



STUDY COMMISSION ON THE USE OF STUDENT ASSESSMENTS IN NEW JERSEY

Final Report

January 11, 2016

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Introduction¹

In its work, the Study Commission on the Use of Student Assessments in New Jersey (Study Commission) has been guided by the charge embodied within Governor Chris Christie's Executive Order No. 159 to improve the quality of education for all New Jersey children. The members of the Study Commission clearly recognize education is the greatest gift that one generation can give to the next, and they further understand the educational professionals who lead and staff schools deserve praise and encouragement for their daily commitments to students.

To improve the quality of education, a vision for educational excellence and equity must be crafted and shared among all educators and families throughout the State. Excellence means preparing students for the future challenges of adulthood, college, and career. Equity means all students should have the opportunity to receive a quality education regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, language proficiency, family income, place of residence, or need for special programs or accommodations.

In the pursuit of continuous quality improvement, the Study Commission recognizes that the State's system of public education must have: (a) a strong, shared expectation for achievement through rigorous standards that are closely aligned with the expectations of colleges and employers; (b) an aligned curriculum, instructional resources, and lesson plans to implement the standards; (c) high-quality assessments to measure student, school, and Statewide progress; and (d) policies and practices to use wisely the information that the assessments provide to improve teaching and learning and to help struggling schools. In this context, New Jersey's Statewide assessments (i.e., Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and exams in science) must be viewed in conjunction with other measures of student performance to provide robust, comprehensive, and detailed data that are capable of informing continuous improvement strategies at the student, classroom, school, school district, State, and national levels. Success for students means more than a one-time snapshot from a single standardized test, but rather multiple measures across a student's entire school experience. Attendance and graduation rates; disciplinary and behavioral data, including suspensions and expulsions; and career and technical education readiness data are just some examples of multiple measures that can provide a more complete picture of educational needs and inform strategies for continuous improvement.

The Study Commission also recognizes that much is being asked of schools and educational professionals whose needs and concerns must be heard, acknowledged, and addressed as the changes associated with continuous school improvement progress. For this reason, there must be clear recognition by all concerned that meaningful change will happen gradually, over many years, and with positive outcomes being determined by patience and persistence. The State also should bear in mind the need to complement this vision of continuous improvement with work being done in other education areas, such as improved programs and services for students with disabilities, career and technical education, chronic absenteeism, and dual enrollment with higher education.

Finally, the Study Commission recognizes that creating a shared understanding of the standards-based change process that reflects the concerns voiced by many educators, parents, and members of the general public has been a challenging task. The Study Commission deeply appreciates the

¹ The drafting of the Final Report began on October 1, 2015, and does not reflect events that transpired after that date.

many comments, both positive and negative, received from these constituencies during its deliberations.

In this report, the Study Commission seeks to clearly demonstrate it has listened to and considered the comments and has responded and provided clarification, as appropriate. The Study Commission acknowledges the concerns that have been voiced about the issue of over-testing in the State's public schools and its impact on instruction. It has addressed this issue both in its Interim Report (December, 2014) and in recommendations that follow.

In addition, the Study Commission acknowledges the concerns about the use of assessment data in the State's educator evaluation process. However, using data to inform practice is a nearly universally accepted improvement strategy. Consequently, the Study Commission does not believe the philosophy of data-informed practice is among the root causes for the criticisms that have been raised in the debate regarding standardized testing and PARCC. The Study Commission recognizes that some educational practitioners who have advanced concerns in both emails and public testimony sessions are genuinely concerned they might be held accountable by school district administrators and district boards of education for things clearly outside their control. For example, among the many educators and members of the public who offered comments to or testimony before the Study Commission, there was concern regarding the use of standardized test data (specifically PARCC data) in the educator evaluation process. There was also concern that English language arts and mathematics teachers in grades 3 to 8 (a relatively small subset of the State's teaching force) would be disproportionately impacted in their evaluations by the use of median student growth percentile (mSGP) scores derived from their students' academic growth on the PARCC assessment. Based upon the first year of educator evaluation implementation, summative data across the State served to mitigate much of this concern, namely that (a) the vast majority of New Jersey teachers were rated "effective" or "highly effective," and (b) the distributions of teacher ratings with and without mSGP scores were nearly identical.

Nevertheless, anxiety and fear levels surrounding this issue remain palpable and appear to have formed at least part of the basis for the anti-PARCC television, radio, and print advertisements, which arguably appear to have contributed significantly to the parent opt-out movement in spring 2015². A lack of trust between policymakers and educators and the abundance of misinformation seem only to add to this atmosphere of anxiety and fear. Therefore, many of the recommendations that follow focus on improving the relationships between policymakers and educators and on building educator confidence that the State's educational system appropriately uses assessments to foster learning. Improving relationships is critical, given the importance of school-based, data-informed collaborations between classroom teachers and school leaders to improve instruction. Quite simply, the Study Commission believes educators, parents, district board of education members, and other stakeholders must embrace a shared understanding that assessment data can be used effectively to inform and improve teaching. Moreover, the PARCC data must become a critical part of this shared understanding as the data continue to be better understood.

In the following pages, the Study Commission continually addresses the issues of communication and professional learning, which are prerequisite to effective change. However, the Study Commission clearly understands there are many obstacles and impediments to be

² In spring 2015, the New Jersey Education Association launched an intensive negative public relations campaign related to the use of standardized testing that was aimed to coincide with the spring PARCC test administration.

confronted in attempting to communicate factual information to educators, parents, and the public-at-large, many of whom no longer use traditional outlets (e.g., news reports) to acquire information and knowledge. Increasingly, much information (and much misinformation) is being transmitted through various forms of social media, which can complicate the burden of communicating accurate and factual information. The ability of government and educational advocacy organizations to rise above the clamor of social media is limited. Nevertheless, the Study Commission offers several recommendations for transmitting accurate information to different audiences. In doing so, the Study Commission acknowledges that accomplishing this objective may require either the allocation of new resources or a fundamental change in thinking about how government communicates, or both.

However, one point must be abundantly clear: the Study Commission firmly believes all students in New Jersey's public schools who are eligible should be required to take the State standardized assessment (i.e., PARCC). Doing so will ensure all students are progressing well in their educational endeavors and all public schools are effective for all students. High-quality assessments such as PARCC will hold schools accountable for serving all of their students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Study Commission believes it will be impossible to effectively close achievement gaps between and among students without accurate and actionable information.

Background on the Work of the Study Commission

This is the Study Commission's Final Report, as mandated by Executive Order No. 159, which was issued by Governor Christie on July 14, 2014. The stated charge to the Study Commission was to review and make recommendations to the Governor regarding the quality and effectiveness of student assessments administered to kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) students in New Jersey. In particular, the Study Commission was charged to consider and make recommendations on the volume, frequency, and impact of student assessments occurring throughout New Jersey school districts, as well as on the Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Common Core State Standards.

The Study Commission included individuals with broad backgrounds and experiences in education, higher education, and business, including practitioners and parents. Commissioner David C. Hespe was appointed chair of the Study Commission, and several members of the New Jersey Department of Education also participated as staff to the Study Commission.

As the Study Commission was engaged in its deliberations, Governor Christie announced on May 28, 2015, his concern regarding the Common Core State Standards. Governor Christie also called for the assembly of teams of educators and parents to conduct a point-by-point review of existing New Jersey standards with the objective of making recommendations for standards that are even higher than the Common Core State Standards and are New Jersey-based. In view of this fact, the Study Commission offers recommendations that reflect this comprehensive ongoing review.

Organization of the Final Report

The remainder of this report is organized in three sections: (1) a brief description of the Study Commission's meeting schedule; (2) a brief description of the processes used by the Study Commission to elicit testimony and feedback from educators, parents, interested members of the general public, and students; and (3) a series of recommendations offered by the Study Commission according to the four major themes or strands that comprise its focus: (a) Statewide

standards for excellence in education; (b) a shared vision for a comprehensive assessment system; (c) assessment tools, including PARCC; and (d) use of data to improve teaching and learning.

The report also includes a number of appendices. The Executive Order for the organization and work of the Study Commission is presented in Appendix 1, and a complete listing of Study Commission members and staff is presented in Appendix 2. A list of presenters and a brief description of their statements is presented in Appendix 3, an illustration and description of the CAR is presented in Appendix 4, and a list of resource materials that were used by the Study Commission is presented in Appendix 5.

Study Commission Meeting Schedule

The Study Commission conducted 21 meetings from November 2014 through November 2015, (exclusive of the public testimony sessions) during which presentations were received and discussions were held regarding the issues identified in the Executive Order. As part of the deliberative process, detailed minutes of meetings were developed and posted on the Study Commission's website for public access.

Process for Eliciting Input from the Public and Education Community

A user-friendly website (<http://www.state.nj.us/education/studycommission>) was created to serve as a convenient communication tool both to inform the citizens of New Jersey about the work of the Study Commission and to provide a mechanism for public input and feedback. On this website, the Study Commission posted Executive Order No. 159 and a press release announcing its organization. The website further included the following: identification of all members of the Study Commission, as well as their professional affiliations; minutes of all Study Commission meetings; and a mechanism for the public to submit input, plus a telephone number and an email address (studycommission@doe.state.nj.us). Email messages from approximately 300 individuals were received for review by members of the Study Commission.

