
Committee Meeting

of

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*“The Committee will discuss the efficacy, validity, and practicality
of statewide standardized assessments generally,
with emphasis upon their use as a graduation requirement”*

LOCATION: Committee Room 16
State House Annex
Trenton, New Jersey

DATE: May 14, 2019
9:30 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblywoman Mila M. Jasey, Co-Chair
Senator Declan J. O’Scanlon Jr.
Senator Samuel D. Thompson
Assemblywoman Patricia Egan Jones
Assemblyman Benjie E. Wimberly
Assemblywoman BettyLou DeCroce



ALSO PRESENT:

Rebecca Sapp
Executive Director

Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

SENATE

Hon. Bob Andrzejczak
Hon. James Beach
Hon. Patrick J. Diegnan, Jr.
Hon. Declan J. O'Scanlon, Jr.
Hon. Ronald L. Rice
Hon. Samuel D. Thompson



ASSEMBLY

Hon. Ralph R. Caputo
Hon. BettyLou DeCroce
Hon. DiAnne C. Gove
Hon. Mila M. Jasey
Hon. Patricia Egan Jones
Hon. Benjie E. Wimberly
Hon. David W. Wolfe

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MEETING NOTICE

TO: Members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools

FROM: Senator Ronald Rice, Co-Chair
Assemblywoman Mila Jasey, Co-Chair

The Joint Committee on the Public Schools will be meeting Tuesday, May 14, 2019 at 9:30 a.m. in Committee Room 16 of the State House Annex.

The Joint Committee is taking this opportunity to discuss the efficacy, validity, and practicality of statewide standardized assessments generally, with emphasis upon their use as a graduation requirement.

The public may address comments and questions to Rebecca Sapp, Executive Director, at 609-847-3365, or by email at Rsapp@njleg.org

Issued May 1, 2019

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ASSEMBLYWOMAN MILA M. JASEY (Co-Chair): Good morning.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: Good morning.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Let's try that again.
Good morning.

I want to thank everyone for coming this morning. I'm very much looking forward to a spirited discussion, with input from stakeholders representing all positions and viewpoints. We really have tried to be inclusive here.

We want you to tell us -- from your points of view, depending on who you're representing -- about the efficacy, validity, and practicality of standardized testing. We also look forward to hearing testimony regarding its use as a graduation requirement.

I'm disappointed that the Department of Education is unable to testify today and provide an overview as to where we are on this. But I very much appreciate Commissioner Repollet reaching out to me and expressing his regrets.

I'm also pleased that there will be, or there is, representation from the Department of Education; and certainly a transcript, both audio and written, will be provided to the Department. I hope that the Department will remain for the entire hearing and listen to what will be, I'm sure, very interesting testimony.

We have many speakers and time is short, so we are going to get started.

And I will say that if you see members getting up to leave, it's only because Senate Budget is meeting today, and this is just a really tough time of year to schedule additional meetings.

What I'm going to do is call you up in groups of three, I believe; and each of you has about 10 minutes to present. Let's make it 5 to 7, which would leave a few minutes for discussion, if there are any burning questions from members. Otherwise, I'm going to ask members to hold their questions so that we can hear everyone's testimony completely. My goal is to be out of here by 12 o'clock, okay?

All right; that's the goal.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: How about 11:59?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: 11:59? All right, Assemblyman Wimberly.

Okay; we're going to have a quick roll call, and we're going to get started.

First up we'll have Melanie Schulz, Director of Government Relations, New Jersey Association of School Administrators; joined by Andre Green of FairTest; and Stan Karp, Director of Secondary Education Reform Project at the Education Law Center.

MS. SAPP (Executive Director): Senator O'Scanlon.

SENATOR O'SCANLON: Here.

MS. SAPP: Senator Thompson.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Here.

MS. SAPP: Assemblywoman DeCroce.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: Here.

MS. SAPP: Assemblywoman Jones.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Here.

MS. SAPP: Assemblyman Wimberly.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Here.

MS. SAPP: Assemblywoman Jasey.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Here, present.

And I have to express apologies from my Co-Chair, Senator Rice. He's unable to be with us today, but I will fill him in; you can be sure of that, okay?

All right, are we short a chair?

S T A N K A R P: No, I think we have to set up something for--

Did you want me up first?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: I think Melanie is going to go first, okay?

M E L A N I E S C H U L Z: Thank you, Assemblywoman Jasey and members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools, for the opportunity to speak with you today on the topic of assessments.

At NJASA this has been a primary topic of discussion, and I would like to address my comments in what are three different, but related, buckets.

First, there is an immediate need to expand the Consent Order to include the graduating classes of 2021 and 2022. Absent expanding this Consent Order, legislation must be passed to eliminate the 11th grade assessment requirement for graduation. The consequences of neither of these things occurring will cause chaos in school districts. Right now, school leaders and faculty have no idea what this assessment will look like,

nor do they have any direction about how to inform students on what will be tested.

There has been much speculation on what might be, but superintendents must plan their school year around what is concrete, and not conjecture.

Also, keep in mind that even if the Consent Order is expanded to include the classes of 2021 and 2022, it does not remove the 11th grade exit exam requirement; and the NJDOE will have to start looking at a possible RFP in six to eight months for those graduating classes starting in 2023. And those are the students who are currently in 8th grade.

The Consent Order summary is as follows.

For the classes of 2019 and 2020, students graduating as members of these classes can meet graduation assessment requirements through any of the three pathways: achieve passing scores on high school level and NJSLA/PARCC assessments; achieve scores defined in the table on alternate assessments, such as SAT, ACT, or ACCUPLACER; or submit, through the district, a student portfolio appeal to the NJDOE.

Our position has been to put a bill on the Governor's desk; and if the amendment to the Consent Order is approved, then the Governor can simply veto this legislation.

Second, I would like to address assessment going forward. NJASA, along with many other stakeholders, has been meeting regularly on the next generation of assessments. Federal law requires states to conduct assessments as a condition of receiving Federal funds. Statewide assessments are required in mathematics and English language arts, every year in 3rd through 8th grade, and once in high school. Separately, Federal

law also requires a science assessment once in each of the three grade spans, 3rd through 5th, 6th through 9th, and 10th through 12th.

Working together with stakeholders on what these assessments should look like is necessary, and should not be confused with high school exit testing.

Third, NJASA fully supports the creation of a New Jersey Commission on High School Graduation Assessment Requirements. The Commission would research and study best practices, as well as looking at how other states address high school graduation requirements.

Stakeholders would work for about a year; and we have talked about September 1, 2020, as the date for submitting a final report which would propose recommendations to the Governor, the Legislature, and the State Board of Education. This is vital work that needs to be done, and I ask that legislation be introduced as soon as possible and moved in the Legislature so this Commission can begin its work.

Again, I thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of NJASA, and I'm happy to take any questions that you might have.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: I think we're going to hold the questions, unless there's a burning one. Because this is very clear, and I think it sets the tone for the discussion today, or the presentations today.

Thank you, Melanie.

Next up, Stan.

MR. KARP: Thank you.

Thanks for the invitation. It's a pleasure to be here on behalf of the Education Law Center.

(refers to PowerPoint Presentation)

Before I came to the Education Law Center, I was a high school educator in Paterson for 30 years. I had spent time administering and preparing students for every one of the high school graduation tests that New Jersey has used, and I'm glad the Committee is here revisiting that policy today.

I want to spend my time going quickly over a few slides that show how we got to the point where we are today, and then offer some recommendations and thoughts about where we might go.

Graduation rates in New Jersey are a positive part of the story of public education. We have the second-highest graduation rate in the nation. New Jersey, annually, graduates about 100,000 seniors, and over 90 percent of them have been graduating successfully from high school. And another positive, if you look at the numbers, is on the right hand side you'll see that the increase, since 2011, when the Federal government standardized the way graduation rates are supposed to be calculated across states -- New Jersey's rate has increased every year. And the rates of students of color and economically disadvantaged students have increased faster than the rates of other students, and that has helped to close some of the gaps. So this is a real positive sign.

We now have, in New Jersey, a graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students in our poor urban districts that is almost equal to the U.S. rate for all students; which is a great accomplishment, and a sign that our public schools and our educators have been doing a good job.

Since 1979, we've had a law, the *Proficiency Standards and Assessment Act*, that requires an 11th grade test in math and language arts

that requires retesting opportunities on the main assessment; and that requires an alternative for students who don't pass the assessment that is not based on standardized tests. That is a technique for evaluating student performance that's based on other than standardized tests.

And the tests, according to the statute, is supposed to be a measure of basic skills for all students and what they must possess to function politically, economically, and socially in a democratic society. And sometimes there has been debate over what that standard should be and how the test should assess it.

Graduation tests we've had, since 1979, are the Minimum Basic Skills Test; and the High School Proficiency Test 9. In 1987, the late 1980s, the statute was amended by the Legislature to move the test from the 9th grade to the 11th grade. It's significant that that took an act of the Legislature, because later on this became a legal issue when new tests were introduced that did not include an 11th grade test.

In 2002, we went to the High School Proficiency Assessment; and then, in 2016, PARCC.

The alternative assessments -- which were not standardized tests -- have been the Special Review Assessment, which was replaced by the Alternate High School Assessment; and then, more recently, replaced by the portfolio, used by students who did not pass the main assessment.

In 2016, the rules were changed in a way that was different than all previous tests. They were imposed on the class of 2016 before the State Board adopted regulations that required and authorized that test. And because these rules were put in place without filing with the Administrative Procedure Act, a challenge was filed in the Office of

Administrative Law by ELC and ACLU, challenging the imposition of new rules without the regulations required to authorize those rules. A settlement was reached in 2016 that offered some protections for that senior class, an acknowledgement that new regulations were needed; and it also initiated the data collection so that the Department of Education would track how students were meeting the various requirements to graduate.

Then the regulations that the State Board adopted after that settlement, according to the APA, had some contradictions with the statute. The regulations that they adopted did not have an 11th grade test, as the statute required; it limited some of the retesting opportunities that the statute required; it restricted access to the alternatives, making that access conditional in taking other assessments, which was not in the statute.

It also started to use fee-based tests, like SAT and ACT, which also raised some legal and equity concerns about whether all students would have equal access to fee-based exams.

The 2016 regulations also only had alternatives, for the most part, for three years, and then phased them out, which was another concern. And for all these reasons, a legal challenge was filed against the new regulations, and became an extra concern when we saw that there were dramatic changes in the graduation test. You can look here -- the passing rates for the HSPA, which was the last test, were in the 90 and 80 percent range. The great majority of students were satisfying that requirement; and then a small number were using the alternatives, either the SRA or the AHSA.

When PARCC became the graduation test, the passing rates dropped dramatically to the 30 and 40 percent range. And so, of the 100,000 seniors each year who were graduating, you had tens of thousands of students who had to take multiple tests and find other ways, besides the main State graduation test, to satisfy the graduation requirement.

You also see a disparate impact -- that the passing rates in the student subgroups were significantly different; and that PARCC represented an obstacle to graduation for students of color, for English language learners, and for economically disadvantaged students at a greater rate than for white students. At the same time, white students, too, only were passing the test less than half, and so they were also taking additional tests to satisfy the requirement.

The only thing that sustained high graduation rates during this period in New Jersey's graduation rate was the multiple pathway -- the availability of other ways to satisfy the testing requirement. You had tens of thousands of students there, on the right, who would have been at risk for not graduating if they did not have alternatives besides PARCC. And remember, the 2016 regulations, that initially were passed in 2016, eliminated those alternatives that those students were using after three years, and left only the portfolio, which was another concern. The State Board did take some action last year to preserve those options; but at the same time, it did not address the other contradictions between the regulations they had put in place and the statute. There was still no 11th grade test, there were still some limited testing opportunities, and some limit on the access to the alternatives.

Last New Year's Eve, the Appellate Division celebrated the New Year by handing down a decision in the graduation challenge. And it said that the existing regulations that were on the books were invalid because it violated State law and the plain language of the statute: the fact that the statute was very clear about requiring an 11th grade test in math and language arts, not separate end-of-course exams in different grades. The 10th grade test -- obviously, the ELA 10 was given in 10th grade. The algebra test was mostly taken in 8th and 9th grade, but could be taken in any year; and this clearly was in contradiction to the statute.

The decision was problematic in that it left students who were in school -- some of them six months from graduating -- without clear legal ways to graduate. And so, in February, a Consent Decree was signed between the Department of Education, the Administration, the plaintiffs, the ACLU, and ELC that allowed the classes, who are seniors and juniors, to graduate under the existing 2019 rules. At the time we had advocated that that be extended to all the students in high school, since they all had been subjected to the rules that were found in violation; but the Administration only agreed to the two years. We are still hopeful that that will be extended to cover all current high school students.

But currently, there are no graduation rules in place for the freshman and the sophomores; or for the classes of 2023 and beyond, that will be coming into school next September.

Some of the impact and lessons here -- the 2016 rules led to a dramatic increase in high school testing. ESSA -- the Federal law requires two assessments, one in language arts and one in math. Under the 2016 rules, New Jersey was giving six PARCC exams in high school; that has since

been reduced to four. It's still more than the ESSA requires. And in addition, because so many students were not passing, they had to take multiple additional exams to satisfy the State graduation requirement; which, again, is not a Federal requirement. It is simply a State rule that I know other speakers today will be speaking to.

The rules were also extremely complicated. If you've seen the charts put out by the DOE, they were very complicated, they changed each year, there was a lot of confusion. There is still a considerable amount of confusion, at the school and district level, over what the graduation rules are and how frequently they've changed.

There's a general consensus that the existing law requiring 11th grade exit tests needs to be repealed or revised; that it no longer serves the interests of the State.

And before I end with some recommendations, I do want to mention that I think that there is considerable common ground on this issue in the sense that everybody agrees that there should be publicly reported assessment, for ESSA and State accountability purposes, that students are given, and that the results are reported out publicly.

