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**Testimony before the State Board of Education on Statewide Assessment**  
**January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Dr. Christine Miles and I serve as Associate Director of Professional Development and Instructional Issues with the New Jersey Education Association. My past experiences include serving as a high school English Teacher, curriculum supervisor, building-based administrator, and Director of Consulting for the late Grant Wiggins' organization, Authentic Education, where my primary focus was on curriculum, design, and assessment on an international scale.

The State BOE will recall that in the Spring of 2018, the NJEA collaborated with the NJDOE on the Statewide Assessment Outreach, gathering student, parent, and educator input on the lived experiences with NJ's statewide assessment system. Throughout this work, we found that the statewide assessment system has had profoundly negative implications for curriculum and instruction and is severely impacting student mental health. This evidence, in connection with extensive empirical standardized assessment research, has informed the creation of my testimony today. The empirical research supporting the statements are included with this submitted testimony.

**1** - The New Jersey Education Association supports the reduction of onerous statewide standardized assessment. Educators and educational researchers know that reducing assessments at the high school level does not lower expectations, it places an emphasis on quality over quantity. Research shows that a rigorous sequence of courses, high-quality curricula, and student performance in their coursework is the greatest indicator of college and/or career readiness<sup>3</sup>. By reducing the number of assessments at the high school level, we place the emphasis back on instructional time, teaching and learning.

Dr. Arthur VanderVeen, CEO of New Meridian, the company that is contracted by the state of New Jersey to license content of our NJSLA, urged the State Board of Education to shift its focus away from testing in July 2018. He stated, "The more important indicator of post-secondary readiness is the curriculum and not the assessment. States should be focusing on ensuring a rigorous sequence of courses instead of focusing on an assessment<sup>1</sup>." Dr. VanderVeen's company receives a significant profit from the state's \$30+ million statewide assessment system budget, and a reduction in testing would significantly reduce his bottom line. Yet, he urges the state to focus its energies elsewhere.

**2** – Proponents of increased testing argue that PARCC/NJSLA is a check on grade inflation and indicates whether our students are career and college ready. However, the educators and educational researchers know that this is inaccurate. Performance on a standardized assessment does not indicate career and college readiness. State regulations provide an overview of the requirements for students to graduate. Students are required to take and pass 120 credits worth of coursework, demonstrate proficiency on locally designed and administered assessments, and meet attendance standards. There is no research basis in the claim that PARCC/NJSLA, or any standardized assessment, will address the

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<sup>1</sup> New Jersey State Board of Education Meeting Transcript, July 2018.

concern that too many students are not college ready and require remedial coursework. Nor is there research that shows PARCC/NJSLA performance is a predictor of future success. There is, however, research that confirms that a student's transcript/high school grades are what make a high school diploma truly meaningful and give the most accurate picture of a student's readiness for college and career, despite the grade inflation argument.<sup>2</sup>

**3** – The Governor, Commissioner, and NJDOE are committed to transitioning to a stronger, fairer, and MORE EQUITABLE system for all of the beautifully diverse students throughout the state of NJ. A common, and quite frankly, ignorant and misguided claim of those in favor of increased testing is that the data from the PARCC/NJSLA allows the state to ensure equity for the most historically marginalized students.

Standardized assessments do not enhance equity; they reinforce inequity. Equality assumes that everyone benefits from the same supports, while equity provides everyone with the support that they need to succeed. Our current statewide assessment system does not allow for districts or educators to provide students with these supports. Empirical research conducted in New Jersey has continuously demonstrated that student results on statewide assessments can be predicted with 85% accuracy by community and family income levels<sup>3</sup>.

Districts already collect rich and relevant data outside of the statewide standardized testing data that reveal disparities within their student populations. Testing proponents argue that statewide standardized testing data reveals “achievement gaps,” when in reality, these tests serve to further *opportunity gaps* by restricting historically marginalized students' access to higher level coursework.

Historically, districts have not been given the supports and resources needed to appropriately support students and effectively address these disparities. Further, the immense amount of time dedicated to standardized test preparation and implementation further consumes valuable instructional time and resources with no valuable return.

**4** – As can be seen throughout the country, increased testing has not led to improved outcomes for students<sup>4</sup>. On the contrary, these tests have harmed our students, our educators, and our districts. Standardized assessments have many unintended consequences for students, educators, and schools. Of particular note is the devastating impact standardized testing has on student mental health. On average, students are experiencing higher levels of stress and anxiety than today's adult population<sup>5</sup>. Students identify testing as the primary source of stress in their lives. Standardized test anxiety results in damages to children's psychological and emotional well-being, impediments to social functioning and the development of positive social relationships, development of negative attitudes toward school and

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<sup>2</sup> Hiss, William, 2014. “Defining Promise: Optional Standardized Testing Policies in American College and University Admissions.”

<sup>3</sup> Christopher H. Tienken, Anthony Colella, Christian Angelillo, Meredith Fox, Kevin R. McCahill & Adam Wolfe (2017). Predicting Middle Level State Standardized Test Results Using Family and Community Demographic Data, RMLE Online, 40:1, 1-13, DOI: 10.1080/19404476.2016.1252304

<sup>4</sup> Dee, T.S. & Jacob, B.A. 2006. “Do High School Exit Exams Influence Educational Attainment or Labor Market Performance?” Social Science Research Network, April. [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=900985](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=900985)

<sup>5</sup> American Psychological Association. (2014). Stress in America. Are teens adopting adults' stress habits? Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2013/stress-report.pdf>

learning<sup>6</sup>, physiological reactions from students<sup>7</sup>, including crying, vomiting, loss of bowel/bladder control, and adverse emotional reactions, such as loss of student sense of identity, self-concept, self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-worth. Finally, and most alarmingly, a correlation exists between the rising adolescent suicide rate and emphasis on standardized testing<sup>8</sup>.

The New Jersey Education Association believes that the NJDOE's proposal is most certainly a step in the right direction for the students, educators, and communities of our beautifully diverse state. We urge the State BOE to approve the NJDOE's proposal at next month's meeting and, in doing so, truly commit to enhancing equity, emphasizing high-quality curriculum, and prioritizing the mental health needs of NJ's students.

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<sup>6</sup> Alliance for Childhood. (2001). Rethink high-stakes testing. Top doctors, educators warn federal push on tests harmful to children's health, education [Press release]. Retrieved from [http://drupal6.allianceforchildhood.org/testing\\_press\\_release](http://drupal6.allianceforchildhood.org/testing_press_release)

<sup>7</sup> Segool, N. K., Carlson, J. S., Goforth, A. N., von der Embse, N. and Barterian, J. A. (2013). Heightened test anxiety among young children: Elementary school students' anxious responses to high-stakes testing. *Psychology in the Schools*, 50(5), 489-499. doi:10.1002/pits.21689

<sup>8</sup> Singer, S. (2017). Middle school suicides double as Common Core testing intensifies. Huffington Post. Retrieved from [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/middle-school-suicides-double-as-common-core-testing\\_us\\_59822d3de4b03d0624b0abb9](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/middle-school-suicides-double-as-common-core-testing_us_59822d3de4b03d0624b0abb9)