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**Testimony of AFTNJ President Donna M. Chiera
NJ Senate Education Committee
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To reclaim the promise of the American education system AFTNJ supports Senate Bill 2176 and **strongly urges the Senate to include language for a moratorium on all consequences connected to the testing program until the study is concluded.** New Jersey's assessment program is one of high stakes not only for teachers, but for administrators, students, schools, neighborhoods and entire districts. The assessment tools that have been or currently are being designed to identify strengths and weaknesses of an individual student may also identify programmatic gaps in curriculum for schools and districts. However, the results of these assessments have been extended to make additional high stakes decisions that they were not designed for. In fact, the assessment developers will overwhelmingly agree that the current assessments were not designed to evaluate staff or close down schools. To continue to use these assessments to make such decisions until the task force releases their final report only adds to the perception that the state's educational agenda is to privatize schools, destabilize communities and to break unions. We urge the establishment of the task force accompanied by a moratorium on consequences of high stakes testing.

This legislation and a moratorium on consequences of high stakes testing is a positive first step in AFT and AFTNJ's agenda to "Reclaim the Promise" of American public education by creating strong and effective neighborhood public schools that are safe, collaborative, and welcoming places. We believe that all neighborhood schools should strive to do the following:

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

Most teachers entered the profession with the belief that there should be a joy in becoming a life-long learner. The excitement of entering a classroom and opening doors to countless possibilities is now at risk because everything about teaching and learning is evaluated through testing. We continue to see states and local school districts applying data methodologies such

as value-added and student growth percentiles to high stakes decisions such as graduation, evaluation and funding. These methodologies are not designed for these decisions.

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

Performance data in the United States are often used purely for accountability purposes. Other high performing countries cited by legislators, policy makers and think tanks to justify the reforms they propose to our public education system tend to use the data to guide intervention, reveal best practices, and identify shared problems so all stakeholders can design real solutions for the students in their systems.

For more than two decades this punitive test-based accountability system has been in place and has failed to improve student performance or ensure equity of educational resources or services. The achievement gap has widened in places where these large scale assessments were used to measure schooling outcomes, identify struggling learners and perceived poorly performing teachers.

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

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

We believe the adoption of the National Core Standards will be an important first step in bringing equity to our national education system in which our students can learn to successfully compete in a global economy. Unfortunately, the implementation of the standards was overshadowed by the tenure legislation and new evaluation systems. Testing and consequences took priority over teaching and learning. The proposed legislation should be combined to form a task force to study and make recommendations on the implementation of the National Core Standards, the professional resources allotted districts for the implementation, and the time and the appropriateness of district and state testing. While this evaluation process is going on there needs to be a “time out” or moratorium for students, district and staff on all consequences related to the implementation of the core standards, PARCC assessment, new teacher evaluation system and consequences of the NJTEACH law.

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

- Transparent accountability systems readily understandable by teachers, families and the broader public;
- Engagement of a broad cross-section of school stakeholders—teachers, students, parents, and community organizations—in planning and implementing accountability policies and strategies that are tailored to each school and district’s unique context;
- Delivery of a broad and well-rounded curriculum, including the arts, science, social studies, civics, health and physical education, and social/emotional and character development;
- State and districts support for meaningful learning that links curricular tools and resources, instruction, and new assessments to ensure the development of higher order thinking and performance skills that students need to be successful in the world outside of school;
- Accountability tools and systems designed to enhance learning environments, improve curriculum, and increase teacher efficacy;
- Teachers and other education professionals involvement in the development and decision making about the standards and assessment processes with feedback from parents, teachers and students to evaluate and continuously improve the system;
- Disaggregated reporting by race, ethnicity, poverty level, English language status and disability, but no longer require testing of every student at every grade level every year, and instead employ sampling methodology to determine how well the system is meeting goals;
- Qualitative observation as well as multiple measures of students, educators and schools that reach beyond standardized math and reading test scores and instead capture the multi-faceted aspects of education valued by parents, the profession and the community to identify schools needing improvement;
- Policymakers responsible for appropriating the necessary funding for implementing the new accountability system;
- Administrators responsible for distributing the funds equitably and for creating a collaborative environment that includes teachers in decision making about curriculum, assessments and professional development necessary for successful implementation;
- Hold ALL education stakeholders responsible for wisely using the resources –e.g., enriched and engaging curriculum, well prepared teachers, safe and orderly schools, teaching supplies, computers and other technology—necessary to meet student needs and achieve both equity and excellence for ALL students.

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