



# AFT New Jersey, AFL-CIO

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Arcelio Aponte, President  
New Jersey State Board of Education  
NJ Department of Education  
PO Box 500  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0500

Dear President Aponte and NJ State Board of Education members,

My fellow teachers in New Jersey and I generally support the implementation of new Common Core standards for our students—this approach to teaching has been developed by classroom professionals and emphasizes conceptual learning starting in elementary school and building from there through high school. Throughout the country 45 states, including New Jersey, have adopted Common Core.

However, new measures call for proceeding carefully through to execution. The stakes are high for students and teachers, which is why AFT National President Randi Weingarten called for a moratorium on the stakes for students and teachers due to testing on Common Core standards.

Attending Weingarten's remarks on April 30, 2013, I immediately thought of the potential of appropriately using Common Core standards in evaluating where students are and where we want them to go. In the long run this will provide a wonderful opportunity to help identify first students needs and then growth. However, we must remember that these are new standards so even in years to come; students who started school prior to the implement of the Common Core will not have realized the benefits.

Last month, while affirming the "enormous promise for schools, children, and the future of our country," of teacher and leader support and evaluation systems, Education Secretary Arne Duncan wrote to allow states to "delay any personnel consequences, tied in part to the use of student growth data, until no later than 2016-2017." Duncan said that "too much change all at once could undermine our collective progress."

Consider a student finishing up the sixth grade this year. She will only half realize the benefits of a new system before she graduates high school. Testing her skills and abilities will likewise only yield a partially valid view of the effectiveness of her current teacher if the test is designed to measure cumulative lessons she never had.

In New Jersey, we need to consider the Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey (TEACHNJ) law approved last year in implementation and execution of the Common Core standards in our classrooms. If the state Board of Education has regulated that 30 percent of a teacher's evaluation be based on student test scores, how will that sizable portion reflect the shifting realities of simultaneously revising standards for students?

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As a classroom teacher for more than 30 years I understand the importance of good assessments of students. As a professional committed to children and keeping the best teachers in the classroom, I welcome fair teacher evaluations. In these transitional years of testing on new materials a moratorium on the consequences of testing makes educational policy sense.

The dangers are clear. Children fast-tracked into homogeneous groups by high-stakes testing may suffer, which means students in poor, urban districts could be further stigmatized as scores may be considered along with SATs for college admission. For public education to have an equalizing effect on our very racially, ethnically and class-segregated state, we need to empower these children with the structured educational goals of Common Core, but not punish students who are already behind.

Recruitment for hard-to-staff districts and schools could likewise suffer if teachers' opportunities for advancement, compensation and tenure are tied to poor student testing. As a union, we advocated that TEACHNJ have peer review and assessment, professional development and mandated mentoring for teachers who do not rate as effective. But it would be concerning if the corrective part of the new law gets overused because high-stakes testing on a new curriculum sidetracks the intent—of keeping great teachers in every classroom.

I remain confident we can get it right with implementation of a Common Core curriculum teachers helped develop. To properly evaluate teachers, we need to consider multiple measures beyond test scores such as classroom evaluation and students outcomes other than testing. That is what will have to work for the overwhelming majority of teachers who are not in English, math or the disciplines where testing is not applicable to students such as physical education or art teachers.

New Jersey's Board of Education should ask Commissioner Cerf to reconsider Secretary Duncan's offer of a moratorium on the consequences of high-stakes testing. As we—along with most of the rest of the states—move towards a new curriculum, we need to realistically consider where we are today avoid significant problems that could hamper forward progress for our students and schools.

Respectfully,

Donna M. Chiera

C: Diane Shoener