Three sessions were also held in January and February 2015 in Jersey City (north), Jackson Township (central), and Blackwood (south) to elicit public testimony regarding the issues relating to the Common Core State Standards, high-stakes testing, and the PARCC assessment. Comments were offered by approximately 100 people.

Process for Eliciting Student Feedback about PARCC Testing

Representatives of the Study Commission also conducted three feedback sessions in June 2015 at East Side High School in Newark (north), Melvin H. Kreps Middle School in East Windsor (central), and Mary S. Shoemaker Elementary School in Woodstown (south) with 17 students to elicit information regarding their experiences with the March and May administrations of the PARCC assessment.

Study Commission Final Recommendations

The following recommendations are presented according to the four major themes or strands that have been described above: (a) Statewide standards for excellence in education; (b) a shared vision for a comprehensive assessment system; (c) assessment tools, including PARCC; and (d) use of data to improve teaching and learning.

1. *Statewide Standards for Excellence in Education*

In June 2010, the State of New Jersey formally adopted the Common Core State Standards for kindergarten through grade 12 in English language arts and mathematics. The standards were intended to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare the State's children for the college- and career-readiness demands of the 21st century.

The current standards for mathematics are intended to measure students' abilities to: (1) make sense of problems and persevere in solving them; (2) reason abstractly and quantitatively; (3) construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others; (4) model with mathematics; (5) use appropriate tools strategically; (6) attend to precision; (7) look for and make use of structure; and (8) look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning. Key features of the English language arts standards include: (1) reading, i.e., text complexity and the growth of comprehension; (2) writing, i.e., text types, responding to reading, and research; (3) speaking and listening, i.e., flexible communication and collaboration; and (4) language, i.e., conventions, effective use, and vocabulary.

As noted above, Governor Christie voiced his concern with New Jersey's commitment to the Common Core State Standards during the Study Commissions deliberations. Governor Christie also called for the assembly of teams of educators and parents to conduct a point-by-point review of the Common Core State Standards with the objective of making recommendations for New Jersey-based standards that are even higher than the Common Core State Standards. To that end, the Study Commission offers the following recommendations³.

Standards Review and Development

Recommendation 1

The Study Commission recommends the pending review of existing State standards utilize the following criteria. New Jersey's standards should be:

- Aligned with college and career readiness requirements;
- Connected to the real world using higher-order thinking skills, i.e., problem solving, reasoning, fluency, and synthesis (apply to new situations);
- Age appropriate and sequenced (progression of achievement from grade to grade);
- Focused (greater mastery of fewer standards);
- Coherent and clear;
- Aligned with technology; and
- Comparable nationally and internationally.

Recommendation 2

The Study Commission recommends the pending review of existing State standards include a review of the results of the 2015 PARCC assessment, as well as the standard-specific

³ The Study Commission notes the deliberations currently underway in the U.S. Congress regarding the re-authorization of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (P.L. 107-11) may impact the Final Report's recommendations.

testimony and feedback from the public and students received by the Study Commission, as they might provide insights regarding the clarity of the standards and how the standards have been implemented.

Recommendation 3

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE provide school districts with the time, support, professional learning, and communication necessary to accommodate any changes to the standards that might impact the school district's planning, implementation, and decision making about curriculum, instruction, and/or instructional resources.

Recommendation 4

The Study Commission recommends that, as the review of State standards progresses, greater consideration, emphasis, and focus be given to preparing students for 21st century jobs and careers and the knowledge and skills students will need to perform well in those jobs and careers, including communication, problem solving, and critical thinking skills, as well as some of the "softer" life skills, such as perseverance and global citizenship.

Recommendation 5

The Study Commission fully supports the NJDOE's efforts in the implementation of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and recommends that all education stakeholders support and promote the new science standards.

Professional Learning Regarding the Implementation of Standards

Recommendation 6

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE assume a leadership role in developing broad partnerships with State education associations and advocacy groups (including, but not limited to, the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association (NJPSA), New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA), New Jersey Association of School Administrators (NJASA), New Jersey Parents and Teachers Association (NJPTA), institutions of higher education (IHEs), and the business community) to provide school districts and educators with readily available, accessible, comprehensive, and sustained professional learning and associated resources that are aligned with revised State standards and that can assist school districts in developing and implementing curricula.

Recommendation 7

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE collaborate with State education associations and advocacy groups to create online cross-disciplinary professional learning initiatives accompanied by sufficient incentives to encourage the State's educators to expand their professional knowledge and skills and to turn-key their learning for colleagues.

Recommendation 8

The Study Commission endorses the understanding that every teacher is a literacy teacher and recommends that the NJDOE encourage school districts to devote considerable time and effort to providing sustained professional learning in standards-based instruction for teachers of subjects other than English language arts and mathematics. The Study Commission recognizes that current educational standards cannot be effectively implemented without instructional technology and, consequently, the Study Commission further recommends that school districts continue to provide the resources and professional learning necessary to infuse technology in curriculum and instructional practices.

2. Shared Vision for a Comprehensive Assessment System

Regarding the ongoing debate about changes in State standards and assessment systems, the Study Commission recognizes the importance of organization and communication in effecting meaningful and systemic change. The Study Commission also recognizes that change is best accomplished when it is predicated upon the acceptance of a vision for assessment that is widely shared and communicated among stakeholders.

The term “assessment” is often used as a synonym for “testing” or “evaluation,” which sometimes confuses the issue. For the purposes of the Study Commission’s work, the following operational definition was adopted:

Assessment is the collection, interpretation, and strategic use of information to inform educators, students, and parents/guardians about student progress in attaining the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors to be learned or acquired in school. Assessment can be in the form of formative, interim, and summative measures of student performance (including teacher-made, commercial, or state assessments, and multiple formats, e.g., forced choice, constructed response, projects, etc.). (Adapted from the Illinois State Board of Education, Zaleski, 2014).

The foundation of an excellent assessment system includes a viable aligned curriculum; aligned assessments; assessment-literate educators/students/parents; time for collaborative teamwork that is focused on curriculum, instruction, and the use of assessment data to improve student learning; and a long-term vision and commitment to the work of assessment. It represents practice/process versus mere compliance (Wright, 2014).

A comprehensive assessment system is an integral part of the instructional process; is inextricably linked to a viable curriculum and effective instructional practice; and uses State, formative, interim, and summative assessment tools that are tightly aligned to standards to inform curriculum, instruction, and assessment. A comprehensive assessment system is used to address immediate student needs, inform ongoing instructional changes, guide long-term educational improvement, and provide on-going, timely, and actionable information on what students know, understand, and are able to do in relation to the standards. In a comprehensive assessment system, a well-planned and thorough professional learning program is put in place to strengthen the assessment literacy of all education stakeholders and to ensure an efficient assessment and testing program (Wright, 2014).

The Study Commission has carefully reviewed the Connected Action Roadmap (CAR)⁴ and has determined that it represents an excellent model for a comprehensive, aligned assessment system and a shared Statewide educational vision and offers the following recommendations.

Recommendation 9

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE work proactively with other State agencies, education associations, advocacy groups, and individual educators to implement and communicate a shared vision for the appropriate use of assessments through a comprehensive assessment system consistent with CAR. This should be reflected in the strategic plans of the NJDOE, as well as school districts throughout the State. The shared

⁴ The Connected Action Roadmap (CAR) was presented by Patricia Wright, executive director of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association, and an illustration of the model is attached to this report as Appendix 4.

vision should further address the impact of PARCC and end-of-course (EOC) testing on midterms and final examinations at the high school level.

Recommendation 10

The Study Commission further recommends that the NJDOE assist school districts in obtaining the training necessary to establish their own comprehensive vision for school district assessment and how each assessment tool relates to an important learning or strategic objective.

Recommendation 11

The Study Commission recommends that the process for communicating the shared vision for assessment include multiple strategies and tools for communication, numerous forums and venues at various times, and multiple methods for assessing the quality and effectiveness of the messages. All events and announcements made throughout the year (e.g., test score releases, testing windows, educator evaluation reports) must be consistent, clearly connected to the shared vision, and coordinated among stakeholder groups at the State and local levels via multiple sources.

Recommendation 12

To create a meaningful assessment system in New Jersey, a shared vision (including a consistent level of awareness and understanding of assessment purposes and strategies by practitioners, i.e., teachers and principals) is essential. Therefore, the Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE assume a leadership role in ensuring all State education associations and advocacy groups commit to bear a collective responsibility for communicating widely and consistently throughout New Jersey this shared vision for assessment.

Recommendation 13

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE strongly encourage pre-service providers to emphasize more fully in their educator preparation programs the efficient and effective use of student assessment measures and techniques, especially regarding test and item construction and data analysis.

Recommendation 14

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE, in cooperation with State educational associations and advocacy groups, develop and launch a proactive communication campaign throughout the State regarding: (a) the State's role and responsibilities under federal and State laws and regulations with respect to educational standards and the use of student assessments in schools; (b) best practices in assessment of all student populations, including English language learners and students with disabilities and; and (c) what the NJDOE determines to be the most common, frequently occurring, and widespread misunderstandings and inaccuracies about educational standards and the use of student assessments in New Jersey's public schools.