Everyone agrees that test scores should be part of the students' high school record, along with credits, activities, service, attendance, projects, and other records of academic accomplishment.

The disagreement comes over the policy of whether the score on a single test should be enough to deny a student a diploma when they have satisfied all other requirements. Remember, all the students who you've seen, all the numbers you've seen, are numbers for students who have met all the credit and other requirements to graduate. As a matter of

fact, New Jersey's graduation rate has continued to increase, even as those credit requirements increased for science and math to three college prep math classes and three college prep lab-based science classes. And yet, the graduation rate has continued to increase. The question is whether or not a test that might be part of the students record should be enough to totally deny that student a diploma.

The research on this is pretty clear. In your packets you have a report called *The Case Against Exit Exams*, which is not a report produced by an opponent of testing. It's a report produced by someone who is a strong supporter of Common Core and who was Arnie Duncan's Senior Policy Advisor, Anne Hyslop. She reviews the research on exit testing and shows, pretty conclusively, that the impact of exit testing is extremely negative on the students who don't pass, and doesn't help the students who do. That there's not a positive effect on college participation rates, there's not a positive effect on employment outcomes, and there's a very alarming increase -- negative impact on incarceration rates in those states that have rigorous exit tests.

There is also a large body of research that shows that the most reliable indicator of student success after high school is grade point average; which, if you think about it, makes a lot of sense, because while grading can be subjective across schools and subjects, it also represents a nuanced judgment by multiple teachers over many years, and also gives you an indication not only of students' academic performance, but their ability to read the expectations of an institution, to solve problems, to find help, and to persist in the face of expectation.

Our recommendations, going forward, are, as Melanie said, to extend the February Consent Decree to cover all current high school students in classes 2019 through 2022.

We also suggest suspending the existing graduation statute pending further legislative hearings and review, and NJDOE's development of new State assessments.

We think existing State assessments need to continue for State and ESSA accountability purposes; but they should not have individual scores used to make graduation determinations for students after the Consent Decree expires. It would be required during the Consent Decree, because the 2019 rules that would be extended include using the State tests, as well as all the other options.

In the future, once a class has entered 9th grade, the graduation requirements should not be changed for that class during a student's high school career. It's simply not fair to the student; the regulations say that; the statute does not say that strongly enough. That's a change we would recommend.

And we would also recommend that the annual data collection done around pathways by the Department be continued and improved so we get even more reliable data about how students are meeting the requirement.

This is the map of states using the exit test; you see there are only 12. You can take off Washington in the upper left corner; I know that Andre, and others, will speak to that. But again, there are very few states now still using exit testing, and there is no Federal mandate requiring high

school exit testing, and we think this is the direction that New Jersey should pursue.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you.

My head is already swimming.

Fortunately, we have it all on paper as well.

Are there any quick questions anyone wants to ask?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: I just have one.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Yes, Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: Yes, thank you -- for Melanie.

Melanie, in your statement you talked about the creation of a New Jersey Commission on High School Graduation Assessment Requirements. And whenever we do this, and we do legislation, we end up being stopped by who's on it, you know?

So I would think, to this Committee, it would be better up front -- the recommendations of who should sit, from which areas, on this Commission, so that could be established before legislation is done. So it doesn't become a detriment, as it's moving along, because there's a disagreement of how many members or who should be sitting on it.

I think that's something that should come out upfront.

MS. SCHULZ: Do you want me to talk to that?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: I have a question as well.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: I think that's something we can discuss offline; but that's probably a good idea.

Yes, Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: I have a couple of questions.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, Melanie, you talked about the assessments -- English, math-- Wait a minute; let me get it clear in my head. There was a way for people to not take the PARCC test; but the second one you mentioned, you said there was a chart or a graph, that it showed what they had to do. But there wasn't any with your testimony.

See what I mean?

MS. SCHULZ: Right; I will make sure that that gets included.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Thank you.

MS. SCHULZ: Sorry about that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: That's okay.

And for our Education Law Center friends, I can't say that I don't agree with a lot of what you showed us; and I'm grateful for the way the graphics you used spoke to my level.

But on the issue of-- I know that Assemblyman Lampitt, who is our Education Chair here, proposed legislation that we did not finally vote on, that was going to address this issue as a result of the Consent. Can you explain what it was about that legislation that you all did not like?

MR. KARP: I think our main concern was-- As I read the legislation, it only extended the rules for 2019 to the juniors and the seniors.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Okay.

MR. KARP: We were very concerned about the 9th and 10th graders; that was our main concern, although we had some others.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Well, I agree with you, because I have people in all those grades.

MR. KARP: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Personally, you know; grandchildren, of course.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you.

Senator Thompson.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Thank you.

This is the first time I've seen data on the percent of students who pass or fail the PARCC test. And I was stunned by the percent of students who fail it.

Any idea why such a high percentage of students fail?

MR. KARP: I think there are a lot of possible answers.

I mean, it was a very unpopular test, and there were many students who had a very negative attitude towards it. It was taken on computers for the first time. There were many issues, and tech issues, with that preparation. It was a more unfamiliar test; New Jersey's tests had always been based, pretty much, on the statute requirement of a basic skills evaluation of what students needed to function in society and to, you know, maybe, seek employment.

This was more of a test that was aligned with both the SAT and the National Assessment of Educational Progress Standards, a national test sometimes called the *School Report Card*, which has notoriously difficult standards.

To give you an example, on NAEP -- the two states that do the best on NAEP, every year, are Massachusetts and New Jersey; and yet only half of the students in each state pass, because where you pass on the standardized test depends on where you set the passing score or the cut score. And this is an arbitrary issue, and it's one of the reasons exit testing is not a good idea. If you set the test too high, too many kids do not graduate high school. If you set it too low, then you are not necessarily evaluating what it is that you say -- college and career readiness, or some other hard-to-define characteristic.

So exit testing actually undermines the ability of assessments to give you what limited information they can provide.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Well, when you speak of, of course, the language portion of the test, I can see where there could be all kinds of variations on how you would design that. But when you go into a math test, algebra -- I mean, you know, there's not that many variations on what you could get into with algebra and solving algebra problems. Just a comment there.

But secondly, do we have any information on what the passing rate was in other states? Is it comparable to New Jersey; higher or lower, etc. -- on the PARCC test?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: I think-- Andre, would you like to answer that?

A N D R E L. G R E E N: Sure; thank you, Madam Chair.

The answer is that when states moved to PARCC -- which not all states did -- we saw similar results across the board. Because, in fact --

speaking to (indiscernible)'s point -- the test is designed, in a perfect world, for 30 percent of the students to fail. That's actually how they calibrate it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: A third?

MR. GREEN: Yes.

SENATOR THOMSON: Again, my question -- how does our pass/fail rate compare rate with other states?

MR. GREEN: You saw relatively similar drops in all states. So states that were doing worse on other tests had similar drops. They're still doing worse on PARCC, but test scores and fail rates dropped across the board in all states.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you.

I think I'd like to have you give your presentation now; and introduce yourself.

MR. GREEN: Good morning.

My name is Andre Green; I'm the Executive Director of a group called FairTest, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing.

We advocate for policies that end the myths and overuse of standardized testing. And, therefore, we are here to talk about the problems with graduation exams and those requirements.

You'll forgive me; I'm the proud product of public schools and, as such, my 7th grade English teacher told me that, "I'm going to try to tell you what I'm going to tell you, then tell you, and then tell you what I told you.

So real quick, we're going to go over three points: Why graduation exams don't advance education, why there is a national trend

away from them, and how there are other better and more useful ways to assess students and schools.

In short, graduation exams are a solution in search of a problem. And as a note, because of -- as my associate Mr. Karp pointed out -- very recent changes in the national picture, this PowerPoint wasn't finalized until last night, so I will be getting it to Ms. Sapp afterwards, as well as a bit of research. I'll be citing a lot of studies; that data will also include those citations for those studies.

But it's simple -- graduation exams are solutions in search of a problem. They do not, in any way, shape, or form, improve educational outcomes.

Research indicates that graduation exams do not provide information that helps either colleges or employers. Quite simply, tests do not measure the skills required for collegiate success. We'll discuss that more broadly in a bit; but multiple-choice tests, frankly, as we all know as adults, don't actually measure the skills we use for success in careers and post-secondary life.

I'm a *Jeopardy!* champion, which makes me one of the few people in America who can say that fact recalled in a timed environment has actually gotten me money as an adult. The reality of that is that's not how we measure success as adults.

And research has shown that tests do not make high school graduates more employable, they do not increase wages. So if they're not increasing our desirability to colleges and they're not increasing our value to employers, who exactly do they benefit? And they don't produce stronger

college graduates; states with exit exams have not seen declines in the number of students who need remedial education in college.

And as Stan pointed out, we have not seen a correlation between (indiscernible), higher test scores, and collegiate success. The SAT is the only test that can show any correlation with collegiate GPA, and that is only a very, very mild correlation for the first semester of college.

Going forward, as Stan pointed out, the best correlation to collegiate success is high school GPA, in part because it measures things like the ability to complete assignments, work ethic, and the ability to do independent research.

In fact, graduation exams have been shown to harm student outcomes. FairTest is located in Massachusetts, where I serve on our local School Board. Massachusetts is often held up as the gold standard for the power of assessment. It is one of the last remaining states to have a graduation exit requirement, it's called the *MCAS*. And when they looked at it -- they last looked at it in 2010, they looked at students who barely passed the MCAS, compared to students who barely failed the MCAS. Given that any one test is going to have a margin of error, these groups are, in practice, pretty comparable. They share similar demographics, they share similar socioeconomic status, similar GPAs, etc. But despite those similarities, the group that just barely failed the MCAS had an 8 percentage point drop in their graduation rate, compared to students who just barely passed it.

When you think about it, this is actually intuitive. When you give a student a test and you say, "You must pass this test to graduate," and they don't graduate, you may wish that they would say, "Okay, I need to

buckle down and double-down on the work, and do a better job.” But in reality, a lot of those students say, “There’s no point in appealing this; I’m going to drop out.”

We found this result replicated in many studies throughout many states. We have found that graduation exams have increased dropout rates, especially among low-income students, and high-poverty schools and districts; both students who are low-income or poverty students in wealthy districts, as well as students in low-income, high-poverty districts.

And in fact, at least one study -- actually put out by a conservative proponent of testing -- has found that graduation exams have been linked with increased rates of incarceration.

So not only do they not improve achievement, they don’t really accurately measure achievement that is happening. Test-taking is a skill; and as I pointed out, not really one that correlates with post-secondary success. Standardized tests do not and cannot measure the research, analysis, collaboration, and communication skills needed in a knowledge-based economy. And we know this because every single system in America bans the use of these in the room. Why? Because if students have them, they would cheat. How would they cheat? They would look things up on Google, text their friends for help; let’s say they would do research, they would analyze that data and collaborate on that data -- which are exactly the skills needed to succeed in a post-industrial economy.

Also, we know that students who are otherwise great academic students, who have succeeded in life, but may suffer from anxiety, a learning disorder, or English as a second language, may excel academically,

and still struggle with exams; because test-taking is a skill. It's one I may thrive in, but it is definitely a skill.

And any one test is a bad measurement tool. It is, in fact, considered a measurement industry standard that making a decision, based on one test score, is bad policy. Especially for adolescents, we know that any one test score is going to be affected by very low-level, day-to-day variables. How much sleep did they have last night? Are they having a fight with their friends? Did they eat enough? These are things that vary from day to day, but have been proven to have an effect on test scores.

And accounting for all that, it's still the case that the single largest predictor of success on a standardized test -- it's not GPA, it's not anything other than parental income. When we do standardized tests, what we are fundamentally measuring is how much money your parents have, not educational outcomes.

And because of that, while they don't measure achievement, they do a really good job of reinforcing existing educational inequity.

And it's true -- standardized tests have documented decades of systemic inequality in education. It is not a coincidence that people who are otherwise marginalized in society do poorly on standardized tests.

But what they have not seen, in the last 25 years of real expansion of standardized testing, is those the tests moving to address those inequities. The inequities remain relatively unchanged; NAEP scores and racial achievement gaps on NAEP have been unchanged for 25 years. So the fact that we have a policy that isn't addressed -- standardized tests have not been addressing achievement gaps, but they have-- And especially when we create things like graduation exams, we are making those students

responsible for our failure to address achievement gaps. If a student who has done the work for 10 or 11 years in schools, has a high GPA, has met those standards, and is still not passing a test, that is not a student's failure; that is ours.

And because of that, we encourage students (*sic*) to teach to the test. We have seen a narrowing curriculum, especially in low-income districts, that require you passing this test to the bare minimums, which is why you don't see art and music in low-income schools.

Now, this is real quick--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Wait, go back to that last one; I like that one.

MR. GREEN: Yes, so the simple solution is, when you're in a hole, stop digging. And this is something states have done.

At one point, 27 states had standardized tests. As of Friday, when Washington signed a law getting rid of graduation tests, we are down to 11. We've seen Republican strongholds, like Georgia and South Carolina, abandon the test; we've seen Democratic strongholds, like Washington and California, abandon the test. This is not a partisan issue. The data is clear -- standardized tests do not work.

The Fordham Institute, a conservative think tank, simply went looking for evidence in support of graduation exams, and had to admit they couldn't find it.

But in conclusion, I would like to leave with what you could do instead; so if not graduation exams, then what?

There are success examples. I am the Executive Director of a group called *FairTest*, not *No Test*. We believe, as every teacher in America

believes, that assessment is a part of education. So getting rid of graduation exams is not giving up on assessments. New Jersey should know if its students are getting the education they deserve. Three states, in particular -- a lot of states are experimenting, but three states, in particular, I want to highlight what they've done to improve educational outcomes.

