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JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**MAY 14, 2019
ASSESSMENT**

Good morning, Members of the Joint Committee on Public Schools.

My name is Harry Lee and I am the Interim President of the New Jersey Charter Schools Association. We are a non-profit membership organization that has represented New Jersey's public charter schools and the students and parents they serve since 1999. Our mission is to advance quality public education for New Jersey's children through excellent public charter schools. We believe that every child in the State of New Jersey should have the opportunity to attend a high-quality public school that best meets his or her needs.

Towards that end, we and our members support a system of robust and thoughtful assessment for all public schools including public charter schools; a system that answers key questions about the effectiveness of instructional programs and holds schools responsible for student outcomes.

It has long been known that different school districts produce dramatically different outcomes for their students, and in the past it had been the practice to blame these differences on the students themselves.

For decades, especially in New Jersey's urban districts, there was little progress in measures such as graduation rates, college attendance, and career readiness, even as more equitable funding was provided. Further, hidden disparities in student outcomes persisted invisibly throughout the state, even in affluent school districts.

The achievement gaps between different ethnic groups and affluent and economically challenged communities is now well documented and it is widely accepted that it must be addressed wherever it appears. In the absence of this data, the whole issue of the achievement gap would not have been understood or addressed.

While we have a long way to go, there are important proof points to see what is possible in public education. Over the past 20 years, improved statewide assessments have shed a light on both what is happening and what is possible.

We have now seen public schools in some of our most economically disadvantaged communities demonstrate that all students can achieve high levels of academic proficiency on state tests, graduate high school, and attend and succeed in college. Our system of statewide assessments, whether NJASK, HSPA, PARCC, or NJSLA, has focused our attention on whether students are learning adequately and has—however imperfectly—provided schools with an objective measure of program success. We have seen that when schools align their curriculums with state standards and train their teachers in effective instructional practices that are informed by formative and interim data, measures of success rise for all students.

New Jersey's charter sector demonstrates what is possible. For example, Newark charter schools are delivering breakthrough results for students in the city. In Newark, there are currently 19,000 students attending public charter schools. Last year, charter students in Newark eliminated the achievement gap

and outperformed the state average in both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics on PARCC. 83% of Newark charter students come from low-income backgrounds which is more than double the state average. Beating the state average is an incredible accomplishment since New Jersey has one of the highest performing charter sectors in the country.

When we view two schools in the same community, serving virtually the same students, with dramatically different outcomes on state assessments, we know we will find different instructional practices and school cultures in place. This is not surprising, but it is important to our growing understanding of what works.

Good assessments answer questions and provide insights into student learning, both individually and collectively. As we consider alternatives to the current assessment program, let's keep in the mind the questions which any future system must answer:

- Are students learning adequately to be prepared for college and career?
- Are schools effective in their instructional programs for all students, regardless of where they live, their backgrounds, or special needs?
- Are changes to our instructional programs and standards more or less effective in driving student success?

No single test can answer all these questions satisfactorily, but we need data points to get us started. Let's keep in mind the lessons of the past 20 years as we consider how to improve statewide assessments to better support all students in their learning and lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak and I would be happy to answer any questions members of the committee may have.

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