Recommendation 15

The Study Commission recognizes the critical need for comprehensive and sustained professional learning that focuses on assessment literacy. Therefore, the Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE assume a leadership role in providing such training. NJDOE's memorandum of understanding with the New Jersey Institute of Technology to develop interactive modules on professional learning communities will be especially useful in this endeavor. Moreover, the Study Commission recommends that professional learning be

differentiated to meet the diverse needs of different constituencies, i.e., district board of education members, school district and school administrators, teachers, other staff, and parents. In addition, State education associations and advocacy groups must also commit to provide school district and school stakeholders with consistent professional learning opportunities in assessment purposes and strategies.

Recommendation 16

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE organize a communication team, comprised of representatives from all stakeholder groups, to pool resources and coordinate and facilitate Statewide communication of the assessment vision. This team is not intended to serve as an advocacy group, but rather as an informational group.

Recommendation 17

Among the strategies to be used for delivering a widespread and consistent message about the assessment vision, as well as other critical issues in education, the Study Commission recommends the NJDOE (a) employ public access television channels and radio throughout the State to run informational broadcasts about the shared assessment vision; (b) seek the cooperation of the business community and philanthropic organizations to fund and sponsor the development of such informational broadcasts; (c) prepare ready-to-use multimedia informational packets and make them available to district boards of education and educators; and (d) use television and radio outlets and social media to more consistently reach out directly to parents and families about ways in which they can support their children's learning.

Recommendation 18

The Study Commission acknowledges that the trickle-down process for communicating information about issues of importance and concern can at times be slow, cumbersome, inefficient, and ineffective, especially when the process includes multiple organizational levels. Accordingly, the Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE work with school districts and State education associations and advocacy groups to create a database of professional email addresses with a singular purpose to provide a mechanism for communicating directly with educators in New Jersey's public schools. This database would not be used to disseminate position statements, but rather to provide timely, uniform, consistent, and accurate information to educators (e.g., schedules for the release of Statewide assessment score reports and educator evaluation processes).

3. Assessment Tools, including PARCC

Standardized Testing and Over-Testing

During its deliberations, the Study Commission received testimony and correspondence from a diverse group of stakeholders and interested publics regarding perceived strengths and weaknesses of standardized testing, in general, and the PARCC assessment, in particular. Another issue raised during the Study Commission's testimony sessions and in correspondence was excessive testing and the time diverted from instruction to prepare for and administer the assessments.

The Study Commission is cognizant that the only testing required by the NJDOE is conducted annually via the Statewide assessments in English language arts, mathematics, and science, which are mandated by State statute and the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Other tests administered in schools are at the discretion of school districts and/or

schools (e.g., periodic formative, diagnostic, and achievement tests) or individual students (e.g., Advanced Placement, PSAT, SAT). Nevertheless, the Study Commission surmises that over-testing in the State’s public schools is a serious issue and a cause of concern. In response, the Study Commission offers the following recommendations (some of which were offered in its Interim Report, December 31, 2014).

Recommendation 19

Effective and efficient assessment systems require adherence to a set of principles linking curriculum, instructional practice, and assessment; stakeholder collaboration; and rigorous data analyses. The Study Commission recommends that school districts continue to be held accountable, via the Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC), for the development and implementation of aligned, efficient, and effective student assessment systems based on those principles.

Recommendation 20

The Study Commission recommends that school districts conduct a thorough inventory and analysis of their own student assessment systems to: (a) determine which tests and assessments are being administered to students; (b) determine the minimum testing necessary to serve diagnostic, instructional, and accountability purposes; (c) ensure every test and assessment is of high quality; (d) ensure every test and assessment is providing the information needed for specific school and school district purposes; and (e) ensure every test and assessment is supported by structures and routines so assessment results are effectively used to improve student learning.

The Study Commission further recommends that the NJDOE commission a comprehensive research study in which the information generated in the above recommendation is compiled and organized to obtain an understanding of the volume, frequency, and impact of testing within the Statewide K-12 environment, including which assessments are being used in school districts, how often they are administered, what purposes they serve, how much time students and staff spend on preparing for and implementing the assessments, how school districts schedule the State-required assessments, and what impact the testing schedule has on student learning time.

Recommendation 21

The Study Commission recommends that school districts use the vision and philosophy of the CAR as the basis for reviewing their student assessment systems. School districts should conduct their reviews in the light of existing student assessment data, including PARCC results, with an eye toward ensuring their systems are aligned, efficient, and effective. The Study Commission further recommends that the Partnership on Collaborative Professional Learning provide the tools for this review⁵.

Recommendation 22

Consistent with a school district’s vision, mission, goals, and objectives and to maximize transparency in testing, the Study Commission recommends that each school district engage its parents and community members in an ongoing conversation about the school district’s

⁵ This consortium includes representatives from the N.J. Principals and Supervisors Association, the Foundation for Educational Administration, N.J. Education Association, N.J. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, N.J. Association of School Administrators, the Education Information and Resources Center, N.J. School Boards Association, Learning Forward New Jersey, N.J. Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, and the N.J. Department of Education.

plan for student assessment. The conversation about the school district's assessment plan should include which tests and assessment instruments will be administered to students at the school district, school, and classroom levels; what purposes the tests will serve; how often they will be administered; how much time the implementation of the instruments (including preparation and practice time) will be expended; and how the results of the testing will be used to provide supports, enrichment, and advancement to students. The NJDOE could assist in this effort by having the educational specialists within the county offices lead discussions with school districts about assessment literacy and implementation.

Continuation of New Jersey Participation in the PARCC Consortium

The Study Commission believes the ultimate selection of an appropriate Statewide standardized assessment must first and foremost be driven by a comprehensive evaluation of the needs of New Jersey's students and educators. Consequently, the Study Commission urges the NJDOE to remain vigilant to those needs. Further, the Study Commission believes the attributes of a good assessment tool include the following:

- (a) The assessment must be a learning tool capable of providing teachers and practitioners with the information necessary to identify learning gaps for individual students, classrooms, and schools. This requires the assessment to have the capacity to assess the depth and breadth of the appropriate standard(s), including higher-order skills such as critical thinking and problem solving. For the assessment to be valuable for instructional planning, teachers must have access to actual test items, which have not been accessible to teachers or school administrators because of prior constraints associated with the N. J. Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) and High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA). Similar to other states, New Jersey previously was unable to develop and administer an assessment instrument with a sufficiently large pool of test items to allow access to past test items. However, a consortium of states working together, pooling resources and expertise, and comparing experiences could accomplish this.
- (b) The assessment must also be an accurate predictor of college and career readiness from the earliest grades to the threshold of graduation. Students and parents deserve to know whether students are on track for entrance to college or entry-level jobs with the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful. In the past, the State assessment system did not provide this level of feedback.
- (c) The assessment should be capable of being administered electronically (i.e., by computer) to ensure students are prepared for the technology-rich world in which they will live and work. The assessment must also be capable of being scored quickly and returned to educators in a timely manner.
- (d) The administration of the assessment must be capable of assessing the needs of all students with greater ability to accommodate the special needs of students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs).
- (e) Finally, the assessment must be capable of being used as a graduation test consistent with existing State statute and providing quantifiable information regarding educator performance that can be used, when combined with other information (e.g., supervisory observations of performance), to provide useful feedback to improve teaching through better support and development.

The Study Commission believes the PARCC assessments have the potential, over time, to exhibit all of the above-mentioned attributes and should continue as the State's assessment. Nevertheless, the Study Commission urges the NJDOE to continue the public dialogue regarding the extent to which the PARCC assessment lives up to these expectations over time. Further, the Study Commission acknowledges the importance of reviewing the Statewide assessment system whenever the standards are revised. Specifically, the Study Commission offers the following recommendations.

Recommendation 23

The Study Commission recognizes that Statewide standardized assessments are an important part of a comprehensive school improvement initiative and are necessary to provide equity in education and accountability for results. Based on information available at this time, the Study Commission recommends that the State of New Jersey continue its membership and participation in the PARCC consortium and annually administer the PARCC instrument as its Statewide assessment.

Recommendation 24

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE engage in ongoing dialogue with other states in the PARCC consortium regarding issues of collective concern. The Study Commission believes comparing experiences and data with other consortium members will help New Jersey to identify and improve best practices.

Recommendation 25

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE provide opportunities for waiver requests for the PARCC English language arts 11 (ELA 11) test for students who participate in an assessment that provides information for college placement nationwide (e.g., International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement).

Recommendation 26

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE require all students enrolled in public schools in grades 3 through 12 to take, as appropriate under federal law, the Statewide standardized assessment in English language arts, mathematics, and science as prescribed in State statute and the EOC assessment (i.e., Algebra I & II, geometry, and ELA 9, 10, and 11). The Study Commission further recommends that the NJDOE explicitly advise school districts and the general public that there will continue to be no Statewide standardized testing in kindergarten through grade 2.

