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Good afternoon. My name is Sean Spiller. I am high school science teacher currently serving as Vice President of the New Jersey Education Association. As education experts, we are grateful for this opportunity to share with you our views on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC, assessments. But I must emphasize, these are not just our views, they are the widely held consensus of almost every study on this issue. While our colleagues throughout the state are working with students at the start of another school year, those of us here today represent the many NJEA members who believe passionately that New Jersey needs a new approach to standardized testing that better serves the needs of our students.

As we have previously testified, our concerns with PARCC have been shared since its introduction in New Jersey, and we continue to call for a complete transition away from PARCC. Having said that, we do want to recognize the efforts of the Department of Education to begin that transition. While a complete transition is our goal, every movement that the Department makes away from PARCC, is a step in the right direction.

Experts and researchers warn against using standardized tests for high-stakes purposes such as graduation requirements or teacher evaluation. I commend the Department of Education for proposing regulations which would reduce the amount of required testing and ensure that high school students continue to have an appropriate range of options, beyond taking PARCC tests, to earn their diplomas. We also want to thank the commissioner for reducing the use of test scores in teacher evaluation. It has no basis in research and I want to thank him for thinking of kids, not politicians.

What is clear is that PARCC tests create unneeded stress for students, they take time away from teaching, they constrain the curriculum, and they fail to provide teachers or parents with data that is timely and actionable. A remarkable and disturbing finding from the stakeholder sessions held earlier this year, which was highlighted most frequently by students, was the evidence of mental health implications that the current statewide assessment system has upon them. Participants shared noticeable shifts in student dispositions, citing heightened anxiety, frustration, and exhaustion evident in students leading up to and during PARCC administration. Participants even shared frequent anecdotes about students "breaking down" from the pressures of testing. The high-stakes of PARCC as a graduation requirement is one more onerous and unnecessary burden negatively impacting our students' mental health. When our young learners view PARCC as a hindrance to success -- as one fourth grade student noted, "The PARCC may make it so that I don't become as successful as others or go to a good college" -- then we need a new normal.

The department has proposed reducing testing from six tests to two at the high school level, which is a step in the right direction. We want to thank the department, and the commissioner for this recommendation and encourage the board to adopt it. Even with this reduction, NJ will STILL require MORE testing than ANY other state in the nation. As the DOE enters Phase II of the transition away from PARCC we need to find even better solutions, and we look forward to working with you on them.

Another important improvement for students proposed by the department is the change to graduation requirements. This proposal, which requires students to take and pass ELA 10 and Algebra 1, and retains a menu of options if students should fail the test, is a marked improvement over requiring students to take three years of PARCC tests.

It's important to acknowledge the proposed changes to graduation requirements do not fully comply with current state statute, which requires an 11th grade assessment. However, we appreciate that the Department is moving toward a solution that will ease the stress of testing on high school students. We are encouraged by this and look forward to continued work on this issue with this Board, the Commissioner, the Department, elected officials and stakeholders.

In closing, we will continue to advocate for a stronger and fairer assessment system in the state of New Jersey. One that does not leave our children feeling degraded or demoralized. We look forward to continuing to work with the Commissioner, the Department, this Board, parents and caregivers and students as we enter Phase II of the DOE's Assessment Outreach.

Thank you.