In New York City, there is a consortium of schools, called New York Performance Standards Consortium, that use portfolio-based assessments. Those students are showing higher college success, higher college stick-to-itiveness, and better success post-secondarily, than their socio-demographic peers in other New York City schools.

Massachusetts, where I'm from, there's a Massachusetts Consortium of Innovative Educational Assessment, which is working to build a multi-variable, multi-vector assessment of school and student quality that includes standardized tests, but also includes school climate surveys, college retention rates, student growth.

And New Hampshire's Performance Assessment of Competency Education is pioneering (indiscernible) work on task-based assessments, saying that the best way to measure if a student can do a thing, is to have them do a thing.

So in conclusion, and if you have any questions, (indiscernible) information, which we will get to you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you; that's a very good summary of the issue, and gives us a good look at what's happening nationally.

I know that you're going to give us copies so that we can distribute them to the members. And in the interest of time -- unless you

have a burning question -- I think we're going to go to the next group. It's not to cut you off; but rather, I want everyone to have a fair opportunity to speak.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Madam Chair, just one question.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Hold on; Assemblyman Wimberly.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: I'm sorry; I just have one question for you.

How many states have exit exams now -- our standard graduation in the United States?

MR. GREEN: As of Friday, 11.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Eleven out of-- Okay.

MR. GREEN: Out of 51.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Our Budget Senators are leaving; and thank you for coming.

SENATOR O'SCANLON: I apologize.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: That's all right, that's okay. We'll make sure that you have copies.

Next up, I would like to hear from Shelley Skinner, Executive Director of Better Education for Kids; Harry Lee, the Interim President of New Jersey Charter School Association.

And I understand Rick Pressler, the Director of School Services of the New Jersey Charter School Association, was not able to come this morning; as well as Patricia Morgan, the Executive Director of JerseyCAN.

S H E L L E Y S K I N N E R: Patricia has a sick child--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: A sick child.

MS. SKINNER: --so she is not going to be joining us. But I do believe that she submitted testimony.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Yes, thank you.

Okay, Shelley.

MS. SKINNER: Good morning.

I'm Shelley Skinner; I'm the Executive Director of Better Education for Kids.

I'll get right to the point.

Coming here to defend testing is not a popular thing to do; it gives me no great joy. But I do believe in high-quality assessments.

I think we do our students a great disservice by not making sure that they have mastered the content that is critical for post-secondary success. And having good grades simply is not enough.

You know, these assessments are the only unobjective measure that we have to tell the difference between an *A* in, let's say, Jersey City versus Short Hills. We have no other measure to tell us what the quality of that *A* is. I'll give you an example. Recently, the *Boston Globe* did an extensive story on the false sense of security even good grades can have on students. And I quote, "The harm done by lowered expectations doesn't just befall the kids who are barely making it through high school. As illustrated by those profiled in the *Globe*, a disservice is being done to their high-achieving peers; not young people at risk of not graduating at all, but those who leave high school at the top of their class and under the impression that they're fully ready for college. This includes elite schools,

like Bryn Mawr, BU, and Boston College. They discover, with pain and surprise, angst and embarrassment, that they are nowhere ready. The culprit is grade inflation, which occurs when subjective course grades exceed objective measures of performance.”

The test results, in general, I completely agree -- they are not the sum of a student’s full academic career. However, a high-quality assessment is an effective diagnostic tool to learn which standards students understand, and which ones they are struggling to learn. These assessments provide data to educators on how to best use their resources to improve student mastery of New Jersey standards. I get this is really -- this is hard work, and I think we’ve seen -- you know, to Senator Thompson’s point, why are so many students struggling with the test?

And, you know, I think -- I applaud the work that the Department of Education is doing, trying to really help teachers and educators unpack the standards. That’s tough work, and I think there’s still a lot more work to be done. But I don’t think it gets away from the fact that what they’re being tested on -- these core competencies -- are critically important to post-secondary life success.

So yes, it’s great that we have rising graduation rates. It is not great that we have equally rising remediation rates and increasing dissatisfaction in the workforce with the quality of competency that students are coming out of high school with. And that includes the Army. I mean, we have a serious problem that the vast majority of folks who take the entrance exam to get into the Army cannot pass that exam.

So I think we do have to have an honesty check with ourselves about how we serve students, or do not serve students, by not really understanding their level of competency.

It took three years to transition from the outdated NJ ASK, to PARCC -- now called, I think, NJLSA. That was three years of hard work by principals, teachers, and local school boards to provide professional development, make necessary upgrades to technology and infrastructure, and communicate to students and family. And I think all of us would agree that even with the three-year runway, the rollout left teachers, parents, and students confused, worried, and generally disillusioned.

The good news is, five years later, the field has adjusted to the current statewide assessment, opt-outs are way down, and proficiency rates have climbed for all groups. Despite the vigorous protest by many, the academic sky did not fall with a more rigorous assessment. In fact, proficiency rates continue to rise, year over year.

One of the most promising data points is that African American students and Hispanic students in New Jersey have made remarkable gains in ELA in grades 3 through 8. African American students have seen an average percentage point increase of 9.5 in ELA since 2015; and Hispanic students have seen an average performance increase of 10.9 in the same period. By comparison, the state average is only 7.8 percent increase in ELA.

Better Education for Kids is fully supportive of the Administration's plan to develop the next generation of assessment. There is no more important work than preparing our students for the ever-changing demands of a competitive global economy. We encourage the

Department to learn from the shortcomings of the transition from NJ ASK to PARCC by providing adequate time and resources for school leaders and teachers, and extensive stakeholder communication.

Finally, I would be remiss in not communicating our very deep concern about the high school graduation requirement for the class of 2021 and 2022. As you all know, the Consent Decree did not cover those two graduating classes.

I think I'm even more alarmed by the fact that those students -- the sophomores and freshmen -- took what they believed were their exit exams this spring. Nobody has told them that that does not qualify for high school graduation. I mean, there's a level of, you know, that it's boring. I'm being dishonest, quite frankly. Like, we need to be honest with students and families about what is going to happen to their student graduating from high school. I know this is a difficult conversation to have; but again, we are-- These kids work hard; they took a test under a certain set of rules. Nobody told them that the game had changed.

Finally, I would just ask that as we move forward we really have a thoughtful conversation about how we move forward with the next generation of assessments. And again, I think we do really need to have an honest conversation about how our students are faring post-high school. Even our four-year college remediation rates leave a lot to be desired; and I'll give you an example. My mother is an English teacher at Northwestern. She bemoans to me often how poorly ready her students are at an Ivy League school.

So, you know, it is not the sum-- PARCC is not the sum of everything; but, you know, it's not a bad diagnostic measure of honesty

about where our students stand. And so I don't think we do ourselves any favor by keeping our head in the sand about where we are.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Shelley.

Harry would you like to follow?

H A R R Y L E E: Absolutely; thank you.

Good morning, members of the Joint Committee.

Thank you for this opportunity to talk about this very important topic.

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

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

It has long been known that different school districts produce dramatically different outcomes for their students; and in the past -- as has been stated earlier -- it had been the practice to blame these differences on the students themselves. For decades, especially in New Jersey's urban

districts, there was little progress in measures such as graduation rates, college readiness, college attendance, career readiness, even as more funding was provided to school districts. Further, there are hidden disparities in student outcomes that persisted invisibly throughout the state, even in our most affluent districts.

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

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

We are now seeing public schools in some of our most economically disadvantaged communities demonstrate that all students can achieve high levels of academic proficiency on State tests, graduate high school, and attend and succeed in college. Our system of statewide assessments -- whether it be NJ ASK, HESPA, PARCC, or NJSLA -- has focused our attention on whether students are learning adequately and has, however imperfectly, provided schools with an objective measure of program success.

We have seen that when schools align their curriculums with State standards and train their teachers with effective instructional practices that are informed by interim assessment data, measures of success rise for all students.

New Jersey's charter sector demonstrates what is possible. For example, Newark charter schools are delivering breakthrough results for students in the city. In Newark, there are nearly 19,000 charter school students attending public charter schools. Last year, charter students in Newark eliminated the achievement gap and outperformed the State average in both English language arts and mathematics on PARCC. Eighty-three percent of Newark charter school students come from low-income backgrounds, which is more than double the State average. Beating the State average is an incredible accomplishment, since New Jersey does have one of the highest performing education sectors in the country.

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

Good assessments answer questions and provide insights into student learning, both individually and collectively. As we consider alternatives to the current assessment program, let's keep in mind the questions which any future system must answer. Are students learning adequately to be prepared for college and career; are schools effective in their instructional programs for all students, regardless of where they live, their backgrounds, or special needs; are changes to our instructional programs and standards more or less effective in driving student success?

Again, there's no single test that can answer all these questions satisfactorily, but we do need data points to get us started. Let's keep in mind the lessons that we have learned over the last 20 years as we consider

how to improve statewide assessments to better support all students in their learning and their lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Harry.

Are there any questions?

Yes, Assemblywoman DeCroke, and then followed by Assemblywoman Egan Jones.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: Thank you.

Shelley, a question for you.

Earlier, you heard me speak to Melanie Schulz about the recommendation for the creation of a New Jersey Commission on High School Graduation Assessment Requirements. Would you be in favor of that? I mean, because in part of your testimony you talked about providing adequate time and resources for school leaders and teachers, and extensive stakeholder communication. I mean, that's part of the problem. I mean, everything that I've heard from teachers and from parents is, there's not enough time in the day for the teachers to be able to teach the requirements of what they need, and also prepare them for the testing. And I think that's of great concern.

So we have to look at the global part of this and try to fit it all in; and how do we do that? So would you support such a Commission to take a look at all of that?

MS. SKINNER: I am in full support of looking under the hood and seeing what we can do better.

I also think, generally speaking, no teacher should be spending all their time teaching to the test. In fact, this exam was, actually, really meant to look at critical thinking skills, and not, sort of, check-the-box sort of skills, right?

So my honest feeling is, if teachers are -- which I believe many of them do amazing work. If they are really understanding the standards and unpacking them for students, there shouldn't be a huge emphasis on test preparation. That is just my personal feeling.

But I do agree; like, we need to look under the hood and look at more. And I hope that that Commission would be truly, sort of, bipartisan; meaning that, sort of, all groups who have strong feelings on this are at the table, not just some, right? This is a passionate issue; everybody has an opinion. But I think it's really important that we bring, kind of, all of those different groups to come together and have, you know, adult conversations about how we can make this better.

So I would agree with that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: Okay. So, you know, when you talk about that, you talk about a classroom setting--

MS. SKINNER: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: --and the preparation of -- a teacher preparing the students. You have to take into consideration the classroom setting--

MS. SKINNER: I do.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: --and all the students in there, and how they each behave, and the time that is spent.

MS. SKINNER: Look, I agree 100 percent. I'm literally the only person in my family who is not a public school teacher. So, you know, I grew up in this; I have an appreciation and understanding.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: And I do have members who are teachers, so I do understand.

MS. SKINNER: Right.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: One last question, and one thing that I'm very strong about is -- and I didn't get to say this to the last group of speakers -- you know, you can be book smart, but you test poorly. And that's a lot from students; you know, they're stressed out, they have tension. They're worried about not passing.

So, you know, you could be really very smart, but not come out well in testing. And I have great concern for that, and I think that whatever we do, we statistically have to take a look at that and really look at individuals and what's best for them. And I think, maybe, we can come to a better playing field for everybody. So I think it's something we all need to work on together.

MS. SKINNER: Yes; look, I don't disagree with you. Some students are really uncomfortable with testing. The portfolio is another way for those folks, but I think-- You know, I don't think that that's an answer for everybody; but it certainly is one way for students who really struggle with test anxiety.

So I'm not a big-- I'm not in favor throwing out the baby with the bathwater; but yes, like, I am completely open to, like, really diving deep into that work. And again, I'm not saying the test is the end all, be all; but we really need to know, like, do they have the basic competency for

post-high school success? And a lot of the data tells us they do not. And that's even high-achieving students, right?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: Well, I don't disagree with that. But I think, overall, we have to look at every aspect of it.

MS. SKINNER: I agree 100 percent.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Okay.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: So thank you for your testimony.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Thank you, Madam Chair.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: And I am going to ask that we not get into a back-and-forth--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Right.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: --because we have a number of people yet to hear from.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: To keep to her schedule, which is our schedule. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: Sorry about that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: That's okay.

First of all, I just want-- The first bill I put in the Legislature when I arrived was to stop PARCC, because I felt it had been administered badly, parents were being threatened if they chose not to have their child take it, school districts didn't have the computer resources that were essential. And my oldest granddaughter at the time -- a very excellent

student -- thought that all it did was waste time in her classroom. Her cousin, a little less as strong a student, felt the same way.

So I asked them, "Would you testify if the bill ever gets considered?" and they said "yes." So on that basis, I put that bill in, and it got nowhere.

PARCC was bad to me, not only on the student level, but the fact that we were assessing teachers, but only two -- English teachers and math teachers. That, to me, is blatantly inappropriate.

And because we have a time constraint, I'm going to stop my, you know, soapbox on PARCC there.

But the Commissioner, appearing before the Budget Committee -- which I was a member last year -- indicated, you know-- As the Governor came in, he said, "PARCC's done."

But then we got into this assessment period and graduation stuff, and we thought we were into it for two years, which should mean this is the last year. So I am anxiously awaiting the next round; and the Commissioner did tell us, this year, that he's moving all around the state, meeting with stakeholders, teachers, parents, school districts, boards of education -- I hope that's true -- in order to develop whatever comes next.

I appreciate that we need assessments. They have to be faithful across the board.