Recommendation 27

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE, in cooperation with State education associations and advocacy groups, identify a range of best practices that may be adopted by district boards of education when considering how to work with parents and communities to ensure all eligible students complete the Statewide assessments. The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE communicate to school districts that both State and federal law require students to participate in the Statewide assessment programs, as appropriate. The consequences for schools and school districts for student non-participation in the Statewide assessment program, as required by federal law, should also be disseminated to school districts. The Study Commission recognizes that the NJDOE has provided such guidance to school districts during the current school year and further recommends that the NJDOE continue to provide such guidance on an annual basis.

Assessing Special Populations

The Study Commission acknowledges the assessment of special student populations, including students with disabilities and ELLs, offers unique challenges to school districts and the NJDOE. Accordingly, the Study Commission offers the following recommendations regarding the use of the PARCC and other assessments with these student populations.

Recommendation 28

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE, in cooperation with the members of the PARCC consortium, provide additional guidance to educators and parents of students with individualized education programs (IEPs) or 504 plans and students who are ELLs regarding the students' participation in the State assessment system and the selection of appropriate accommodations and accessibility features. This should be a collaborative effort between the Division of Data, Research, Evaluation and Reporting and the Division of Learning Supports and Specialized Services within the NJDOE, and should include expansion of web-based resources, regional training, embedded technical assistance, and timely dissemination of any new policies and procedures.

Recommendation 29

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE, in cooperation with State education associations and advocacy groups, explore the feasibility and desirability of expanding resources, including tools to measure literacy in ELLs' native languages.

Recommendation 30

The Study Commission recognizes the U.S. Department of Education (ED) currently requires students with an IEP to be tested at the grade level in which they participate rather than at the level at which they are taught. The Study Commission also recognizes this requirement may not always be in the best interests of affected students. Consequently, the Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE enter into a dialogue with the ED to address this concern and seek the authority to exercise greater flexibility when circumstances warrant.

Recommendation 31

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE, in cooperation with State education associations and advocacy groups, provide educators (especially those who teach ELLs and students with disabilities), school administrators, and members of child-study teams with additional professional learning on PARCC accessibility features and accommodations. The professional learning should be provided both in both face-to-face and online formats and should include selection criteria, selection processes, and evaluation of usefulness. Since many ELL and special education teachers possess substantial experience in their profession, such professional learning regarding existing testing formats should not be mandatory for all ELL and special education practitioners. The Study Commission recommends that district boards of education consider establishing policies regarding mandatory initial training and refresher courses for ELL and special education practitioners.

Recommendation 32

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE continue its efforts to use assistive technologies to make PARCC assessments meaningful for students with disabilities.

Recommendation 33

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE continue to pursue aggressively its current application with the ED to exempt newly arrived ELLs from the requirement to

participate in Statewide standardized testing for two years from date of entry to a U.S. school district rather than one year.

Technology Issues Related to PARCC

The Study Commission is very much aware of the technology issues related to the preparation for and administration of the PARCC assessment, including the sufficiency and adequacy of computer technology and the amount of time spent on test preparation (and the corresponding potential loss of instructional time) and administration. In recognition of these issues, the Study Commission offers the following recommendations:

Recommendation 34

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE de-brief school district leaders regarding the 2015 PARCC test administration experience (including test preparation time) to ensure technology resources within school districts are adequate. The Study Commission further recommends that the NJDOE, in cooperation with members of the PARCC consortium, continue to explore ways to improve the user friendliness of the PARCC computerized format.

Recommendation 35

The Study Commission acknowledges that many school districts spent considerable time during 2014-2015 preparing students to become acclimated to the computerized format of the PARCC assessment. While the Study Commission is concerned about the potential impact of this preparation on instructional time, it is reasonable to assume the need for lengthy preparation will decrease as students' familiarity and facility with the testing format and technology increases. Consequently, the Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE, in cooperation with members of the PARCC consortium, develop and communicate best practices in testing preparation to ensure students are technologically prepared to take the assessment, but the preparation time does not unduly distract from instructional time and the learning experience. The Study Commission notes with approval the PARCC test administration changes announced in June 2015, i.e., reducing in the number of testing sessions and streamlining the testing time. The Study Commission encourages the PARCC consortium to continue its efforts to streamline the assessment.

Recommendation 36

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE provide greater information, where possible, regarding individual and average lengths of testing time. Without compromising the integrity of either the goals and objectives of the Statewide assessment program or the PARCC test, the NJDOE should further consider every opportunity to reduce testing time and the testing administrative burden.

4. Use of Data to Improve Teaching and Learning

Assessments, especially high-quality assessments, contribute to the process of collecting and interpreting information that can be used to inform all education stakeholders about students' progress in attaining the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors to be learned or acquired in school (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation as cited in Illinois State Board of Education, 2014). Assessments, therefore, are an essential part of the teaching and learning enterprise, and requiring students to clearly demonstrate what they know and are able to do is essential to the learning process, as it helps to determine the extent to which the educational goals and objectives are being achieved.

When assessment works best, it also provides answers to important questions about the validity of instruction (“Are we really teaching what we think we’re teaching?”), the validity of learning (“Are students really learning what they’re supposed to be learning?”), and student improvement (“Is there a better way to teach the content, thereby improving learning?”) (“What Works in Education,” 2014).

Assessments may be formative, which help teachers to make instructional planning decisions (including differentiation and timely interventions) and rapid adjustments to instructional strategies and to provide timely and meaningful feedback to students. Assessments may also be used for interim measurements so school districts and schools can: (a) diagnose student levels across grades, schools, and the school district; (b) monitor and track student progress over time; (c) evaluate the effectiveness of instructional and curricular resources, programs, and interventions; and (d) identify targeted professional learning needs. Finally, assessments can be summative for purposes of school improvement, accountability to stakeholder groups, monitoring of statewide academic achievement, and for providing national comparisons (Wright, 2014).

Regarding the use of student assessment data to make informed decisions about teaching and to improve student learning, the Study Commission offers the following recommendations.

Dissemination and Use of PARCC Data to Inform and Improve Instruction

Recommendation 37

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE develop a plan for the annual public release of PARCC assessments results (with explanatory remarks to all stakeholders, including parents) that appropriately recognizes the data as a baseline in 2015 (and re-starts the federal accountability timeline) and focuses on improvement in student growth year after year.

Recommendation 38

The Study Commission recommends that school districts engage in a consistent and rigorous review of PARCC and other available student performance data as part of their routine continuous improvement efforts regarding curriculum and instruction.

Recommendation 39

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE encourage school districts to use the PARCC data, as they continue to be validated and better understood, as only one of several tools to improve teaching and learning. The Study Commission further recommends that the NJDOE, in cooperation with State education associations and advocacy groups, provide professional learning to educational practitioners, primarily principals and teachers, about how to analyze and use assessment data in program and curriculum planning.

Recommendation 40

Insofar as teachers’ familiarity with and understanding of PARCC data are critical elements for their acceptance and use as a learning tool, the Study Commission recommends that NJDOE continue to communicate a consistent message about the lessons learned as a result of the PARCC implementation in spring 2015. The Study Commission further recommends that the NJDOE continue to encourage school districts to embed within their strategic plans the use of student assessment data as an important tool for school improvement.

Recommendation 41

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE develop and communicate to school districts best practices regarding teaching across the curriculum, instructional technology, and addressing curriculum gaps, especially in English language arts and mathematics, that will contribute to students' preparation for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers.

Using PARCC Data for Educator Evaluation

Recommendation 42

The Study Commission recommends that, as part of its professional learning efforts, the NJDOE consistently demonstrate how the process of student assessment and educator evaluation provides important and valuable feedback to improve teaching and learning. The positive and encouraging results of the educator evaluation system thus far⁶ should prove useful in future professional learning efforts.

Recommendation 43

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE communicate in a manner that is highly transparent and public and in terms easily understood by educational professionals and the general public how the educator evaluation system works, how evaluation data within the system are derived (i.e., how student growth is calculated), what the data mean, how summative evaluation ratings are computed, and how the summary data should be interpreted. The Study Commission further recommends that the weight applied by the NJDOE to the student achievement component of educator evaluation summative ratings be continually assessed for accuracy and fairness and adjusted, as appropriate. To implement this recommendation, the messaging vehicles described in Recommendation 18 are essential.

Recommendation 44

The Study Commission recommends the NJDOE encourage school districts to ensure student growth objective (SGO) assessments are part of the overall instructional plan and are neither duplicative nor stand alone in the educator evaluation process. The Study Commission also recommends that the NJDOE reduce the impact of SGO testing on instructional and learning time.

Recommendation 45

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE expand the availability and flexibility of waivers regarding educator evaluations to meet the unique needs of school districts and schools.

Recommendation 46

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE encourage school districts to use student assessment and educator evaluation data in the continuing professional learning of all teachers, particularly novice and struggling teachers.

⁶ The results of the first year of educator evaluation findings can be found at <http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/resources/201314AchieveNJImplementationReport.pdf>

Using PARCC Data as a Graduation Assessment

Recommendation 47

The Study Commission recommends the NJDOE begin a transitional period for the use of PARCC as a high school graduation assessment. Moreover, this transition period should provide sufficient time for students to learn the standards-based material.

