrimination against Jewish or
5 Israeli students, classroom indoctrination regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and employee
6 social media conduct that targets or intimidates students or other employees will not be tolerated
7 and will result in prompt investigation and appropriate discipline?

8 Mr. Fishman. Beyond what they were required to do under the VRA with the Department of
9 Education?

10 [REDACTED]. That's not what I --

11 Mr. Fishman. I'm sorry?

12 [REDACTED]. That's not what I said.

13 Mr. Fishman. I'm trying to figure out what's the -- I'm trying to ask what's the difference
14 between what you're asking for and what the Department of Education --

15 [REDACTED]. I'm asking for a clear commitment pertaining to the issues that I just listed.

16 Dr. Watlington. My understanding is that the lion's share of what you referenced is
17 inherently referenced in the voluntary resolution agreement, at least the spirit of it, that I signed.

18 With the voluntary resolution agreement, certainly, we've been clear as a school district
19 already that pursuant to policy 248 and policy 348 -- that the district does not support and will not
20 condone or tolerate discrimination and harassment of any kind.

21 While the policy doesn't specifically reference antisemitism, it is inherently a part of
22 it -- antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism, all forms of hatred and harassment and discrimination -- and
23 inherent in our policy on teaching controversial issues, curriculum development.

24 I think, at a larger level, that speaks to parts of the curriculum that can be controversial, if you
25 will -- potentially controversial -- and that would include the Israeli-Palestinian phenomenon or

1 conflict, as well as other controversial issues.

2 BY [REDACTED]: MAJORITY STAFF:

3 Q As superintendent, will you commit today that every Jewish student in the district
4 should be able to attend school without being pressured to denounce Israel, defend their Jewish
5 identity, or conceal either one in order to participate fully in school life?

6 A I want to make sure I fully understood that question. Would you mind saying that
7 again?

8 Q As superintendent, will you commit today that every Jewish student in your district
9 should be able to attend school without being pressured to denounce Israel, defend their Jewish
10 identity, or conceal either one in order to participate fully in school life?

11 A Consistent with our policy, there are policies and procedures in place such that no
12 Jewish student should have to defend their identity, and no other group of students should have to
13 defend their identity, shared ancestry, and the like.

14 I'm not sure I fully understand your question about denouncing Israel because -- I'm not sure I
15 fully understand that. Certainly, does that mean that a Jewish student could not speak non-
16 affirmatively about Israel or its policies?

17 Q No. No. It means that a Jewish student who -- for whom Israel is a core part of their
18 Jewish identity, they should be able to attend school without feeling like they have to hide that or
19 without feeling like they have to denounce Israel and say it's not -- it's, you know, a racist, settler,
20 colonial state. That's what I'm saying.

21 A That's an absolute moral and policy expectation of the school district. No Jewish
22 student should have to denounce any -- any shared ancestry, just like no other student should
23 have -- should be -- feel pressured to denounce their ancestry, whether that's their Palestinian
24 ancestry, their African ancestry, Asian ancestry, European ancestry, and the like. I think that's an
25 absolute expectation codified in our policy and existing procedures.

1 ██████████. We'll go off the record. Thank you.

2 [Recess.]

3 BY ██████████: MINORITY STAFF:

4 Q I just wanted to, in light of the last thread of discussion, mention and want to make sure
5 we're all aware of the School District of Philadelphia's statement against harassment that's on their
6 website.

7 Are you guys familiar with the statement?

8 A Yes.

9 Q I don't have copies of it. That's why I'm saying that. It's -- it's short, but says, in part,
10 not all, "The school district of Philadelphia does not tolerate any form of harassment. This includes,
11 but is not limited to, harassment based on a known or perceived protected classification, e.g., race;
12 color; ethnicity; age; religion; sexual orientation; gender identity or expression; marital status;
13 pregnancy; English language proficiency; veteran status; disability; and national origin, including
14 shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, such as antisemitism and Islamophobia."

15 And it says, "Students who believe they have been subjected to any form of harassment or a
16 hostile environment based on protected characteristics are encouraged to report the conduct."
17 And, immediately under that, there are multiple methods to report -- either online, calling, emailing.
18 And it also provides it for charter students and employees and staff.

19 I believe it references this has been up since the beginning of this year, but is it something
20 that has been publicized to students or to the school community, that they know this is here and
21 something they can access?

22 A Yes. It has been publicly shared and reinforced on multiple occasions with senior
23 leadership and all principals by me directly.

24 Q And this is in addition to a separate site, specifically on bullying, harassment, and
25 discrimination?

1 A That is correct.

2 Q I just wanted to make sure that was on the record, that this is a policy. It wasn't
3 something that we just talked about here as a new commitment. This is something that you are
4 committed to and have been committed to for some time?