And the only other thing I have to say about the PARCC test-- And you alluded to the charter schools in Newark. I have to tell you, I was shocked that in Camden City the students tested so high on PARCC they overwhelmed some of the highest, most affluent districts in the area. I was so surprised. But they have been doing an extraordinary job for those kids

in a very tough urban setting, and I can only applaud that. And understanding that, know that whatever the next round of assessments will be, they will also be doing a good job.

So I didn't even ask a question; I just did my soapbox. I'm sorry.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Okay, so soapboxes off.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: No, can I--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Oh, no; Benjie has one.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: No, no soapbox--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Questions.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: --just a request. No, no question.

Through the Chair, I'm just curious to see your opinion of what this Commission will look like. And that's through the Chair -- if you could give a recommendation; that's it. When you say a *diverse group*--

MS. SKINNER: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: I would love to get your opinion on that.

MS. SKINNER: Yes--

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: No, no comment.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Write it down and send it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Can we have that in writing?

MS. SKINNER: You can have it in writing.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Yes.

MS. SKINNER: Thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, thank you.

I would venture to say that we could start with the list of people who were invited here today, because it's a pretty diverse group.

Next up, we'd like to hear from Christopher Tienken, Associate Professor of Education, Leadership Management, and Policy at Seton Hall University; J. Kenyon Kummings, Superintendent, Wildwood City School District; and also David Aderhold, Superintendent of Schools from West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District.

Thank you, gentlemen.

And for the record, introduce yourself when you begin to speak.

Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER H. TIENKEN, Ed.D.: Good morning.

I'm Christopher Tienken from Seton Hall University.

Thank you, honorable members of the Joint Committee; thank you for allowing me to speak today.

My comments today come from years of research on the topic of standardized testing as a Professor, and also from years of experience as an Assistant Superintendent, middle school Principal, Assistant Principal, Director of Curriculum, and a teacher.

Overall, the large body of results on the usefulness of standardized tests suggests they are blunt and inaccurate measures of the quality of teaching and learning that take place in the school, and they do little to address inequity of achievement with the so-called *achievement gap*.

The *achievement gap* itself is an offensive term that suggests there's something wrong with students, specifically students of color and students of poverty; because those are the students who are always

identified as having a gap. The term suggests that those students lack something that other students have.

The achievement gap, in fact, is a distraction. It's a symptom of a much larger problem that exists in our society. And that's the enactment of policies that favor some groups over others; policies that create, by design, inequalities of opportunity. These include tax policies that widen income inequality, housing policies that segregate communities, labor policies that keep specific groups of people on the margins, and even our own school funding formulas here in New Jersey that have clearly created winners and losers in ways that are completely inequitable.

Unfortunately, high school exit exams -- or any other standardized test, for that matter -- have no history closing any gaps: opportunity gaps, achievement gaps; name a gap, they haven't closed it. If they did, New Jersey would not have any gaps because we've had exit testing for decades.

Standardized test results do not capture accurately what or how well students learn, or how much they know about specific topics. The results tell us more about the social and economic conditions in which students live and grow up than what they know and can do.

Colleagues and I have conducted a series of studies across the country, in states like New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Iowa, Michigan, and now in Ohio, in which-- So we've conducted studies around the country in which results from standardized tests -- we were able to predict them by knowing only a few demographic factors, using U.S. Census data, based on communities and families. The findings from these various studies -- and they were all different grade levels; grades 3 through 8, high

school -- the findings suggest there are serious flaws built into education accountability systems that rely on standardized tests to make important decisions about students.

Most recently, we predicted the percentages of New Jersey high school students who would score at Level 4 or above on the PARCC Algebra 1 and English 10 assessments. Now, you know that those are used for graduation.

We predicted accurately for 75 percent of the schools for PARCC Algebra I, and 71 percent of the high schools for English 10, by using just two demographic factors. Now, of course, we loaded in about 27 demographic factors, and after all the stats came out we were able to narrow it down to just two for those tests: the percentage of families in the community with income less than \$35,000 a year, and the percentages of families in a community with income over \$200,000 a year.

We've done the same thing in New Jersey with HSPA and NJ ASK with other variables, like the percentage of single-family homes in a community or the percentage of bachelor's degrees in a community.

In general, our models can identify how much a particular variable actually affects a test score, and that allows us to identify the most important demographic characteristics that relate to test scores.

Regardless of the district-- So this is for all districts across the state, in these various states. It doesn't matter what type of district it is; regardless of the district, we're able to do this. The interesting thing is that all the factors that we find consistently that predict test scores the best, are factors outside of the control of schools and really inside the control of more social policy.

So they really tell us more about where students live than how much a student learns. So though some proponents of standardized assessments claim that the scores could be used to measure year-to-year academic growth, we found, again, that there is simply too much noise in the scores to be useful indicators of learning and teaching. In fact, one of the creators of the Student Growth Percentile -- the SGP that we use right here in New Jersey -- Damien Betebenner stated, in a September 2011, article -- and I'm going to quote, "The results of standardized assessments should never be used as the sole determinant of education or educator quality." Yet we're still here today debating whether to use a test score for graduation.

So nationally known tests, like the SAT, suffer from similar issues. For example, there's about a 150-point difference between the scores of students who live in families that make \$40,000, compared to students who live in families making \$80,000; and there's a 300 point difference between that student in a \$40,000-a-year household and one of the top earners, of \$180,000. So again, the SAT itself is picking up noise.

In short, the results from standardized tests do not close any gaps whatsoever; they actually create perception gaps. They increase the negative portrayals of students from poverty and students of color. They reinforce stereotypes, and are used to justify policies that strip certain communities of badly needed resources. Using standardized test results in high stakes decisions do little to inform the system of education. They did little for me as an Assistant Superintendent or Principal, as a teacher; and they ensure that certain groups of students will have to jump through more hoops and pay a higher price to graduate than other groups of students.

And again, when we look at the students who are forced to do that -- these are the students who need the most; they're paying the most, and they're getting the least.

Over time, assessments made by teachers are better indicators of student achievement than standardized tests. As we heard earlier, the high school GPA-- Say what you want about grade inflation and all these other things, it is still the best predictor of first-year college success and four-year college persistence. And I'm not saying that; the SAT -- the College Board is saying that. That's produced in their own research on the SAT.

And also, a very large study at the University of California, Berkeley included 80,000 students in the University of California system. They also found that in that system of 80,000 students, high school GPA was a better predictor than the SAT.

So overall I believe the time is right for New Jersey to revise its accountability structure to downplay the role of standardized test results; develop, perhaps, a multi-layered system of accountability. And here are some other examples from across the country. I went over the river here -- in New York we have a good example. We also have a statewide example from Nebraska that ran for about eight years during the *No Child Left Behind* era, in which it was a mix of district-created assessments, small intrusive state assessments that would meet the requirements of ESSA; and then also an accreditation layer, perhaps a national accreditation layer, but from Middle States, to take a big, overall macro-look at school districts.

So you really have, like, a three-legged stool of accountability that gives you different layers, different layers of data for different purposes.

You have school data for instructional information, you have state data for accountability, and then you have national accreditation as actually the main reporting tool for parents, so they know where schools are doing well or not.

Thank you very much for your time; I appreciate it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you. I appreciate the way in which you described your research; and the fact that we have all the references here as well.

So thank you; don't go anywhere.

All right.

J. KENYON KUMMINGS: Hi; good morning.

Kenyon Kummings, Superintendent from Wildwood Public Schools.

Thank you, again, for the invitation to come today.

This is my third time before the Committee. I first came in 2016, discussing the ESSA and accountability structures. And the last time was about a month ago, talking about minority teacher recruitment and the pipeline issues ultimately that exist there.

I think mainly I'm going to focus on the disruption that results from testing, beginning very early in students' lives; and then how it extends and affects their trajectory. I also want to spin it back and talk about the equity components to this; I think it's important to bring that up.

The District that I'm responsible for continues to have the highest percentage of student poverty -- children living below the poverty line in -- New Jersey, although the numbers are smaller than some of the bigger urban centers. We have a high population of Special Ed students

and a large ELL population; and I share that just because I think it'll give perspective as I move through the testimony.

Our students begin in different places. So in the more affluent areas, some students get to kindergarten or preschool, and they're reading. Our students -- many of them can't even recognize the first letter of their first name. So when we're talking about how we're assessing what kids can and can't do, there are a lot of different places that we have to look, and we need to develop our own systems to assess, so that we can modify instruction for the student.

And as a practitioner, I'll echo some of the sentiments of my colleagues that we heard earlier -- I've yet to see the value, at the student level, from these standardized assessments that we're able to utilize; and program and do things *for* kids instead of *to* them.

The short-term effects-- Last time I was talking about our role in the New Jersey Network of Superintendents. That's a group of -- a community of superintendents dedicated to systems of equity and trying to improve systems of inequity that we see in our systems. A lot of times we're heavily weighting standardized test scores, and we begin tracking students very early in education -- definitely at the 3rd grade level -- when we're looking at high-achieving students for Gifted and Talented or Basic Skills programs.

So I'll spin it back to the testimony about the pipeline issue with teachers and minority teachers. These decisions that we're making in 3rd grade, when we're tracking students, we're looking at how they're performing in middle school as we're starting to figure out what courses they're going to sit for in high school. And then the level of that

coursework is going to set up the prerequisites for the type of college education or whatever they're going to do after high school. These are things that we're doing that involve State testing, and we're setting the trajectory for kids, long-term, for their lives early on.

Long-term for schools -- my first time before the Committee I talked about my experience with accountability systems, as a result of test scores. Our District has been through CAPA, we've been through the RAC system; now that's been renamed the Office of Comprehensive Support. So again, as a look-back, I've been involved in accountability systems for 12 years now. There has been no quantifiable value from being monitored that way. My experience is that our systems stop; we dedicate a lot of time to those visits and reporting, and we don't see the gains that are lauded and the benefits that are there as well.

I know that we talked about eliminating bias, so I'm not going to go too far into that.

I will talk about the processes -- when we're talking about the graduation assessment. Our high school students -- if they do not pass the PARCC -- or whatever we're going to name it this year or the following year -- they have the other pathways that Stan Karp was talking about earlier.

We do have data from the NJDOE Graduation Pathway -- data sets that were OPRA'd -- and the argument for the assessment is that it keeps a level playing field for students who are in urban environments, as compared to those who are in more affluent-type districts. So it's billed as an equity issue and it is lauded as an equity issue; but I think it's important when we dig into the data and who's utilizing these other pathways, I think it tells a different story.

So if we look at the students who did not pass the PARCC and had to either go through one of the assessments, the alternatives, or the portfolio process, in 2018, 88 percent of those students were black or Hispanic -- for the students who were not able to initially pass the scores, which we saw were low from the earlier reports. Sixty percent are economically disadvantaged and 31 percent were English language learners. So we shouldn't be shocked that students who are learning English are not testing well on a language arts exam in English.

Also, 2,096 students were denied graduation through any one of those processes. When we look at that data and we break it out by percentages, 64 percent were black or Hispanic, 49 percent were economically disadvantaged, and 11 percent were ELL.

I was not able to find this aggregated data, because I was very curious about who's using the portfolio process specifically, and being denied graduation because of the portfolio outcome. I can tell you, locally, in Wildwood, in my five years as Superintendent we've never had a portfolio denied for a student who's going through that portfolio process because they weren't successful through other measures.

I think it's also worth noting that there is no State assessment requirement if you have the means to attend a private high school and you have the funds for that tuition. So if we're talking about equity and we're looking at the haves and the have-nots, that's a very specific *have*.

I guess my question is, are we, in effect, requiring minority students from low socio-economic backgrounds to do more than their more affluent, non-minority peers in order to gain a diploma? If so, are the accountability systems that are defended as mechanisms to ensure equity

actually facilitating *inequities*, by doing more harm than good for minority students in low social-economic backgrounds?

I think it's also -- when we're talking about standards and credit -- and the argument has been made that we abandon the assessment as a component of graduation -- our State sets standards for which our schools build curriculum. Our State sets a minimum amount of credits for graduation in high school, for which high schools then build credit-bearing coursework, which our students have to sit for and earn the credit in order to get a diploma. Only those students are the ones who are recommended for these other pathways. So if we're looking at this, if we're looking at who's taking advantage of it, if we're seeing now that we have data that shows that these systems are largely being utilized by minority, low socio-economic students; why are we continuing to have this as a component and a gateway to earn a high school diploma, which is a very important ticket for post-graduation opportunities?

I think the State of New Jersey can control how State standardized assessments are impacting the education of its students. I ask the Committee to consider the following.

Return the decision to issue a high school diploma to the public school districts, and remove this decision from third-party test vendors. As we've seen-- I had 78 percent in here, but now, apparently, Washington's out; so now a higher percentage of the country is doing so.

Identify what is required to be compliant within the Federal requirements, and find a way to do so with the least amount of disruption and negative impact to the education of our students. So whatever the minimum is to be compliant, my request is that we do that.

Ensure that school monitoring initiatives, as a result of test scores -- such as the RAC -- improve the educational environments of schools, and prevent them from hindering the education that is in process.

And I think, in closing, you'll hear different people advocating for different things; and they'll use the terms *robust assessment* and *rigorous assessment*. I would challenge you to ask them to define what that looks like.

Also, when we're throwing around *equity* as a buzzword, I would ask people to define that as well.

And when we're talking about assessment and education, I would really love to hear people start using the words *unbiased* and *valid*, instead of *rigorous* and *robust*, and then maybe we can begin to get to those points and that expectation.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you very much, Superintendent.

And I appreciate the fact that you have been taking the time to come before us and educate us. And I will tell you that this Thursday, at the Assembly Education Committee meeting, we have experts coming in who are working on the issue of the teacher pipeline -- something I've been talking about for years -- with an emphasis on attracting, training, and retaining teachers of color, especially; because those numbers and percentages have been declining.

So you probably don't want to take another day to come in, but we can certainly, if you like, send you the testimony from that hearing.