The Study Commission recommends the NJDOE continue to allow students through the graduating class of 2020 to demonstrate proficiency on a standardized assessment through PARCC EOC assessments or the identified substitute assessments (e.g., PSAT, SAT, ACT, Accuplacer, etc.). Beginning with the graduating class of 2020, eligible students should be required to take the PARCC EOC assessments in courses in which they are enrolled -- without having to achieve a prescribed score -- before they can access the alternative assessments for high school graduation.

The Study Commission further recommends that the graduating class of 2021 be the first class to be required to satisfactorily pass the appropriate PARCC EOC assessments as a condition for high school graduation.

As the PARCC EOC assessments for ELA 10 and Algebra I appear to align best with the expectations of the knowledge and skills for graduation established in State statute, the Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE establish ELA 10 and Algebra I PARCC EOC assessments as the State assessment requirements for graduation at least for the initial years of implementation, with provisions for reassessing the requirements in future years. Further, the Study Commission recommends the NJDOE begin to pursue the appropriate State regulatory processes to revise the graduation requirements, including minimum levels of proficiency in English language arts and mathematics.

Using PARCC Data as a College and/or Business Placement Tool

Recommendation 48

The Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE encourage IHEs throughout the State to use PARCC assessment scores for identifying course placement and enrollment in dual-credit programs. The Study Commission further recommends that IHEs work with the NJDOE and the PARCC consortium to share data on student progress in college courses to assess the validity of the PARCC assessment and to assist in the development of future tests.

Recommendation 49

The Study Commission recognizes that most New Jersey employers require entry-level job applicants to pass company-required tests in English and mathematics that assess their abilities to understand vocabulary and grammatical rules and to solve basic math problems. The Study Commission further recognizes that many employers could also benefit from knowing applicants' abilities to solve more complex problems that demand higher-level critical thinking skills. Finally, the Study Commission believes the business community would be well served to learn more about how PARCC assessment data can be used to better gauge the capacity of applicants to do the job or for growth within the company. Accordingly, the Study Commission recommends that the NJDOE convene an informational session with stakeholders in New Jersey's business community to review PARCC assessment item content and help them to gain greater insight into how PARCC assessment results can be useful to them, within the context of their respective hiring needs, employment policies, and human resources guidelines.

APPENDIX 1

Executive Order No. 159

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey (“State”) is committed to improving the quality of education for all new Jersey children; and

WHEREAS, my Administration believes that the educational success of each child depends upon rigorous standards, excellent educators, and high quality student assessments that measure the progress of student learning and the effectiveness of classroom instruction; and

WHEREAS, in June 2010, the New Jersey State Board of Education amended the Core Curriculum Content Standards to include the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics and English Language Arts to provide clear guidelines for teachers and their pupils; and

WHEREAS, since 1990, the federal government has required the assessment of students and, beginning in 2015, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (“PARCC”) assessment will replace the current State assessments; and

WHEREAS, in August 2012, with unanimous bipartisan support from the Legislature, I signed into law the Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey (“TEACHNJ”) Act, which is designed to raise student achievement by improving instruction through constructive feedback, evaluations, and professional support of teachers and school leaders; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Education, as part of the flexibility available under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, requires the State to use student growth data as a significant factor in the evaluation of teaching staff; and

WHEREAS, once implemented, the PARCC assessment will measure student learning and its results will be considered as one component, among others, as required in the evaluation of teaching staff under the TEACHNJ Act; and

WHEREAS, in order to determine if the Core Curriculum Content Standards and the PARCC assessment are appropriate to be implemented by school districts through New Jersey, a Study Commission composed of a broad range of education practitioners and experts should be established to review and make recommendations on the quality and effectiveness of all student assessments administered to K-12 students by the State, school districts, and individual schools, including those administered for college admission, college credit, and career pathways; and

NOW, THEREFORE, I, CHRIS CHRISTIE, Governor of the State of New Jersey, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and by the Statutes of this State, do hereby Order and DIRECT:

1. There is hereby created a Study Commission on the Use of Student Assessments in New Jersey (the “Study Commission”).

2. The Study Commission shall consist of up to nine (9) members appointed by the Governor who shall serve at his pleasure. The Governor shall select a chairperson from among the members of the Study Commission. The Study Commission shall consist of individuals who have practical experience, knowledge, or expertise in the areas of education policy or

administration. All members of the Study Commission shall serve without compensation. The Study Commission shall organize as soon as practicable after the appointment of its members.

3. The Study Commission is charged with presenting recommendations to the Governor regarding the quality and effectiveness of student assessments administered to K-12 students. In particular, the Study Commission shall consider and make recommendations on the volume, frequency, and impact of student assessments occurring throughout New Jersey school districts, and on the Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Common Core State Standards.

4. The Department of Education shall provide staff support to the Study Commission. The Study Commission shall be authorized to call upon any department, office, division, or agency of this State to supply it with any information, personnel, or other assistance available, as the Study Commission deems necessary to discharge its duties under this Order. Each department, office, division, and agency of this State is hereby required, to the extent not inconsistent with law, to cooperate fully with the Study Commission within the limits of its statutory authority and to furnish the Study Commission with such assistance on as timely a basis as is necessary to accomplish the purposes of the Order. The Study Commission may consult with education stakeholders, practitioners, experts, or other knowledgeable individuals in the public or private sector on any aspect of its mission.

5. The Study Commission shall issue an initial report containing its recommendations to the Governor no later than December 31, 2014. The Study Commission shall issue a final report to the Governor by July 31, 2015. The Study Commission shall expire upon the Governor's receipt of a report containing their final recommendations pursuant to this Executive Order.

6. The final report of the Study Commission shall be provided to the Legislature and shall be made available to the public.

7. This Order shall take effect immediately.

GIVEN, under my hand and seal this 14th day of July,
Two Thousand and Fourteen, and of the
Independence of the United States, the Two
Hundred and Thirty-Ninth.

[seal]

/s/ Chris Christie
Governor

Attest:

/s/ Christopher S. Porrino
Chief Counsel to the Governor

APPENDIX 2

Study Commission on the Use of Student Assessments in New Jersey

David C. Hespe, Chair

Commissioner of Education

Dana Egreczky

Senior Vice President, New Jersey Chamber of Commerce

Dr. Lawrence S. Feinsod

Executive Director, New Jersey School Boards Association

Catherine M. Lindenbaum

Parent Association Representative

Dr. Marcia Lyles

Superintendent, Jersey City Public Schools

Nicole Moore

Principal, Shamong Township Schools

Matthew Stagliano

Educator, Camden County Technical Schools

Dr. Raymond A. Yannuzzi

President, Camden County College

Tracie Yostpille

Educator, Freehold Township Schools

Staff to the Study Commission

Kimberley Harrington, NJDOE, Chief Academic Officer

Dr. Bari Erlichson, NJDOE, Chief Performance Officer

Peter Shulman, NJDOE, Chief Talent Officer

Beth Auerswald, NJDOE, State Board Office

Dr. Thomas C. Monahan, Consultant

APPENDIX 3

Brief Description of Presentations to the Study Commission

November 24, 2014 **Bari Erlichson, Ph.D.**
Chief Performance Officer, NJDOE
Topic: New Jersey's Statewide Assessments

During the Study Commission's initial meeting, Dr. Bari Erlichson provided an overview of federal requirements for academic content and student achievement standards in English language arts, mathematics, and science under the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). Dr. Erlichson also discussed to whom the federal requirements apply and the grade levels assessed. She further discussed subgroup accountability, assessment of English language proficiency, alternative assessments for students with severe disabilities, and required sample participation in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing. Finally, she provided an overview of State laws and regulations governing high school graduation and the State assessment system, as well as a brief history of testing in New Jersey (1996-2014).

December 5, 2014 **Patricia Wright**
Executive Director, New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association
Topic: Designing a Comprehensive Assessment System

Patricia Wright briefed the Study Commission on the process of designing a comprehensive assessment system, which focused on assessment *of* learning, assessment *as* learning, and assessment *for* learning. She discussed the purposes of State assessments, including school improvement, accountability, monitoring Statewide academic achievement, and national comparisons. Ms. Wright also operationally defined formative, interim, and summative assessments and discussed how school improvement is possible only when assessment systems are properly aligned with curriculum and instruction.

December 10, 2014 **Diana J. Zaleski, Ph.D.**
Project Administrator, Illinois State Board of Education
Topic: Balanced Assessment Initiative in Illinois

Alissa Peltzman
Vice President of State Policy and Implementation Support, Achieve, Inc.
Topic: Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts

Dr. Diane Zaleski briefed the Study Commission on the Balanced Assessment Initiative underway in Illinois, which is part of the state's transition to the PARCC system and to an evaluation process that contains a student growth component. She also introduced and briefly discussed the state's involvement with the *Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts*. Dr. Zaleski's presentation was followed by a more in-depth briefing by Alissa Peltzman, who focused on one of Achieve, Inc.'s core products, the *Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts*. The assessment inventory is a field-tested, openly licensed, and free-to-use tool that can be implemented by school district and school officials to take stock of their assessments and assessment strategies.