5 A Yes, absolutely.

6 Q In that light, I don't believe I have any further questions but want to give you an
7 opportunity, if you would like, to say anything for the record before we conclude.

8 A Yes, I would like to share final comments.

9 Q Go right ahead. The floor is yours, sir.

10 A Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to represent the School District of
11 Philadelphia here today.

12 As superintendent, I want to make one thing abundantly clear. My top priority is the safety
13 of our students and staff -- physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially.

14 As part of that commitment, we do not condone or tolerate antisemitism, just as we do not
15 condone or tolerate Islamophobia, racism, or discrimination against any ethnic, racial, or religious
16 group.

17 Many of our students and families have been deeply affected by the Hamas attacks on
18 October 7th, 2023, and the continued conflict and violence in the region. In my decades as an
19 educator, I have rarely seen a more emotionally and politically charged -- charged educational
20 climate.

21 The district is responsible for educating students from diverse backgrounds who bring diverse
22 perspectives into the classroom. The district's responsibility is to avoid advancing any particular
23 perspective on this or any other conflict. Our goal is to teach students how, not what, to think, and
24 to -- and how to evaluate different perspectives as independent thinkers.

25 In our efforts to present students with an unbiased view of historical and current events,

1 district leadership and staff will inevitably face criticism from those who believe their perspectives
2 are not being adequately heard or addressed. To be clear, when a staff member or student engages
3 in harmful conduct, we have a responsibility to hold them accountable.

4 If any student, staff member, or family feels unsafe or targeted in our schools because of their
5 identity, that is unacceptable. When we receive complaints to that effect, we have an obligation to
6 take them seriously and to investigate them thoroughly, fairly, and promptly.

7 The School District of Philadelphia is the ninth-largest district in the Nation. Close to
8 200,000 students attend public school in Philadelphia, including nearly 116,000 in district-operated
9 schools.

10 The district employs over 9,000 teachers, who are responsible for educating students across
11 approximately 250 schools.

12 I am in those schools all the time. I know from my classroom visits that the overwhelming
13 majority of our teachers are dedicated to challenging and nurturing our students.

14 In any organization this large, some staff members will not live up to expectations. When
15 they don't, we must act.

16 Regrettably, incidents of hate and bias have occurred, and that is not okay.

17 In 2024, the district entered into a voluntary resolution agreement with the U.S. Department
18 of Education to better address antisemitism, including by more effectively training staff and students
19 about discrimination and tracking and investigating discrimination and harassment complaints more
20 efficiently.

21 We have taken multiple actions pursuant to the VRA, including: first, issuing and
22 disseminating a statement reaffirming the district's lack of tolerance for harassment and
23 discrimination; second, revising district policies to clearly articulate and more effectively enforce
24 the -- the prohibitions of Title VI against discrimination related to shared ancestry or ethnic
25 characteristics; third, purchasing and implementing a new recordkeeping system for documenting

1 discrimination and harassment complaints involving students and staff; fourth, instituting mandated
2 annual training for all staff on Title VI and specialized training for all administrators involved in
3 investigating Title VI complaints; and, fifth, administering a climate assessment to all sixth through
4 12th grade students.

5 We are fully -- we are committed to full compliance with the VRA. Beyond that, we have
6 taken steps -- we have taken other steps to address discrimination and harassment.

7 Specifically, we have taken the following six steps: first, launched a multiyear partnership
8 with Facing History & Ourselves to address shared ancestry discrimination and build more inclusive
9 school communities; secondly, recruited a new chief of talent/human resources and a new deputy
10 chief of employee labor relations; third, appointed a new chief academic officer with oversight of the
11 curriculum office; fourth, delivered professional learning for educators and staff on antisemitism,
12 Islamophobia, Title VI, and facilitating dialogue among those of different backgrounds and
13 perspectives; fifth, convened meetings with over 25 Jewish, Muslim, and other organizations to
14 strengthen community partnerships; and, sixth, commenced a thorough review of the district's social
15 studies curriculum.

16 Through these efforts and others, we will continue to combat antisemitism and all forms of
17 hate.

18 Every student entering a district school deserves to know they belong. We owe that to
19 them and our community.

20 Thank you.

21 [REDACTED]: I want to thank you, and we can go off the record.

22 [Whereupon, at 4:32 p.m., the interview was concluded.]

Certificate of Deponent/Interviewee

I have read the foregoing ____ pages, which contain the correct transcript of the answers made by me to the questions therein recorded.

Witness Name

Date