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Collaborative Approach Necessary for Improving New Jersey Schools

EDISON...Statement from AFTNJ President Donna M. Chiera on Governor Chris Christie's call for extending school days and years.

"The American Federation of Teachers New Jersey (AFTNJ) is concerned that Governor Chris Christie calls for extending school days and years without mandating a collaborative planning process that has helped make these programs successful in districts in New Jersey and elsewhere.

The planning process for any new program should be inclusive and solicit meaningful input from local teachers participating on behalf of their unions, parents and community members. Representatives of any group that currently provides wraparound services such as health care, tutoring or counseling for students and their families should be included to insure continuity of these valuable programs.

Successful implementation of an extended school day or school year must start with an in-district evaluation of what is already working or lacking within that district's existing programs including current extended day, afterschool and summer school programs. How can we expect a different result if a district simply extends a program that is not highly effective?

AFT research has identified that longer school days and years, or adjusted schedules can be particularly effective in low-income communities. More time for language arts and math can be helpful in addition to adding hours for subjects such as the arts, science and technology and languages that may have been sliced from school budgets. Giving low-income children a safe and stimulating place to spend their afternoons helps makes the school a more integral part of the community and strengthens students' connection to the school and teachers.

Ironically, the Governor yesterday vetoed bipartisan bills; one to study implementation of universal full-day kindergarten and another to study college affordability. New Jersey needs collaborative plans to improve education from pre-kindergarten through higher education based on proven research and the leadership of experienced educators, not political gimmicks."

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