December 10, 2014 **Christopher Manno, Ed.D.**
Superintendent, Burlington County Special Services School District
and Institute of Technology

Topic: A District Strategic Evaluation Process

Dr. Christopher Manno, former superintendent of the Burlington Township School District, briefed the Study Commission on the *All Students Achieving* strategic evaluation process now in effect in the Burlington Township School District. During his presentation, Dr. Manno walked the Study Commission through the strategic evaluation process, which is grounded in four major questions: “What did we do?”; “Did it work?”; “How do we know?”; and “So, now what?” Dr. Manno reported that the strategic plan’s key components are mission, values, and goals. All initiatives, whether State or local, are situated within the organizational goals. Further, the school district’s objectives, which are designed to implement the goals, are revised each school year, continuously assessed for progress, and routinely reported to the district board of education. Dr. Manno discussed how support for the plan was secured from a cross-section of the community. He also described the methods by which the school district celebrated the plan’s launch and results, as well as how the plan created a change in the school district’s culture and the formula used for promoting the culture change.

January 14, 2015

Kimberley Harrington

Chief Academic Officer, NJDOE

Topic: Introduction to Academic Standards and the Common Core

Kimberley Harrington provided an overview of the history of academic standards in New Jersey and nationally and discussed the differences between standards and curriculum. She further illustrated how the Common Core State Standards encourage preparation, competition, equity, clarity, and collaboration. She also discussed the role of international benchmarking in the development of the Common Core State Standards and the evidence and criteria used. Ms. Harrington also outlined teacher involvement in the development and adoption processes and discussed the shifts the Common Core State Standards will require in mathematics and English language arts. She provided an overview of the standards and practices in both content areas, the differences between the Common Core State Standards and the previous Core Curriculum Content Standards in mathematics and English language arts, and the literacy standards embedded in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects in grades 6 through 12.

January 14, 2015

Dorothy Strickland, Ph.D.

Professor Emerita, Rutgers University and Member, N.J. State Board of Education

Topic: Toward a Comprehensive and Coherent Assessment System
Linking Standards/Instruction/Assessment

Dr. Strickland briefed the Study Commission on an assessment model that links standards, instruction, and assessment to improve teaching and learning. Dr. Strickland discussed the purposes, uses, and concerns regarding a comprehensive and coherent assessment program. Dr. Strickland also made the following recommendation regarding English language arts: establish a shared vision across all areas of the curriculum that includes an on-going, interdisciplinary professional development model linked to classroom instruction and that fosters a shared responsibility for literacy development in science, social studies, and other non-English language arts subjects. Dr. Strickland also recommended use of the *PARCC Model Content Framework* that accompanies the PARCC assessment. Finally, Dr. Strickland recommended a greater emphasis on formative assessment and suggested it is a functional and useful form of “test practice” when standards, instruction, and assessment indicate how formative and summative assessments align with summative ratings as part of educator evaluations.

February 10, 2015 **Laura Slover**
Chief Executive Officer, Parcc, Inc.
Topic: PARCC Overview and Update

Laura Slover briefed the Study Commission on the history of the PARCC assessment's development. She reported that more than 2,000 educators, including at least 90 educators from New Jersey, were involved in the PARCC development process. Ms. Slover said the test was developed by the PARCC consortium and not by the test vendor, Pearson, Inc., and every test item was reviewed by at least 30 different content experts and educators and went through at least six levels of review. She reported 11 states and the District of Columbia were administering the PARCC in 2015 (the performance-based component is administered after approximately 70 percent of the school year and the end-of-year component administered after approximately 90 percent of the school year). She stated the assessment is designed to drive instruction and is reliable and valid for use in a variety of ways within an accountability system. Ms. Slover reported the goal for the 2015-2016 PARCC administration is to provide the student reports before the end of the school year. She further indicated that the roster analysis over time will show individual student growth. Finally, she reported there will be an item analysis, and the PARCC consortium will release approximately 40 percent of the test items from this year's test after the administration and release all (100 percent) of the test items from the 2015 test within three years.

February 10, 2015 **Carolee Adams**
President, Eagle Forum of New Jersey
Topic: Not With My Child You Don't

Carolee Adams spoke to the Study Commission regarding a number of reasons to oppose experimental and expensive education reform embodied within the Common Core State Standards/PARCC, including the following: they are not legal; PARCC is neither valid nor reliable; PARCC is not diagnostic, and there is no evidence that standardized assessments increase student learning; PARCC is not child or teacher friendly and does not encourage the joy of learning; the Common Core State Standards and PARCC do not respect parental rights or local control; they are not protective of student privacy; they are not affordable; they are not relevant or rigorous; they are not trustworthy; and they are not expected to last. She also suggested the State drop out of PARCC and disavow the Common Core State Standards. Ms. Adams further suggested the State should invest in formative assessments; employ grade-span testing; restore the lost tools of learning (grammar, rhetoric, logic); encourage strong, intact families; restore student and familial responsibility for a student's academic performance by eliminating high-stakes testing; adopt the previous Massachusetts academic standards; stand up to tycoons; restore the family; recognize that all students do not need or want to go to college and dedicate high school tracks; push Congress to allow a tax deduction for interest on college debt; lobby to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education; and do not develop a new version of old, failed, federally driven schemes and products.

February 26, 2015 **Steven Swetsky**
Assistant Executive Director, N.J. Education Association (NJEA)
Topic: Attitudes of Parents and the Public Toward High Stakes
Standardized Testing in New Jersey

Steven Swetsky briefed the Study Commission on the results of a December 2014 poll, which was commissioned by the NJEA, Save our Schools, and the Paterson Education Fund to research the attitudes of parents and the public toward high-stakes standardized testing in New Jersey. Mr.

Swetsky stated the poll results indicated that parents and voters who were questioned overwhelmingly reported there was “too much emphasis” on standardized assessments in teaching public school children, and both groups favored reducing standardized assessments in the State’s public schools. He said the survey results also indicated the majority of parents and voters who were questioned had heard “not much” or “nothing” about PARCC.

April 16, 2015

Roberta Schorr, Ed.D.

Associate Professor, Rutgers University-Newark

Topic: The Common Core State Standards Study

Dr. Schorr presented the results of her study on the Common Core State Standards and PARCC that was conducted in two phases between December 2013 and June 2014. In the first phase, which was administered to approximately 1,000 teachers, the data revealed more than 90 percent of teacher respondents reported Common Core State Standards implementation had begun in their school, and approximately 40 percent reported feeling ready to implement the standards. For the second phase, which was administered to a slightly different sample of nearly 1,000 teachers, Dr. Schorr reported teachers generally supported the Common Core State Standards and also had mixed feelings about their readiness to implement the standards and about how well they believed their students would do. The second phase also found the level of respondent training regarding PARCC was low, and many teachers reported they felt the training they received was not helpful. Dr. Schorr also reported the key findings from interviews conducted included the need for much more professional development regarding the Common Core State Standards and PARCC. She further stated the results suggest that professional development needed to be sustained over a long period of time and should include meaningful collaboration with colleagues and experiences.

May 11, 2015

Bonnie Hain, Ph.D.

Director of ELA/Literacy Content and Instructional Supports, Parcc, Inc.

Topic: Instructional Tools and Educational Supports

Dr. Hain briefed the Study Commission on instructional tools and educational supports that Parcc, Inc. developed for educators to utilize throughout the school year. She reported that Parcc, Inc., which is the non-profit entity that supports the PARCC consortium, intended from the beginning to create non-summative tools and supports as part of a systemic approach.

Dr. Hain said the first tool made available to educators was the model frameworks, which informs administrators and teachers on how to put the Common Core State Standards together in a seamless way. She also reported the model frameworks allow school districts to maintain local control of curricula while ensuring they are aligned to the Common Core State Standards. She further added that additional supports currently available to educators include instructional tools (i.e., diagnostic assessments, K-2 formative, and speaking and listening), job-embedded professional development, timely achievement data, and peer-to-peer learning. Dr. Hain said the optional tools are meant to help teachers determine their students’ strengths and needs and to show in-year changes at the student level, but the tools are not designed for reporting or accountability purposes.

Dr. Hain also reported that diagnostic assessments, which are computer-based tests that take just a few minutes to complete, are of the same rigor as the PARCC summative assessments, and the two can be used together to determine each student’s needs. Dr. Hain indicated the results from the PARCC assessment can show if a student has a reading comprehension issue, for example, and then one of the diagnostic components can pinpoint the cause without having to subject the

student to interventions not designed to address a precise issue. As a further example, Dr. Hain described how the comprehension of literary and informational texts component of the English language arts diagnostic assessment can be used to determine if a student struggles with the subject content of a particular text or has an overall English comprehension issue. She also provided samples of draft reports that teachers will be able to access after administering the diagnostic assessments and illustrated how teachers will be able to use the reports to determine the likelihood that students have mastered individual skills.

May 29, 2015

Henry Cram, Ed.D.

President, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools –
Commission on Elementary and Secondary Schools
Topic: School Improvement through Accreditation

Dr. Cram briefed the Study Commission on the topic of school improvement through accreditation. Dr. Cram reported that the voluntary accreditation process allows a school to self-evaluate how it compares against 12 world-class standards. Dr. Cram also said the process goes well beyond assessment scores and helps a school develop a strategic plan; clarify its mission; measure progress toward specific improvement goals; demonstrate its efficacy or added value; build community support; organize for continuous self-improvement; and receive external validation from peers. Finally, Dr. Cram discussed how the accreditation process examines a school in a holistic way, supplements school performance data, and builds a coalition of parents, teachers, and administrators.

May 29, 2015

Peter Shulman

Chief Talent Officer, NJDOE

Carl Blanchard

Director, Office of Evaluation, NJDOE

Topic: Achieve NJ: Update on Median Student Growth Percentiles and
Student Growth Objectives

Peter Shulman and Carl Blanchard updated the Study Commission on New Jersey's median student growth percentiles (mSGPs) and student growth objectives (SGOs), which are part of the State's educator evaluation system – AchieveNJ. Mr. Shulman reported the evaluation system's objective is to achieve student growth and to focus on how to get *every* child to show growth. He added AchieveNJ's focus is not on students achieving absolute proficiency or on their scale scores on assessments. Mr. Shulman cautioned that individuals who wrongly focus on an educator's summative rating miss the entire point of the evaluation system. Mr. Blanchard reported that SGOs are meant to be developed by teachers, supported by administrators, and focused on students. He also reported that SGOs are developed by choosing or developing a quality assessment aligned to the standards, determining students' starting points, setting ambitious yet achievable student learning goals with supervisor input and approval, tracking progress and refining instruction accordingly, and reviewing results and discussing the score with the teacher's supervisor. Mr. Shulman suggested teacher-developed SGOs foster ownership and are helping to lead to better conversations about instruction across the State.

June 9, 2015

Elizabeth Franks, Ed.D.

Executive Board Member, N.J. Teachers of English to Speakers of Other
Languages-N.J. Bilingual Educators (NJTESOL-NJBE)

Topic: ELLs and the Impact of CCSS and PARCC

Dr. Franks provided an overview of English language learners (ELLs) and the impact of the Common Core State Standards and PARCC on ELLs. While the Common Core State Standards strive for equality, Dr. Franks stated some ELLs will not have the opportunity to meet the rigorous standards if they are not provided the appropriate supports. She also reported that an appropriate education does not mean the same education for every student; equity is achieved when ELLs receive proper support.

Dr. Franks reported it can take an ELL (who enters at Level 1) four to five years to reach Level 4 of English language proficiency, which usually means the student no longer needs language assistance programs. She indicated that prior schooling in a student's previous country is the biggest predictor of student success; if a student is proficient in his or her native language, he or she usually can master English in a few years. She also indicated PARCC is not discriminatory enough to capture what ELLs at lower proficiency levels really know.

Dr. Franks suggested school districts need additional guidance regarding appropriate supports and how to provide them because not every school district is providing appropriate support to its ELL population. She further suggested a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education to allow newly arrived students a two-year exemption from assessments would be beneficial for ELLs. Finally, she said making the PARCC ELA assessment available in Spanish like the mathematics assessment would allow schools to assess literacy skills and not just English proficiency.

June 9, 2015

Susan Martz

Assistant Commissioner, NJDOE

Karen Campbell, LP.D.

Director, Office of Supplemental Educational Programs/Title I, NJDOE

Topic: The Assessment of English Language Learners

Susan Martz briefed the Study Commission on issues regarding the assessment of ELLs. Ms. Martz reported that ELLs are a diverse student population comprised of students from different ethnic backgrounds with various native languages, socioeconomic status, and length/quality of prior schooling. She also reported that 5 percent of the State's public school population, or more than 70,000 students, were classified as ELLs as of October 2014. Although the overwhelming majority of ELLs in the State speak Spanish (approximately 70 percent), Ms. Martz indicated that Arabic, Chinese, Haitian/Haitian Creole, and Korean are also included in the top five native languages for ELLs in New Jersey.

Ms. Martz further reported the achievement gaps between ELLs and the total student population in both ELA and mathematics, although the ELL population does not include students who previously were classified as ELLs and have successfully completed language assistance programs. She indicated that Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires ELLs to be assessed on academic content standards in English language arts and mathematics, which is done through the PARCC assessments. She also indicated that Title III of the ESEA requires assessment of English language proficiency, which is done via ACCESS for ELLs. She said the latter assessment often is used to establish a student's level of English language proficiency and to determine whether a student qualifies for language assistance programs or has gained sufficient English proficiency to no longer warrant the supports. Ms. Martz also reported that New Jersey regulations at N.J.A.C. 6A:15, Bilingual Education, require the use of multiple measures to establish proficiency - besides ACCESS for ELLs or one of the other State-approved language assessments.

Dr. Campbell briefed the Study Commission on the five language standards, the four language domains, and the performance criteria assessed by ACCESS for ELLs, as well as the six levels of English language proficiency. She also discussed the State assessment requirements, which include PARCC, for ELLs taught in the general education curriculum, and the alternative assessment, Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM), for ELLs with significant cognitive disabilities. Dr. Campbell also reported ELLs in grades 3 through 8 are exempt for one year from the PARCC in English language arts if they arrived in a U.S. school after June 30, and she said the PARCC mathematics assessment is available in Spanish. She also discussed the PARCC accommodations for ELLs, as well as the assessment barriers.

June 24, 2015

Susan Martz

Assistant Commissioner, NJDOE

Margaret McDonald

Director, Office of Special Education Programs, NJDOE

Topic: Students with Disabilities

Susan Martz briefed the Study Commission on the State assessment requirements for students with disabilities. She reported students with individualized education programs (IEPs) are expected to learn the general education curriculum. She further reported the Universal Design for Learning, accommodations and modified learning objectives are utilized to assist students with disabilities in achieving that goal. Ms. Martz explained students with disabilities are a very diverse population with a range of needs (functional, organizational and employment skills) and expected outcomes.

Ms. Martz also outlined the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provisions that require the State to develop guidelines for appropriate accommodations for assessments and to develop and implement an alternative assessment for students who cannot participate in regular assessments even with accommodations. She indicated a student's IEP determines whether he/she takes the regular State assessment or the alternative assessment and also outlines the accommodations that must be provided if the student takes the regular assessment.

Margaret McDonald reported the NJDOE had been part of a PARCC working group regarding accommodations and accessibility for three years prior to the assessment's administration. She also outlined the accessibility features, like frequent breaks, that are available to all students and not just students with IEPs. Ms. McDonald also discussed the accommodations available to students with IEPs or 504 plans that must be determined in advance and included in an IEP or 504 plan, unless emergency circumstances exist. She also reported child study teams met in spring 2014 to develop assessment accommodations for the 2015 State assessment for each student with an IEP.

Margaret McDonald further reported that the State still has the alternative proficiency assessment (APA) in science but now utilizes the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) assessment in English language arts and mathematics for students with the most significant disabilities. She also outlined the DLM participation guidelines and described the differences between PARCC and DLM assessments, as well as the success and challenges of administering the DLM.

June 24, 2015

Barbara Makoski

Superintendent, Cape May County Special Services School District

Topic: Assessing Our Most Special Students

Ms. Makoski briefed the Study Commission on behalf of the N.J. Joint Council of County Special Services School Districts. She reported that the State's eight special services school districts, which provide programs for students with autism, multiple disabilities, preschool disabilities, and moderate-severe cognitive impairments, prepare students to be college ready, if possible, and career ready. She also reported the school districts focus on developing students' social skills, if necessary.

Ms. Makoski also discussed the assessment goals for students in special services school districts and indicated student progress often is measured in small increments (months instead of years). She indicated the special services districts like the DLM because it is based on, and is informing, instruction. She stated the learning maps clarify the pathways for a student to meet the goals of the Common Core State Standards and will help inform instruction. She also indicated that teachers and administrators preferred the DLM over the APA because the former is highly individualized, more diagnostic, and less time consuming among other factors.

Ms. Makoski also reported the special services school districts faced challenges in administering PARCC and DLM for the first time. Among the challenges were preparing teachers to administer multiple formats (PARCC, NJASK, APA, and DLM), which took teachers out of the classroom, as well as the time it took to administer the assessments. She also indicated students faced challenges with the new assessments. For example, she said autistic students rely heavily on prompting, yet they were not permitted to be prompted with the DLM, and students who function at a preschool level were tested even though New Jersey does not require State assessments for preschool students.

Ms. Makoski also recommended limiting the impact of the assessments on instructional time and focusing accountability on student growth. She also stated that the Joint Council would like to see training targeted at new teachers and new test elements without forcing teachers to retrain on elements they have been utilizing for years. She also stated requiring all teachers to receive the same training for assessments leaves minimal time for professional development and for teachers to be creative, and it allows for less time for teachers to talk to IEP teams and case managers about individual student needs.

July 22, 2015

Peter Shulman

Chief Talent Officer, NJDOE

Topic: 2013-2014 AchieveNJ Implementation: Key Findings

Peter Shulman re-visited the Study Commission to present about the State's educator evaluation process pursuant to the TEACHNJ Act. Mr. Shulman reported the assessment data are meant to inform future discussion rather than draw conclusions regarding educators during the first year of the new evaluation system. He also reported the law's implementation represents a significant step forward as educators no longer are subject to a binary system that fails to provide meaningful feedback and to promote growth for all.