MR. KUMMINGS: I'm happy to submit the testimony. I just didn't hear about it this morning.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Oh, okay.

MR. KUMMINGS: I already committed to taking my son to Six Flags for his band field trip; sorry. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: That's okay. I hope the weather is great for him.

MR. KUMMINGS: But again, if we're talking about assessments, and trajectory, and obstacles, as I shared during that testimony, we're seeing the same disparate outcomes within the teacher training -- the Praxis. We have three; so we have two Praxis and we have edTPA. We see the same break-out and disparate outcomes for Hispanic, black, and white students within those programs. And it's really a pipeline issue, not a recruitment issue. You have students to recruit to go into those programs, and they're not even able to enter.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Right; I have that on my list, my to-do list as well.

And I've spoken with the presidents of a couple of colleges here in the state who have asked that we reconsider those tests. Because they're stopping students from even getting started, in terms of becoming educators; and that's a problem as well.

MR. KUMMINGS: Thank you for keeping attention to the issues.

Thank you.

DAVID M. ADERHOLD, Ed.D.: Well, good morning.

Let me offer my thanks, Madam Chairwoman, and members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools, for the invitation today to offer

thoughts on efficacy, validity, and practicality of statewide standardized assessments, with particular interest to the graduation requirements.

My name is Dave Aderhold, and I'm the Superintendent of Schools for West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District; a former Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, high school Principal, Assistant Principal, and classroom teacher. I currently serve as the President of the New Jersey Network of Superintendents, and I'm currently the President-Elect of the Garden State Coalition of Schools.

I stand before -- or sit before you as the former Principal of New Brunswick High School, and the current Superintendent of West Windsor-Plainsboro.

I'm an Adjunct Professor at Rider University, where I teach in the doctoral program on moral and ethical leadership, equity, and school finance.

I also sit on the New Jersey School Boards Association Mental Health Task Force, the SEL4New Jersey Task Force, the New Jersey ASA Equity4All Task Force, the NJSIAA Cooperative Sports Task Force, and the New Jersey Department of Ed Transgender Task Force.

Most importantly, I'm the father of five -- pre-K, 1st, 7th, 9th, and 11th. One is being SLA'd today in 9th grade; that's the New Jersey SLA -- that's what the kids call it -- *being SLA'd*. (laughter) They were formerly *PARCC'd*, now they're *SLA'd*.

I say all of this to share that I have a sustained, invested interest in the educational experiences of New Jersey students.

What I believe becomes lost in these conversations around standardized assessments, particularly for high-stakes graduation

requirements, is the why; why do we do this? Why are we testing? What's the purpose of assessment? How are we using the assessment results? How did the assessment -- what did the assessment results tell us?

And throughout my 17 years as a school or district administrator, it's the rare student who loses graduation due to a State test. High school graduation assessments have always had alternative pathways. But what has prevented students from graduating is the failure to earn established graduation credits and meet attendance requirements. By *credits* I'm referring to the students' mastery of content aligned to State standards. The curriculum is written into standards, administered by a teacher who is credentialed in accordance with the State code, and hired by a Board of Education, which is sworn to uphold the State laws and guidelines set forth by the State Board, the Commissioner, the members of the Legislature.

What is the purpose, then, in administering a statewide assessment? And so we have to ask that question. Is it the desire to hold individual students accountable to ensure fidelity in implementing the State's adopted curriculum standards, or is it about the district? And if it's about the district and taking a look at the district, then we have to ask why we're holding the graduation requirements on the individual student, and one step beyond the Federal requirement.

So let's talk about some questions, first, to think about when it comes to efficacy.

Does the PARCC or the NJSLA produce the desired results that you're looking for, as the Legislature? Does the time and cost of administering the NJSLA yield a meaningful impact for districts or, more importantly, for students? Has the utilization of assessment influenced

instructional practice? Has utilization of tests, as a component of teacher evaluation, driven a desired impact? Has the high-stakes nature of testing yielded any meaningful change? How much money has the State invested, or thrown away, chasing an assessment that does not meaningfully or seemingly benefit anyone but testing agencies and remediation providers?

With respect to validity, there are a couple areas I want to just point to.

State rankings: Districts get pitted against one another, based on meaningless and arbitrary factors that are being selected out of context, out of the context of school communities, without any knowledge or semblance of my community versus Kenyon's community, right? But yet we're ranked against each other when we're completely different, right? Our communities are different, our students are different, our socioeconomic status is different. Over 70 percent of my families have a master's degree, and the earned income of homes is over \$150,000. And our median average home prices are over \$450,000 in one community, and over \$400,000 in another.

With respect to PARCC and NJSLA, I just simply say it's the equivalent of changing the design of a plane while it's flying, and then holding the pilots and the passengers accountable. Every year there's a different modification for what we're being asked, what we're implementing; and the bottom line, underlying cut scores that would determine that the assessments are being measured upon today, have not been changed through any of the modifications. So the sample size for the original cut scores is different than what's being administered today. And so there's a validity concern with even how the cut scores are determined.

With respect to teacher growth scores -- they're determined not by the kids in front of you, but how the kids in front of you have done in a cohort of another 100 kids with a similar score. So it's called a *100 stack column*. And psychometricians in backrooms play games about how this has worked, and no one can truly define or show us how this works.

So if kids have a 215 on the PARCC 9 -- ELA -- they would be put in a 100 stack column against 99 other kids with a 215 from other communities. Then they're measured upon how each other grows on the next assessment. That happens for-- All of your 25 kids get put into 100 stack columns, and then you determine the growth for that teacher, based on that kind of measurement the psychometrician came up with in a back room, when they're trying to figure out the best way to do this.

With respect to PARCC scores -- artificial intelligence scoring. You may or may not know that we are scoring all student writing in the State of New Jersey by artificial intelligence, right? That was acknowledged fully by the Department of Ed back in the fall. I've never seen it in writing, other than in conversations. Scott Rocco from Hamilton and I put together a couple-page document, concerned about our scores. We actually had Pearson in three different times; they brought the muckety-mucks in from all over the country to meet with us to try to explain what they're doing.

Bottom line is they're using a program called the *Intelligent Essay Assessor*, the IEA. What we know is, they're looking at things like semantic storing similarities, vector length, Lexile indicators. They have a whole formula of how they determine our students' scores. And what does it mean when 104,722 out of 850,966 students scored a zero, in the State

of New Jersey, on writing last year, right? So about 13 percent of our students got a zero.

Is it possible that the very algorithms that they're using to determine student score impacts, especially at the lowest ends of the spectrum, were about 13 percent? You would never expect to see a spike on the left-hand side. Has the validity of AI scoring been really verified? When you're asking validity questions, and we're making high-stakes decisions for districts, for students, for staff members-- We're talking about -- have we ever pulled apart or disaggregated those scores for our Special Education, our ELL, by socio-economic, by race and ethnicity, by gender?

The IA -- scoring writing for PARCC -- and the lack of transparency of this process, and even an acknowledgement of this process, casts doubts on the overall assessment itself.

The Legislature must ask yourselves, "What are you paying for, what is your expected outcome with this data, and how is the Department of Ed ensuring the validity of the scores and the transparency in which we're having conversations around the scores?"

I'm a realist; AI scoring will most likely be here through my children's educational experience. But let's have an honest conversation about it, about what it means, how it's being done. If it's really about cost containment and speed, well then, we have to ask ourselves-- Then if there is going to be a component that there is not -- there's an error rate, an acceptable error rate in the algorithm, should that, then, be more -- something that we're looking at districts versus individual children? Because there shouldn't be an acceptable error rate when we're talking about kids.

Practicality -- just how much time? So driving my son to school this morning, as he tells me he's having his NJSLA this morning-- He's now talking to me about the four classes he's going to miss, and how he's going to sit and do nothing the rest of the day. And that happens time and time again in our classrooms across the State of New Jersey, where -- due to technology, inefficiencies, due to not enough staff to administer, due to challenges with respect to just part of your classes having the assessments while part is not, or part of your whole schedule is having the assessments, part not -- there's a slow down; a general just yielding of time that happens in our schools, and our kids are losing instructional opportunities as a result of it.

How much time must we waste in the administration of an assessment? I have a staff member now hired to be the Director of Assessment and Accountability; I didn't have that position before PARCC. My Assistant Principals have essentially turned into test monitors, lackingly falling behind, at times, in their assessments, as they lose essentially weeks to months in preparation for tests. PARCC comes on the heels of AP exams as well, and we administer over 3,000 AP exams as a District. That's higher than most, but you can imagine what that kind of logistical obstacle becomes.

What's the residual impact to the school day, and what are the budgetary impacts as well?

Members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools, our educational system has evolved in the shadows of a nation at risk, in a narrative in which we've defined schools as *failing*, and then administer tests to prove it. In my estimation, the only ones that have benefited are testing

companies, remediation firms, tutoring companies, and textbooks vendors. The promises of implementation, results, and impact have not been realized.

The proof -- all of our conversations are about high-stakes accountability measures, QSAC, performance reports, teacher/principal, Student Growth Percentiles. We're not talking about individual kids, and we're not talking about how we use assessment to drive instruction; how we use assessment to drive teaching and learning.

We are, however, having those conversations in public schools, because we are creating, we have created, we use internal assessments. The concept of testing this way is pre-computers in classrooms and in systems. When we were first being HSPA'd and HSPT'd, we didn't have the technology and the infrastructures that we have today. All districts have some form of testing protocols that we use to measure students and measure growth. You charge us with making sure that our students meet the graduation requirements; you charge us that we are making sure that our curriculum is written into standards; you charge us with making sure that we're hiring teachers who are certified and able to measure; you charge our boards with making sure we have policies and procedures in a (indiscernible) code.

We do all that; and yet, we still throw on another assessment to monitor children when -- put it upon the educators and the boards of ed that are charged with doing this.

I'm not, believe it or not, anti-assessment for the purpose of looking at the health of a community or the health of a district. If you want to think of the assessment as the annual physical on a school district, by all

means, meet the Federal requirement with one test junior year, and let's stop this ridiculous impact to our schools.

Let's look at it for what it actually is; because at the end of the day, we do not use your assessment results as a one-off measure for anything. We don't trust it. So I would never determine Honors, Gifted, AP -- any of those kind of entry criteria as a result of the NJSLA, or the PARCC, or the HSPA, or the HSPT, or anything else that comes from the State.

That being said, I do look at it as a component of an overall picture. But when I have over 30 percent of my juniors not taking it, as a result of the fact that they're all sitting in AP Lang; and my kids -- right now I have 100 who are in Algebra II in 8th grade, and they're not in my data. And my 6th graders -- because we changed our entrance criteria, and we tried to make sure that we were looking at equity issues -- all of 281 in two years sitting in Algebra II in 8th grade -- they will not be in my scores.

It's a very different equity issue than Kenyon is dealing with; very different. But we should have the abilities to meet the needs of our communities with more freedoms, instead of this prescriptive means in which we're looking at it, with the test.

I urge you to think deeply about what value you're getting out of this; because as a School Superintendent, I get limited to none.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Well, if we could stay here all day, we could continue this conversation. Because as I'm listening to you, to all three of you, you're really validating a lot of concerns and thoughts that I've had over the years, as a Board member for three terms in my District, as a mom, as a grandmother who's now seeing her grandchildren

going into school, and in 2nd grade talking about, "Well, you know, next year I have to take this test."

It shouldn't be about that. I have said it many times -- it should be about the joy and the wonder of learning.

We have not adapted to all of the technology and the opportunities that we now have to teach kids in so many different ways, and to get them really interested. They don't need to memorize the facts; they need to know how to think, how to collaborate, how to do research, how to express themselves. Because all the other things, all that information is right here (indicates).

But, you know, we want them-- I want to see children excited about school. I often think about the first day of school; and, even now, I sometimes go to the elementary school where my kids went and watch the kids come in; and they're so excited. And then you gradually see this kind of, like, deflation, right? Is that a word? And it coincides, also, with the stress levels of the teachers, the administrators, and of the parents; and this is not a good thing.

And we should be able to do a much better job with the resources, the research, and the information that we have; and with educators like yourselves, and others who have come before this Committee. I really believe we could do a better job.

And I think -- and I know that the focus of today's hearing, and other hearings, has been to -- not to be combative, but rather to be collaborative with all of the players in the education world. Because I think we could do a much better job for our children. And if we do that, then we will have a better society as well.

So I thank each of you for your testimony, and we will certainly be in touch.

Thank you.

Are there any questions for these three? (no response)

Okay; we have two more groups to come up.

Julie Borst, the Executive Director of Save Our Schools New Jersey; Marie Blisten, President of NJEA; and Dr. Christine Miles, Associate Director of Professional Development, NJEA.

Please introduce yourselves when you-- You can decide how you want to start.

JULIE BORST: Good morning.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Good morning.

MS. BORST: My name is Julia Borst; I'm the Executive Director of Save Our Schools New Jersey Community Organizing.

I want to thank you all for your time today on this topic. This is something -- for those of you who have been on this Committee for years, or on either of the respective Education Committees -- you know that we have been here talking about assessments with you all, now, for -- I don't know, five or six years anyway. (laughter)

So it's really nice to finally be having this conversation. It's sort of unfortunate how -- circumstances around it, but I'm glad we're finally having this conversation.

So very quickly -- Save Our Schools New Jersey is an all-volunteer organization of parents and other public school education supporters. We currently have 34,000 members; we are in every legislative district in the state, and every DFG -- rural, urban, and suburban.

So over the last five years -- just to talk a little bit about what the parent advocacy has been around this -- Save Our Schools New Jersey delivered over 10,000 signatures to the Assembly Education Committee, requesting that PARCC not become the graduation requirement. And it made a very loud thud when it was dropped on the desk up here.

