

**Testimony of AFTNJ President Donna M. Chiera**  
**NJ Assembly Education Committee**  
**Thursday, May 15, 2014**

To reclaim the promise of the American education system AFTNJ supports the intentions and spirit of the following proposed legislation:

- A990: Establishes Common Core State Standards Evaluation Task Force; delays use of assessments developed by Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) until task force submits final report.
- A2901: Provides that teaching staff member's annual summative evaluation rating for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years will not include a student growth percentile; delays use of certain assessment.
- A3081: Creates Education Reform Review Task Force; delays implementation of certain assessments and certain changes to teacher evaluation system

AFTNJ believes that the passing of this legislation is a positive first step to “Reclaim the Promise” of American public education by creating strong and effective neighborhood public schools that are safe, collaborative, and welcoming places. We believe that all neighborhood schools should strive to do the following:

- Address the social, emotional and health needs of all children, particularly the poor, children of color and children with disabilities;
- Ensure that children and their families have access to wraparound services such as medical, mental health and social services;
- Have teachers and school staff who are well prepared and supported and have manageable class sizes and collaboration time; and
- Expose all children to an engaging and rich curriculum that includes art, music, social studies, civics, the sciences, and physical education.

Most educators enter the profession with the belief that the goal of public education is to demonstrate through teaching, there should be a joy in becoming a life-long learner. The excitement of entering a classroom and opening doors to countless possibilities is now at risk because everything about teaching and learning is evaluated through testing. We continue to see States and local school districts applying data methodologies such as value-added and student growth percentiles to high stakes decisions such as determining which students graduate, teacher evaluation and funding allocations. These methodologies were not designed to support these types of decisions.



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Parents, students community members and educators are beginning to stand up against the trend of standardized testing increasingly driving education policies and practices, leaving us with a disastrous “shame, blame, test and punish” accountability system that is dismantling the teaching and learning process.

Performance data in the United States are often used purely for accountability purposes compared to the other high performing countries. These are the same countries many legislators, policy makers and think tanks use to justify the reforms they propose to our public education system. However when you look at the research, these countries tend to use the data to guide intervention, reveal best practices, and identify shared problems so all stakeholders can design real solutions for the students in their systems.

For more than two decades this punitive test-based accountability system has been in place and has failed to improve student performance or ensure equity of educational resources or services. In fact since implementation of use of these large scale assessments to measure schooling outcomes and identify struggling learners and perceived poorly performing teachers the achievement gap has widened in many districts.

Some policy makers have signed on to the implementation of strategies that substitute test scores for student and teacher supports, fire teachers and close schools instead of giving them the resources they need to help struggling students succeed and communities thrive. Many have irresponsibly sold off our public schools to privatizers and other groups eager to profit on the backs of our children.

As we celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Brown v. BOE, we should have learned there can be no excellence in public education without equity and yet we continue to disinvest in our public schools while expanding charter schools and privatization. This trend has contributed significantly to increased segregation with the result that many children of color and children living in poverty still receive separate and unequal schooling.

We believe the adoption of the National Core Standards will be an important first step in bringing equity to all and students who can successfully compete in a global economic structure. Unfortunately the implementation of the standards was overshadowed by the tenure legislation and new evaluation systems. Testing and consequences took priority over teaching and learning. These newly proposed measures should be combined to form a task force to study and make recommendations on the implementation of the National Core Standards, the professional resources allotted district allotted to the implementation, and the time and the appropriateness of district and State testing. While this evaluation process is going on there needs to be a “time out” or moratorium to students, district and staff on all



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consequence related to the implementation of the core standards, PARCC assessment, new teacher evaluation system and consequence around the NJTEACH law.

This is the time for New Jersey to take the lead to create a public school system that focuses on teaching and learning. To do that AFTNJ believes the following principles need to be the basis on that system:

- Accountability systems which are transparent and readily understandable by teachers and families and the broader public;
- Engage a broad cross-section of the school stakeholders—teachers, students, parents, and community organizations—in planning and implementing accountability policies and strategies that are tailored to each school and district’s unique context;
- Ensure the delivery of a broad and well -rounded curriculum, including the arts, science, social studies, civics, health and physical education, and social/emotional and character development;
- State and districts support meaningful learning that links curricular tools and resources, instruction, and new assessments to ensure the development of higher order thinking and performance skills that students need to be successful in and outside of school;
- Accountability tools and systems are designed to enhance learning environments, improve curriculum, and increase teacher efficacy;
- These tools not only significantly involve teachers and other education professionals in the development and decision making about the standards and assessment processes but use feedback from parents, teachers and students to evaluate and continuously improve the system;
- Retain disaggregated reporting by race, ethnicity, poverty level, English language status and disability, but no longer require testing of every student at every grade level every year, and instead employ sampling methodology to determine how well the system is meeting its goals;
- Identify schools needing improvement by qualitative observation as well as multiple measures of students, educators and schools that reach beyond standardized math and reading test scores and instead capture the multi-faceted aspects of education valued by parents, the profession and the community;
- Hold policymakers responsible for appropriating the necessary funding for implementing the new accountability system;
- Hold administrators responsible for distributing the funds equitably and for creating a collaborative environment that includes teachers in decision making about the curriculum, the assessments and the professional development necessary for successful implementation;



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- Hold ALL education stakeholders responsible for using wisely the resources –e.g., enriched and engaging curriculum, well prepared teachers, safe and orderly schools, teaching supplies, computers and other technology—necessary to meet student needs and achieve both equity and excellence for ALL students;

By doing this we believe that the public education system will be renewed to reclaim the promise of motivating individual self-fulfillment, supporting a thriving global economy, and serving as a foundation for racial, social and economic justice.

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