Mr. Shulman presented data that show that 97.3 percent of teachers were rated as "effective" or "highly effective" in 2013-2014 and 97.4 percent of school leaders received the same ratings. He reported approximately 2,900 teachers (2.7 percent) were identified in 2013-2014 as struggling, which means they were rated as "ineffective" or "partially effective." He indicated the 2,900 teachers educate approximately 180,000 students, or 13 percent of all students in the State, and the evaluation system will allow the struggling teachers to be better supported to improve their impact on student learning.

Mr. Shulman also reported more than 75 percent of teachers scored a 3.5 or better (on 4.0 scale) on their SGOs, which are focused on student growth, driven by teachers, and supported by administrators. He also reported that results show no disadvantage for English language arts and mathematics teachers in grades 4 through 8 who receive SGP scores based on the State assessment system, as the vast majority of teachers who received median SGPs were rated as “effective” or “highly effective.”

Mr. Shulman also presented data on teacher evaluation ratings based on student and school subgroups and discussed the next steps the NJDOE will take to continuously improve the evaluation process.

Mr. Shulman pointed out that a careful review of the educator evaluation process and data for 2015 demonstrates (a) SGOs are being woven into curriculum, unit design, and lesson planning in a more seamless way; (b) the time and resources needed for the design, review, and scoring of SGOs are being reduced and the work of designing, reviewing, and scoring SGOs is being done more efficiently and with greater degrees of collaboration and innovation among educators; and (c) Year 1 data around mSGP scores, at scale, demonstrate teachers across New Jersey are not being disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by teaching a “tested” subject area.

Mr. Shulman further reported, the NJDOE reduced for all educators the weight of the SGP component to 10 percent in 2014-2015 in response to significant educator feedback and acknowledging the transition from NJASK to PARCC. He further reported it would remain at 10 percent through 2015-2016 to allow the State and school districts to make more meaningful judgments about trends in the data over time.

July 22, 2015

Michael Heinz

Science Coordinator, Division of Teaching and Learning, NJDOE

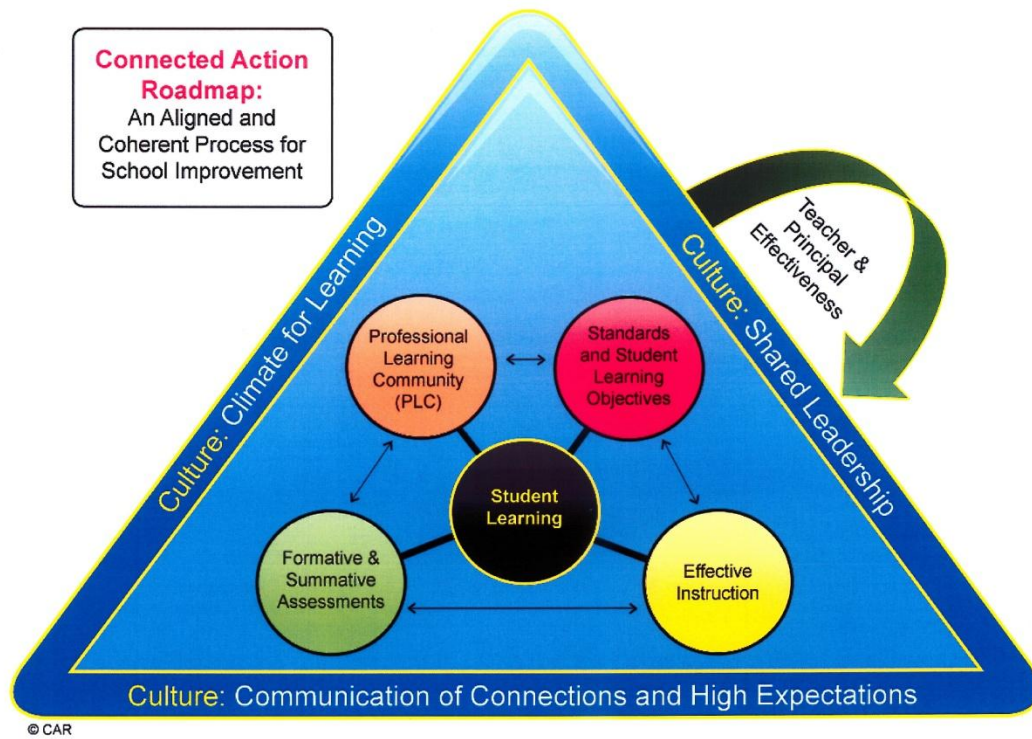
Topic: Next Generation Science Standards

Mr. Heinz briefed the Study Commission on the history of science standards in New Jersey, plus the State’s adoption and implementation of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). He reported New Jersey is among 15 states that either have adopted or are about to adopt the NGSS. He also reported the NGSS, which New Jersey adopted last year, represent the second phase in the evolution of the State’s science standards and focus more on students explaining how and why things happen than on mere memorization.

Mr. Heinz reported school districts will be required to have their science curricula in grades 6 through 12 aligned to the NGSS by the 2016-2017 school year, and the NJASK 8 in science and N.J. Biology Competency Test will be aligned to the NGSS for the spring 2017 administration. He also reported the science curricula for kindergarten through grade 5 will need to be aligned by the 2017-2018 school year and NJASK 4 in science will be aligned in spring 2018. He also indicated all State assessments aligned to the NGSS will continue to be developed by New Jersey and will not be connected to PARCC.

Mr. Heinz provided examples of how the NGSS expect more of students and educators and about how science education will change with the NGSS. He also discussed how the clarification statements and assessment boundaries provided in the standards help guide teachers regarding what they should focus on and prioritize. He also said understanding the standard frameworks is key for teachers to grasp the NGSS.

APPENDIX 4



APPENDIX 4 (cont'd)

A COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

	<u>FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT</u> <i>Assessment as and for learning</i>	<u>END OF UNIT ASSESSMENT</u> <i>Assessment of and for learning</i>	<u>INTERIM (DISTRICT-TWIDE)</u> <i>Assessment of learning</i>	<u>STATE ASSESSMENT</u> <i>Assessment of learning</i>
PURPOSE	Occurs on a daily basis within and between lessons to: (1) adjust instruction instantly; (2) drive instructional planning decisions including differentiation and timely interventions (remediation and enrichment); (3) provide meaningful feedback to students.	Occurs at the end of an instructional unit to: (1) monitor student progress; (2) to evaluate and revise the curriculum unit as needed (including strategies, interventions, resources, and assessments); (3) identify targeted professional learning needs.	Occurs periodically as determined by the district/school to: (1) diagnose student levels across grades, schools, district; (2) monitor/track student progress over time via multiple data points throughout the year; (3) evaluate effectiveness of instructional and curricular resources, programs, and interventions; (4) identify targeted professional learning needs.	Occurs annually for purposes of: (1) school improvement; (2) accountability to stakeholder groups; (3) monitoring of statewide academic achievement; (4) providing national comparisons
AUDIENCE	Students Teachers PLCs	Students Teachers PLCs Parents	Students Teachers PLCs Parents Schools Districts	State Federal District School Teachers PLCs Students Parents
DATA DRIVEN CONVERSATIONS	Is the assessment aligned to the standards and student learning objectives? Does the assessment effectively measure student achievement of the student learning objectives? How should instruction be differentiated? What interventions are needed for students scoring below proficient? What interventions are needed for students scoring at the advanced level? What additional professional resources are needed to meet the learning needs of all students?	Is the assessment aligned to the standards and student learning objectives? Does the assessment effectively measure student achievement of the student learning objectives? What interventions were used throughout the unit? Based on the assessment data, to what extent were these interventions effective? Have students mastered the prerequisite skills needed for future units? How will we continue to provide proper interventions to address areas of concern? What other teachers need this information? What does the data tell us about our instruction? What strategies, activities, resources and assessments should remain in our unit? What needs to change? What additional professional resources are needed to meet the learning needs of all students?	Is the assessment aligned to the standards and student learning objectives? Across the grade, school, and/or district, what progress have the students made? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Do the results align with what we have seen in our other assessments? Based on the data, what strengths and gaps exist in curriculum and instruction? How can this data inform conversations across the grade levels? What additional professional resources are needed to meet the learning needs of all students?	How are our students progressing? How do our students compare? What trends or patterns can be discerned from the data? Across the grade, school, and/or district, what progress have the students made? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Do the results align with what we have seen in our district assessments? Based on the data, what strengths and gaps exist in curriculum and instruction? How can this data inform the conversations of our PLCs? What additional professional resources are needed to meet the learning needs of all students?

APPENDIX 5

Resources Used by the Study Commission

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- New Jersey Secretary of Higher Education. (2015). www.state.nj.us/highereducation/
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- Wright, P. (2014). *Designing a comprehensive assessment system: Assessment of, as, and for learning*. Power Point presentation to the Study Commission on the Use of Student Assessments in New Jersey, December 5, 2014.
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