In addition to that, in the subsequent years we have delivered over 60,000 letters to legislators, also to the State Board of Education and to the various commissions that have been set up over the years. This is one topic that covers, really, every demographic in the State of New Jersey. Parents are very concerned, especially when you come across the ones who have children who are older, who went through the school system before these things were put in place; and then they see how different it is, compared to their younger children. And it does not matter what type of district, economically, we're talking about. Districts have had to narrow their curriculum in order to maintain test scores for this test.

I'd also like to remind this group that when PARCC was first introduced, it was introduced as a test that did not need to be taught to; there didn't need to be any test prep for it because it was based on the standards, right? And Assemblyman Egan Jones is sitting here smiling, because we've had this discussion over many years. And yet, somehow, it has morphed into something much greater than that.

So now, New Jersey is only one of eight states that force high school students to take multiple tests in order to graduate. As you just heard -- and I'm so glad that Andre Green is here today, to remind us all about Washington; and that happened on Friday -- so there's only 11 states that require some form of an exit exam.

You've heard about what the disparities are in relationship to that. Save Our Schools New Jersey has written several op-eds on the topic; I've included that in the packet that you have. And the one thing that we have not talked about today, at all, is about what the impact of this testing has been for Special Education.

So I'm going to take a second and talk about a very personal thing for me. So I am a mother of a now-20-year-old daughter with brain injury. She has spent her entire K through transition life here in the State of New Jersey.

What this has meant is that every step of the way her education has been focused on trying to get her to pass a test -- whether it was NJ ASK or PARCC -- at her grade level, when she was not operating at a grade level.

I've lived in two kinds of districts in New Jersey. I've lived in a *G* District, and I now live in an *I* District; so a very wealthy place. In the wealthy place, there is no reading teacher for Special Education students. And for years, as a parent -- I'm not an educator, I'm a businesswoman -- as a non-educator, I was not seeing how my daughter was not reading and yet operating in the world the way that she does, right? And what I found out, when she entered high school -- which is a different district; the number three district in the state, so Northern Highlands -- what I found out when she entered there was that she had never actually been taught how to read; she memorized enough words to be operating at a 3rd grade level.

The excuse, though, for this -- and this is not a *gotcha* for this district, really -- the excuse is that everything is focused on this test. That was an unintended consequence? I certainly hope it was unintended. But

this is what the reality is; and this is in a place where we certainly could have afforded it, and still, by the way, we do not have this reading specialist in place all these years later.

So if you want to talk about what the negative consequences have been -- you know, I went to Ridgewood High School, as did David Aderhold, a few years later -- and I received, at the time-- I was in a high school that was considered to be the number one in the country. But it was also a time when a high school exit exam meant a couple of hours on a Thursday afternoon in May. Your biggest preparation was, "Bring a No. 2 pencil to school," right? This is not what this has become. This has sort of taken over everything, and to our detriment I believe.

So I would say also that, you know, the statute in New Jersey is 40 years old. There has never been a review of it. This, I hope, is the first step in a continued review of this.

And we know that exit tests, as you heard very specifically, are damaging to low-income students, students of color, English language learners, and, of course, students with disabilities.

I want to talk about -- this is an equity issue. So when we all talk about accountability-- And Save Our Schools New Jersey regularly gets dinged; we get called *anti-testing*. But I will tell you that asking for valid and reliable tests to not be used punitively is not anti-testing. We have been asking for valid and reliable testing, now, for years. We still don't have it. I don't know why that is, but we don't.

What we are also not talking about -- and I forget who touched on this; somebody had touched on it earlier -- but I think what we need to talk about, in terms of accountability, is we need to know how many lives

have been negatively affected by that statute, by not getting a high school diploma. We know that this is a direct line into prison for many people.

We need to know what the effects of drastically underfunding our schools are. And I would say that not having a reading teacher in a wealthy district is one of those effects.

We need to understand that schools -- that is teachers and administrators -- can only do so much with so little. Tests do not create equitable schools. Funding, economic development, workforce development, public policy, getting rid of poverty, anti-discriminatory housing practices, and so on -- that is what moves us towards equity. And we are not talking about those things; we have to address those things as well.

So Save Our Schools New Jersey is now asking for an end of the 40-year-old statute. I can't be more clear about that. Exit testing is not a Federal requirement, as you've heard in several iterations here. There are far more equitable assessments that can be put in place.

New Jersey would still have to meet the Federal assessment requirements. We are not losing a focus on how our schools are doing overall by not having a high school exiting test. You know, ESSA requires assessments, and I quote, "to be aligned with challenging State academic standards, and provide coherent and timely information about student attainment of such standards and whether the student is performing at the student's grade level." It does not mean that it has to be a standardized test.

This is especially important for students with disabilities -- and I will put on that hat again, since there's been very little mention of that,

right? Somebody like my daughter would have benefited, very greatly, from having been in the CTE program; but she wasn't because she wasn't reading.

So we play this catch-up game. There are costs here.

And let me also say that, in general, Special Ed students have been easily marginalized, because we are so focused on what those assessments are.

And I think in the places where a good job is done with those students, there are people like Dr. Kummings. He's formerly a Special Ed teacher; he gets it, he understands it. Those districts that do well have administrators who have history there, and I think they certainly need to be helping their fellow superintendents come along.

I would also echo a call for New Jersey to explore ESSA's innovation pilot. I've included a link here to the New York Performance Consortium's Schools. I visited them several years ago; a friend of mine actually happens to be a Vice Principal at Fannie Lou Hamer, which is their school in the Bronx. She is sending students onto four-year colleges; they are being successful in that environment because they have supports. And I will bring this around to community schools, which is what I would really rather be talking about than assessments still, right? All of those supports are happening for those students in those schools. That does make a difference.

I've included, in your packet, some statements that were sent to us by parents and teachers about what the impacts have been. I've included a complaint that a parent has filed in Montclair, as their student was being coerced to take Algebra I in 8th grade last week; misinformation the

districts have given out in terms of what the rules are for the classes of 2021 and 2022. So obviously there's been a lot of confusion.

I also wanted to say that Save Our Schools New Jersey has been advocating very hard for the Governor's Office to revisit and extend the Consent Order up to the 8th graders, so that incoming freshmen know what they're doing as well.

And I just want to read you one statement that was read to me by a teacher, who is also a parent. So she said to me -- she was from Ewing Township, "In my meeting, I was told there were repercussions for the district if students refused the test; that it is harmful for the district, and that is why they were investigating my posts on Facebook. I respectfully disagreed, as did my President. We both told them we know that's not true.

"As for my own children, the implications of testing have gone far beyond me being worried about high school graduation. They have all but taken free play out of kindergarten, and abandoned character education. We are seeing an increase in aggressive behavior because students are no longer learning how to relate to each other.

"Our middle school schedule is 100 percent dictated by test scores, with no regard to what is developmentally appropriate for middle school students. Science and social studies instruction has been cut in half in the name of ELA and math test scores. This is all a result of these tests. We are robbing our children of a well-rounded education. My own children are not at the high school level yet; but this year, in the middle school, my daughter and other students who refused the test were made to sit in the

auditorium with nothing to do and were yelled at by adults saying, ‘If you don’t like it here, you should have taken the test.’ It was a nightmare.”

These sorts of things should not be happening in our schools, and certainly not for a test. And certainly there should be no abandonment of what a thorough and efficient education ought to be.

So you can read these things in your packets; I’ve included several links.

And I want to thank you again, so much, for starting this conversation. I’m hoping it will continue, because we certainly will be here talking about it.

And I would just like to say that as far as creating a Commission to study what high school exit testing should be, parents should certainly be at that table, should that come to fruition. But it would also be the third or fourth Commission, if I’m not mistaken, in the last several years. So if we’re going to do that, I would hope this is not a kick-it-down-the-highway-a-little-bit, and that we’re actually doing it to try to decide what to do best.

So thank you for your time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Julie.

Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: Just a quick comment.

That’s why I had the question; because I think the appropriate people need to be at the table to come to the best decisions. And you’re right about parents being involved.

MS. BORST: Thank you; I appreciate that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you.

And I appreciate the fact that you mentioned some things -- some issues that have not been raised. And I would ask all of the remaining speakers to do the same, such as talking about Special Ed implications, the loss of recess, and play, and relationship building. Yes, that is very troublesome as well.

MS. BORST: It's social-emotional learning, obviously-- It's every school in New Jersey--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Social-emotional learning--

MS. BORST: --is part of SEL 4NJ, as is the NJEA, and many other people in this room. This is such an important piece that we need to get back.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Right; right.

Thank you.

M A R I E B L I S T E N: Thank you; thank you, Chair Jasey.

Thank you, everyone.

My name is Marie Blisten; I am a very proud New Jersey classroom teacher for well over 30 years. During those 30 years, I had the privilege of teaching students from kindergarten through 12th grade, both in Special Education services and regular education.

I have multiple certificates; I've taught multiple subjects, and including -- I am a reading specialist.

What brings all of us here today? I know the topic is testing, but what really brings all of us here today is what brings all of us and our members into our classrooms. I am also the President of the New Jersey Education Association, and what brings our members into our schools and into our communities is the children and our students; and actually what it

is that they need in order to become productive, successful citizens in this world.

So in that vein and as educators, we absolutely and adamantly support high-quality standards for our students. And we support high-quality curriculum and instruction that will help us get our students to attain those standards.

But inherent in curriculum and inherent in instruction is a tool called *assessment, student assessments*. And we support using formal, informal, and even standardized assessments in order to inform our instruction -- again, in order to help our students.

What we adamantly opposed is the misuse of assessments in the form of high-stakes standardized testing; and in particular today, we're going to concentrate on the exit test for high school.

And that reason is pretty simple. Research clearly shows that it does not help us help our students attain those standards and become successful in their adult lives.

Today, with me is Dr. Christine Miles. She is an employee of NJEA; but prior to our hire, she was a very successful and exemplary classroom teacher. She was an administrator, and then she furthered her own background and education, and has become an expert in student learning, and all those components, in order for that to happen.

She has a short PowerPoint that I believe is going to help us, inform us, as we take the next steps. And we welcome that opportunity to join with you in order to make those decisions and move our students forward.

CHRISTINE MILES, Ed.D.: Good morning.

As Marie said, my name is Dr. Christine Miles.

I have experiences as a high school English language arts teacher, remedial reading teacher, a school-based administrator, a curriculum supervisor, and was also fortunate enough to work with Grant Wiggins' team. He is -- was, as he has passed -- an internationally recognized leader in curriculum design, assessment, and instructional issues.

So we're here today to really talk about graduation testing, standardized testing, and the impact on our students.

So we need to think about what we value as a State in terms of our students' education, and what we believe in, and if our values and our practices are aligned.

Supporters of current high-stakes testing systems claim that it furthers equity for our students. However, these individuals really ignore the evidence, data, and research surrounding the inequitable reality the system presents for our students. So when we talk about these different terms, equality -- equality assumes that everyone benefits from the same supports. All are on the same, level playing field. When we look at equity, equity provides everyone with the support that they need in order to succeed.

However, as our various colleagues have demonstrated today, the reality remains that the current system is designed in a way for those who *have*, continue to have, because the system was designed for them; while those in historically marginalized communities must continue to fight against an unjust system.

As policymakers, you must continually ask yourselves what value there is in prematurely categorizing students as worthy or unworthy

of opportunity while they are still children. This is what our current system of exit testing does to New Jersey students.

To quickly review the Federal requirements versus the State requirements -- federally, we require annual testing in grades 3 through 8 in math and language arts, and then once in grades 9 through 12. In science, the testing occurs once in grades 3 through 5, once in 6 through 8, and once in 9 through 12. There is no Federal requirement for exit testing. Students do have to take a test, but they do not have to pass that test as a graduation requirement from the Federal level.

At the State level, math and language arts -- we have testing annually in grades 3 through 8, and then we are also currently requiring grade 9, grade 10, and grade 11 to test. I have an asterisk there, next to grade 11, because this spring the grade 11 test was removed after the Superior Court's decision. However, for students who are on block schedule, who were in 11th grade in the fall, they took the test. So there are different rules depending on what your school scheduling program looks like.

In science, we have grade 5, grade 8, and grade 11. And we also require all of our students to pass that exit exam in order to meet their graduation requirements.

Earlier, we heard some questions about the time lost and the time wasted. So Assemblywoman Egan Jones mentioned that her granddaughters noted that they were feeling that their time was wasted, so let's look at what that time actually looks like.

Across grades 3 through 11, the minimum number of hours for any student who does not have an IEP that allows them extra time -- so the

minimum amount of time -- is 73.5 hours of testing across grades 3 through 12. And these are the 2017-2018 numbers. That equates to 98, 45-minute class periods of learning that's lost across a student's K-12 career. If we want to think of that in different terms, that could be three years' worth of a one-time per week, 45-minute elective period where students could really be exploring vocational areas of interest, trades, passions, developing skills that may not yet be at grade level. Like Julie mentioned, it could be time for remedial reading for a child who is in need there. But instead, we are wasting that time on testing.

In addition, Dr. Aderhold earlier mentioned that there is lost time on the days where there's testing that's not just during that testing period. A lot of schools will either cut the day short because the students are just completely mentally exhausted after the assessment, or it will be more relaxed time. There are generally very heavy calls for a reduced load -- academic load in those time periods so that the students are not over-taxed for the test.

At the July 2018 State Board of Education meeting, we had some questions that popped up. So at the high school level, a student who sits for the ELA and math PARCC or NJSLA assessment-- You'll hear both names because this year the Department of Education and the State Board of Education changed the name. It's the same exact test; it would be similar to me just taking Assemblywoman Jasey's nametag and putting it in front of me. But obviously, we're still the same people who we are, even though the name has changed.

So they're sitting for a minimum of six hours' worth of statewide testing. Dr. VanderVeen, who is the CEO of New Meridian --

New Meridian is the company that owns all of the licensing for the content for the PARCC or the NJSLA. So they make a ton of money off of the State of New Jersey -- he was questioned by State Board President, Mr. Arcelio Aponte, “Is six hours an appropriate amount of time to capture the quality of curriculum and the quality of our districts?”

And Dr. VanderVeen’s response was, “At three hours, this would still be the longest assessment available in the country.” So at half the time of what we’re currently testing students would still be the most testing across the nation.

Following up on that, he was urged to share his thinking on the proposed shifts in testing requirements and time frames, Dr. VanderVeen shared the following. “The most important indicator of post-secondary readiness is the curriculum, and not the assessment. States should be focusing on ensuring a rigorous sequence of courses, instead of focusing on an assessment.” Dr. VanderVeen’s company stands to lose a great deal of money if testing is reduced, and yet he urged the State to focus on curriculum and instruction, and not the assessment. But yet, we have doubled down on assessment as the State of New Jersey.

Okay, in front of you, you should all have a binder that NJEA has provided to you; and within it there are a variety of resources.

I will briefly mention some of them; and if you have questions as you go through them, throughout the coming weeks, please feel free to reach out to us.

In the front cover you will see three different journey maps; and these relate to -- last spring NJEA partnered with the Department of Education on a portion of their statewide assessment outreach tour. And

the findings in these journey maps really capture all of the different things that our stakeholders said within those meetings. And to clarify for you, the stakeholders in those meetings were not primarily NJEA members. They were parents, they were students. We worked specifically with two groups of high school students, over a hundred students in Collingswood, New Jersey, and we got feedback from them on their experiences. Some students were AP-level students, others were more on a college prep trajectory. And so we got a very diversified perspective. And you'll see in those journey maps the experience, in addition to the full PARCC report that is in that first section of your binder.

So in the spring of 2018, we did that work; and we found that there are profoundly negative implications for curriculum and instruction; and the testing system is severely impacting student mental health.

Now, earlier, we heard from Miss Skinner; and she made the argument that assessment is a great diagnostic tool; but there's a misconception there about the purpose of testing. There are very different purposes of testing that we use. So we have diagnostic testing; you can think of that as if -- when you go to the doctor, you get blood work, you get the baseline, you're seeing where you stand. But that's not saying how we're going to score, you know? You shouldn't be scored on whether your cholesterol levels are too high. That's just the baseline.

Then we have formative assessment. Formative assessment is that checkup where we see if what we're doing to take those cholesterol levels down is actually working or not.

Then we have summative assessment; and we can equate that to an autopsy. And summative assessment is basically what we have in our

current statewide assessment system. We are capturing the end of a school year. At that point, there's not much that can be done. Yes, we get feedback; but we get that feedback well past any usable time frame to be used. It's generally six to nine months after the fact that we get that in our hands; and the students are then out of that classroom and onto the next classroom.

So exit tests are like autopsies; and in a way they are similar because they're really killing our kids.

Okay; so now-- Oh, before we move on, I just want to highlight a few comments that came out of our PARCC work with stakeholders.

So comments from students, parents, and educators. Student mental health implications have really come out in the forefront here. We had 10th graders saying, "I'm going to drop out." We had a high school student say that, "Every year I show up, I stare at a computer for hours, and I end up failing despite my best efforts."

We had a parent state that, "As a parent, I was told curriculum mirrors PARCC. No novels, just excerpts -- like the PARCC -- after all the novels were removed from the curriculum."

"My students are so anxious they failed before they've even started." That was a New Jersey educator.

And the one that hit me the most was from a 4th grade child, who would have experienced the PARCC twice at this point. And she said, "The PARCC may make it so that I don't become as successful as others, or go to a good college." And if that's the mindset that a child has as a 4th

grader, when she has that much time left in her academic career, we've really failed our kids.

Okay, so what does this actually look like in implementation?

Pathways to graduation -- this is what our current classes of 2019 and 2020 have: fairly straightforward; you'll see in the flow chart they can use the alternate pathway option if they don't want to take the PARCC or NJSLA, or if they are not successful with it. They have that opt-out option. So it's a fairly straightforward approach here.

We're definitely supporting the extension of the Consent Decree, because it would allow this process to continue for our current sophomores and freshmen. We would also encourage that Consent Decree to be extended to current 8th graders, because they will be 9th graders in just a few short months, and they need to know what's expected of them.

So the portfolio may be the best option for some; that argument was made earlier. But in the current process, we require students to fail first before they have access to the portfolio. So we're putting additional roadblocks in front of them before they have the best option for themselves. So that's what our first picture is.

This second picture -- which makes us a little bit bug-eyed -- is what the State Board of Education proposed as the pathway to graduation. And there was a question earlier -- Assemblywoman Egan Jones' question regarding the Lampitt Bill on graduation requirements and what that would require. This is what that would allow -- this process -- which is very confusing; parents don't understand it, students don't understand it, and it's really heightened a lot of confusion in the field.

So then we want to think about how many students are actually using these different options.

And so within your kits, in Section 3 of your binders, you will see customized data for each of your legislative districts -- the counties represented in your legislative districts. I've highlighted Senator Rice's here, for LD 28. You'll see that the percentage of students who are using each pathway to graduate -- so PARCC assessment we have in blue, ELA in red, Math -- the percentages. So the majority of students are using the alternate pathway here.

Now, this is just a snapshot of the one legislative district. Earlier, Mr. Karp explained what the statewide data was; and the statewide percentage for students using the PARCC is 54 percent, whereas the alternate pathways -- we have 31 percent portfolio, on a statewide level 5 percent, and then the students whose IEPs determine that they would be better with an alternate assessment -- that dynamic learning map -- we have 6 percent of students doing those.

So when greater than half of our students are using these alternate pathways -- some of which put an extra financial burden upon families -- we know that our statewide assessment system is in dire need of change.

Okay; we've also heard a bit about exit testing, and the research on exit testing.

So I've cherry-picked a few different numbers here. You'll see on there that it says 12 states. I did not have the information about Washington bailing out on Friday, so please edit that to 11 states. So we have 11 states currently requiring exit testing, which is down from a high of

27. And we know that exit tests really deny diplomas to tens of thousands of students across the country every year. It impacts students of color, students with disabilities, and low-income students at much higher percentages than other populations. It's linked to increased incarceration rates, as we've heard earlier, because we have students who then do not see themselves as high school graduates; they don't see it as possible for them; they drop out. It limits their post-secondary opportunities, creating a wall between children and their futures; it lowers their earnings, and they're less likely to be employed.

So then there's a common argument that, "How will we know, without these assessments, if our students are career and college ready?" We have all different things in place already by State regulation. So in order for a student to reach their graduation requirements -- other than our exit tests -- they have to fulfill a minimum of 120 credits of courses. They have to participate in locally designed and administered assessments; they have to be successful in those assessments. There are attendance requirements for students. And then there can also be locally determined requirements. And all of that is in our Chapter 8 Regulations, Standards and Assessment.

And so there's also been an argument about the high percentage of students who have to go to remediation in college. So there's no research basis in the claim that PARCC or the NJSLA will help reduce the common concern that too many students are not college-ready and require remedial coursework; nor is there research that PARCC or NJSLA performance is a predictor of future success.

There is, however, research that confirms that a student's transcript -- their high school grades -- is what makes a high school diploma truly meaningful, and gives the most accurate picture of a student's readiness for college and career. When protesting parties use the argument that the high number of students in remedial college courses demonstrates the needs for high-stakes standardized testing, those steeped in the research and practice know that this is a false narrative.

We can look to the practices of two New Jersey-based higher education institutions for some solutions here. Rowan University -- we've heard, very frequently, from Dr. Eric Milou at the State Board of Education, and he has testified at various places that to address the problem of first-year college students requiring remediation, universities must create various mathematics pathways. All of us have different career paths, and we all require different types of math to be successful in those career paths. Not everyone needs to have algebraic thinking to be successful; most of us would benefit from statistics. And so if we have those pathways, we see an increase in the graduation rate and we see a decrease in the early dropout rate from college for students. And this is something that Rowan University is actively doing, and they're experiencing success.

In addition, Warren County Community College has increased their graduation rate by simply abolishing remedial courses. And so when they abolished the remedial courses, they immediately saw their graduation rate double; their remedial courses often become a trap for students. Few actually complete the courses, and those who don't are gated from the credit-bearing courses they need for their degree.

So what's the alternative? Performance-based assessment. There are multiple states that are using performance-based assessment. Performance-based assessment is one that actually allows us to demonstrate our skills; so those of you with children who are of driving age, they have gone through their driver's education program, they have sat down for either the written test or the computer-based test. At that point, would you allow them on the road? No, you would not. You want to make sure that they have at least the six hours of practical application behind the wheel, and preferably a whole lot more of practical application behind the wheel. And you want to make sure that they actually have the knowledge, the skills, the understanding, and the competency that they need to be successful.

We can all regurgitate information; we can all Google and find information. But we can't just demonstrate skill if we don't have that time to practice the skill.

So performance-based assessment is something that's possible under ESSA, the innovative assessment pilot. Students are given meaningful opportunities to achieve and demonstrate critical knowledge and skills. It enhances educator professional assessment literacy, because the educators are the ones who are collaborating to design, develop, implement, and score all of the performance-based assessments. There are checks and balances on that to make sure everybody's operating honestly, and it allows everyone to constantly look at the data and say, "Here's how our kids performed; what can we do differently? What impact are we having on our kids, and how can we use this data to really make sure that what we're doing is meeting the needs of our kids?"

And so educators are really collaborating to understand their impact through this process.

For additional information on the merits and benefits of performance-based assessment, the final section of your packet -- which is the heaviest -- provides you with all of the research based on that; in addition to policy recommendations and specific steps that policymakers -- including the New Jersey Department of Education, the State Board of Education -- can make in order to get it to happen. It lays out specific costs and the benefits as well.

So when we're referring back to equality, equity, and reality, we have to think about the Governor's call for a stronger and fairer New Jersey. He wants to make that transition; so in order for us to truly be stronger, fairer, and just, we have to remove that fence. And removing that fence does not mean that we're removing accountability; it just means that we're giving our kids the opportunities that they all deserve to have a successful and fruitful life. We are encouraging them and preparing our students along the way for whatever their post-secondary path might be, college or career; and we're removing that fence.

So we really look forward to furthering this discussion with you. We're happy to provide any additional research-based information -- because it's not about our opinions, it's really about the evidence -- and any clarification that you might need.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you very much.

Because one of the things I always say to people is when you bring a problem, don't just bring the problem; bring some suggestions, recommendations.

I really like that graphic, because I think it truly captures the differences between equality, equity, and our reality.

So I thank you for that and, you know, it's good to know that we're not starting from scratch here.

Okay; thank you very much.

DR. MILES: Thank you.

Our final speakers are Deb Bradley, Director of Government Relations at Principals and Supervisors; along with Karen Bingert, who is President-elect of New Jersey Principals and Supervisors; and Betsy Ginsburg, Executive Director of the Garden State Coalition of Schools.

And I guess you'll have to share the two mikes.

Thank you.

DEBRA BRADLEY, Esq.: Thank you.

Good morning, everyone.

I guess we got the lucky straw today, to be the last speaker on a very important day to talk about assessment, which is a major issue for all of our associations here today, and every stakeholder group.

I'm Debbie Bradley, Director of Government Relations for the State Principals Association.

With me today is Karen Bingert, our President-Elect, and the Principal of Hillsborough High School.

Our Association represents over 7,000 principals, assistant principals, and supervisory employees, who are the educational leaders at the school building level.

I'd like to start quickly with our belief system on assessment. We believe that student assessment is an integral part of the instructional process that must be linked to our State learning standards, a viable curriculum, and strong instructional practice; not as separate silos, but as part of an aligned learning system.

And I think that really does track with what NJEA talked about, when we talk about assessment as one tool of part of that system that is comprised of a variety of types of assessment. Local teacher-developed assessments; as well as assessment of diagnostic tools and standardized assessments -- standardized assessments being used primarily for accountability purposes, federally required, to look at identifying achievement gaps, as well as to identify struggling school buildings and school systems for intervention purposes.

The main issue I want to spend my time on, from the State Association level -- and then I want to open the door to Karen to bring you into the high school, through the assessment process, and what goes on at the high school -- is to talk about the current state of uncertainty in assessment, and what that means to school principals and the people we deal with, our parents and students.

So, unfortunately, our schools have been on an assessment roller coaster for the past five years. You've heard it from every speaker here today. And it's been to the detriment of our students, our educators, and our system as a whole.

During the past Administration, our schools were charged with the simultaneous implementation of three major initiatives: one being teacher evaluation, one being the implementation of new State learning and curriculum standards, and the last one being the implementation of the new statewide assessment system, PARCC.

Our members worked under unbelievable pressures to do all of those three simultaneously, with very mixed results. And you all lived through the public controversy that followed, and so did we in our school buildings. Predictably, there were missteps along the way -- you've heard about that -- and many lessons were learned by our members, the DOE, and other stakeholders. And suddenly, State assessment was a major political issue, not an instructional issue; and unfortunately, that is still the case today.

With the change in Administration, there has been a change in approach and tone. They started out with a listening tour on assessment that took place across the state; and the establishment of statewide committees of educators to develop the next generation of assessment. Educators finally felt that they were being listened to concerning what assessment in New Jersey could be; and actions were taken to reduce the length of State assessments in response to public and educator calls for increased instructional time, not testing time. We're not there yet, but there have been steps taken to do that.

One initiative I wanted to let you know about that hasn't been raised-- There have been different things that are going on, but we've been working with the Department and teachers to take our State learning standards, in English language arts and math, and develop statewide

learning goals for every grade level, and learning units, so that teachers could take these and develop their curriculum in every school district in the state; so that we're working with an equitable curriculum across school districts. Give them resources and materials they could work with, to work on their curriculum to address the fact that some curriculum in one district is very different from others.

This work could then be the foundation for our future generation of assessments. It's important work that's going on right now, but it's work that gets sidetracked when the roller coaster of assessment takes another turn. And that happened, as you know, by the court case that happened on New Year's Eve. When the Court came down with its decision to remove the current high school graduation requirements, it kind of upended our system until the Consent Order was reached.

We, as an Association, have been on the front lines of answering questions of, "What does my student do to graduate?" As an Association, we believe that the Consent Order should be extended to current 8th graders, 9th graders, and 10th graders, moving forward; or the Legislature should enact some legislation to address that. We don't care which side addresses the issue; we just believe that it needs to be addressed so that students who come to school in September, a mere three-and-a-half months away, know what they need to do to graduate.

As an organization, we do not have a current position on exit testing; but we do welcome all of the information we've received here today along with you. We haven't had an opportunity to have a discussion with our members on this issue, but we look forward to the conversation. We

also recommend continuing that conversation through a task force of some kind, and we'd love to participate.

And at this point, I'll turn the mike over to Karen, to talk about what happens at the high school level.

KAREN A. BINGERT: Thank you very much, Debra; and thank you to the Committee.

I very much appreciate the opportunity to meet with you today, and to talk a little bit about our experiences.

I have a 27-year background in education, as an English teacher in both urban and suburban districts, vice principal, and a principal.

As President-elect of NJPSA, it's a great opportunity to talk with you today as well.

I have really three areas of focus. The first one is the role and purpose of assessment; next is the actual impact of assessment experiences in our schools; and then, finally, some recommendations for the future.

But I'm actually going to take this back to the 30,000-foot view, which looks an awful lot like one individual child. Because that's my reality, every single day. Whatever happens with assessment comes down to each individual student who walks in my doors every single day.

So I respect the position that you're in. There is certainly no easy answer to this process at all. If there is a test, I will tell you, in a recent conversation with the Somerset County Principals Association, my colleagues unanimously said, "Please make it just one year, one test; one and done, with an opportunity for remediation and some sort of a portfolio so that the students can demonstrate things in other ways."

PARCC became so politicized and so polarizing that it really had a huge impact on our students. There were midstream changes for them. They had already entered high school, thinking that they knew what they were going to be doing before they graduated, and then found out, in some cases at the very end of their junior year or the beginning of their senior year, how things were going to impact them. And we certainly cannot allow that to happen again.

I concur with the recommendations that have been made previously today about having a commission or task force set up to study this more closely. Whether through NJPSA or my role as a Principal, I'm certainly happy to be a participant in that.

So the purpose of assessment in my book, and how it links to education, is trust but verify. We spend 180 days of the school year being trusted to give good lesson plans, to have engaging activities, to give formative and summative assessments. We are trusted to do right by our students. And then we are given the opportunity to verify how things are going on just a handful of days. But, boy, do those days have an impact in our building; because if the students don't see value in what they are doing with this assessment, it really plays no role of importance in their lives whatsoever.

So I'm going to tell you that the implementation of PARCC was extremely difficult in our schools. First off, I'll tell you about one student. She found out, in the beginning of her senior year -- because the results came back so late -- that she had failed the PARCC and needed to go into a remedial course; which we did, taking her out of another class that she would now not have an opportunity to finish.

She did the work, studied, worked to improve her basic skills, and completed the portfolio. The portfolio was sent to the Department of Education in advance of their deadline. But because of the impact of so many portfolios being sent in those initial years, it was the day before graduation, and we still have not gotten a report back on that student.

Her mother drove to Trenton, sat in the waiting room at the DOE, and basically refused to leave until somebody looked at her child's portfolio.

She got a letter from them, came back -- at which point we had already gotten a phone call as well -- and walked in just in advance of the 1 o'clock deadline for me to put her name on the graduation list.

If her mom had not done that, that girl would not have walked in her graduation ceremony; and that's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that you don't get back. So, thank God for that mom.

We've also had some misinformation or misunderstanding. People are hearing, sort of, the political sound bites or the press bites, and it doesn't really paint the full picture.

Even this year, with NJSLA -- which I will tell you, I've had hundreds of opt-outs for PARCC; but with NJSLA, we did not, probably because it had a different name -- but I did have a conversation with a parent who was completely confused and thought that the test this year was a college entrance test. And I had to sit with that parent and have a conversation saying, "No, this is to get out of high school, not to get into college." Because her child didn't want to go to college; her child had a trade route established and was very excited about that.

And whenever there's confusion about the test, what it results in is hundreds of hours, hundreds of e-mails, and hundreds of phone calls, just for one individual administrator -- me, in this case -- trying to explain the role of the test, the importance of the test, and then to deal with the choices that students and their parents have to make. And it's important that we make sure that they are given the opportunity to do that with a full understanding, in a way that will not be detrimental to their students' futures.

Now, the opt-outs themselves-- I know you've heard some stories of this, but I want to make sure that I touch upon a couple of points, as far as what I saw in my school.

Students whose parents opted them out -- I will tell you I did not have the staff or the room available to house those students while we were testing. So we ran a very expensive extra bus run, every single day of testing, to bring students in when testing was over. Now, the students who did show up for testing -- I would have loved to have been at the dinner table the night before, because those students were badgering their parents not to test; and when they did show up in the classroom to be tested, they were angry, and many of them just opened up the Chromebooks, hit a couple of buttons, and closed the top.

That, however, is considered a valid test result by State standards. It was opened, something was pushed, and it was submitted.

So our test results-- Now, we are typically a very high-performing school district in one of the highest-performing states in the country. Our test results looked horrific; and I'm going to tell you, I spent about 30 seconds of my professional time worrying about what they said.

Because what I got out of it was junk data. It did me no good whatsoever, it was not going to guide my instruction, it was not going to help me inform my teachers about what to do to help my students.

Last year, we had a classroom with a girl who came in who wanted very much to try her best on the PARCC assessment, because she tries her best on everything she does. And she took the full time allotted to her. But the click-and-submit group, that was in that room, at the end of testing was livid with her and encountered her in the school and told her that this wasn't important; that she really did not need to spend this time, and that they really would prefer if she just clicked and submitted as well.

We wound up needing to move her to a different room, had some adult intervention on this situation, and tried to make up for other students harassing a student who wanted to do the right thing.

And these are the realities of what we're facing. And then you add to it some of the implications that you've heard previously about students who are highly stressed, dealing with anxiety and depression, and the mental health situations that we are facing in school. And high-stakes assessments, like PARCC and the NJSLA, do have a direct impact on how our students are feeling about themselves and about the quality of their futures. And that is certainly an important point for consideration.

Now, regarding relevance for students -- the students who didn't take the PARCC for me, they took the SATs, the ACTs, the PSATs, the ASVAB, and the ACCUPLACER. I had students who didn't opt to come late on that extra bus run that I provided; but some of them did opt to come to school and sit in my cafeteria with the teacher monitoring them as a study hall, with their SAT prep books. Because that test meant

something, and they were willing to give their time to that, but they were not willing to give their time to something that held no importance to them whatsoever.

So as we move forward, there are a few recommendations.

Please remember that we have a very wide range of learners and goals in our schools. Standardized testing is just a snapshot in time, and it is not fully representative of what our students are learning, what their interests are, or what their futures may hold.

Also please consider that our high school students start planning for high school in middle school, by the choices that they make in their math and their literacy courses. So I really hope that the State is in a position to create one set of expectations that start and finish with a grade, instead of the midstream surprises that have wreaked such havoc for our students.

As I end my comments today, I want to first off, once again, endorse the creation of a commission to look at this more closely with a wide range of stakeholders involved.

And I also want to offer three critical suggestions. First, I ask do no harm. Students placed in situations of uncertainty rarely take the most prudent course of action; and continued uncertainty from the State about graduation assessment requirements will only add new fuel to the fire that previously torched all PARCC efforts in the press, with parents, with staff, students, and the community. Our students, though, were the ones who were truly burned by this.

Second, make plans that account for all students in our schools, so that their range of interests, abilities, and goals are reflected; and

so that the next generation of assessments have relevance for them. We teach students to make informed decisions; so really, why should we be surprised when they get the information and decide not to participate in a test that serves no purpose for them whatsoever?

And then, finally, please stop the roller coaster. There are more than enough twists and turns to being a high schooler and teenager these days, with the dramatic increase in mental health issues as evidence of this. Our children really should not need a seatbelt to make it safely to graduation.

Thank you for your attention, as well as for the work yet to be done in decision-making and in possible development of an assessment system that addresses the diverse needs of New Jersey students.

Thank you for your time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you very much.

And I especially want to thank you for raising and underlining the issue of mental health. It's come up a couple of times in testimony, and it's something that's very much on our radar, because we hear about the increased problems and behaviors that we're seeing in our schools and among our young people.

I was talking to a Principal, actually, last night -- nothing to do with this -- and she didn't sound right to me. And I said, "What's up?" and she said that a 9th grader had committed suicide at her school. And I was like, "Uh," you know? And she said, "The kids are just--" There are a lot of reasons, probably; it's not just testing. It's social media, it's -- you know, it's being a teenager and thinking that whatever is happening today is the end all, right?

So we, as the adults, have to take responsibility for providing safe environments for our children so that they can grow up to be productive adults.

So I appreciate your raising that issue.

Thank you.

Yes, Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: I would just like to say that when you talked about lack of understanding of the process, and what is required-- When this Committee had some students before us, that was one of the key things that they spoke about -- that they didn't understand. And so they weren't prepared, and it wasn't good for them, and that made them feel depressed, and down, and very confused.

So I know the discussion back then came up about guidance counselors, and what we need, and there weren't enough of them. But I think that we need to focus on that part too, to make sure that the students are being reached, you know, at a younger age to understand the importance, going forward.

And I guess there's not enough one-on-one contact within the schools, you know, to be able to talk to the students. So I think we have to keep that all in mind as well, and remember what those students talked about to us that day, because it was important. And I believe that testimony was very -- it impacted all of us, listening to them directly, as to why they didn't get to school and different things that happened in their personal lives, which causes all the problems associated with all of this.

So I think we should be mindful, going forward.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: And we have saved the best for last. (laughter)

Thank you for your patience.

B E T S Y G I N S B U R G: I don't know about that; but thank you for waiting for me.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Your wisdom is always appreciated, Betsy. So thank you.

MS. GINSBURG: I am Betsy Ginsburg, and I am Executive Director of the Garden State Coalition of Schools, an organization of over 100 New Jersey school districts.

In addition to that, I am also a 19-year School Board member; Mila and I started on our respective boards at the same time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: You beat my record.

MS. GINSBURG: So I speak from the insights gained from both of those positions.

And thank you to the Committee for persevering this morning, and for listening to all of us.

Over the past decade, we have spent inordinate amounts of time training for, implementing, adjusting, and arguing about State assessments. Was all that time well spent? I'm still not sure.

PARCC was born out of a desire to close long-standing achievement gaps among New Jersey students and prepare those students for the next chapters in their lives. We shared that desire, and we share it still.

But its birth was accompanied by rhetoric that was divisive and pejorative. Its initial roll down was top-down, toned up, laden with jargon,

and extremely expensive in terms of time and money. Data-driven decision-making, using the data derived from PARCC, was touted as an educational panacea. Those with even the mildest concerns were castigated for being opposed to change; that castigation only galvanized oppositions and intensified the debate.

Perhaps equally damaging -- and we've heard a lot about this this morning -- was the way in which PARCC was used in some quarters to further divide us along well-known fault lines. Suburban educators and parents who voiced concerns were condemned as being ignorant of, or uncaring about, the critical needs of poor, urban, and rural students. And I will tell you that dividing the educational house against itself in that way is the surest means of weakening its entire structure. The enemies of public education revel when we arguing amongst ourselves,

PARCC was also weighted with the baggage of multiple purposes for which it was not intended. The assessment's intrinsic value -- and it had value -- was obscured by that baggage.

The good news -- and I think we've all had a little good news this morning -- is that we now have a chance to do better. As we transition to the next generation of State assessments, we can take time to come together -- and I should say that we endorse the idea of a commission -- and hold thoughtful conversations about why we assess and what we assess. I hope we can do that by focusing on the needs of our students, and the feedback we have received over the years from education practitioners, students, and parents throughout the state. We have to do this in an environment of mutual respect, and malice towards none, without injecting politics and didacticism into the discussion.

Most of all, we have to begin with the idea that even if we succeed in creating the best test -- and I think we all hope that we do -- it is only a tool, one tool. Refocusing on the essentials -- the quality of classroom instruction; the availability of educational tools, including functional facilities in every school district in New Jersey; and the social-emotional health of our educational communities -- is of much greater importance than endless debate on assessment.

We have a Federal testing mandate for this part of ESSA; we have a moral imperative to do better for all our children. Let's reject divisive rhetoric, learn from the past, and work together to create a better future.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you.

And I think I was absolutely right -- that you were the right person to bring us home here.

I want to thank everyone who came this morning, who presented all this information. We have lots of it. We will talk about next steps.

It seems clear that there is a consensus for having a commission or a group to work on this issue, hopefully in collaboration with the Department.

And as I said earlier, I spoke with the Commissioner; I know that they are anxious to work with us. And we now have lots of information to share with them.

If there are no questions, or concerns, or comments--

Would you like to say anything?

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Just great information.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: It was overwhelmingly good information. And I really appreciate the fact that it's data-based, it's research-supported; and I'm sure that, you know-- I feel like this is a moment when we, as a state, can make some decisions that will benefit our kids -- who are the most important because they are our future -- but also benefit our schools, our administrators, our educators, our parents, as we move forward. Because the last five years have really been tough on everyone, I think. And we survived it, but we don't need to prolong it.

So with that, we are adjourned.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)