Good afternoon. My name is Karen Bingert, and I am the proud principal of Hillsborough High School in Hillsborough, New Jersey, located in Somerset County. I am in my twelfth year as principal and my nineteenth year in administration in this excellent district.

I want to thank the Board for your time today, as well as thank the Commissioner and the Department for all of their time and effort as we continue to explore how to best improve New Jersey’s system of statewide assessments.

My perspectives today are based upon two distinct roles, as a leader of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association (NJPSA) and as a veteran high school principal. First, as the former NJPSA Vice-President, I served as a co-chair of a Joint Education Policy Committee of NJPSA and the New Jersey Association of School Administrators that analyzed and developed recommendations on the issues of high school graduation requirements and educator evaluation. As the current President-Elect at NJPSA, I am appreciative that this statewide dialogue on the important issues surrounding student assessment is an open and ongoing one with full NJDOE engagement.

I also bring my perspective as a long-time principal of a large suburban high school which has enabled me to see first-hand PARCC’s benefits, challenges, and unintended consequences at the high school level. From both perspectives, I believe that the proposed amendments to the Standards and Assessment Code before you are a good start to needed changes to enable the development of a fair, valid, student-centered, and relevant state assessment.

I would like to touch upon a few critical aspects of this code and why it is so important to our students and schools:

- If the role of assessment is to provide valuable feedback about learning, PARCC in its former iteration did not do that. There was too much assessment and too little timely information to be gained from it. It is important to note that we used PARCC results for very little. We simply couldn’t. We had high refusal rates, and those students whose parents did make them test did so begrudgingly and dismissively, often taking just a few minutes to complete a unit allotted 60-90 minutes for completion. There was no intrinsic motivation for students to do their best, so their scores were far from valid and ultimately did nothing to help us with our student learning needs, placement decisions, or curriculum development.

- Reducing the number of tests and the unit lengths of the tests is critical to the smooth operation of our schools. In a school like mine, with 2300 students, at times having as many as 1800 of them testing at once, we needed every staff member on deck as a testing administrator, making it impossible to run a regular schedule for the non-testers. Instead, everything came to a halt, testing occurred, non-testers stayed home until testing was done for the day, and we ran an adjusted bell schedule trying to balance out instructional
time as much as possible. We also spent a great deal of money on extra bus runs to bring the second wave of students in late. The loss of instructional time and added expense consumed valuable and finite resources for our school, which has a ripple effect beyond PARCC days. I fully support the code change to reducing the high school testing requirements to ELA 10 and Algebra 1 as a strong approach to restoring instructional time in my building.

- Let us remember that high school students take a wide array of tests that have true meaning to them, such as the PSAT, SAT, ACT, APs, and so on. A motivated high schooler will work very hard for those tests. I know this because on PARCC days, I had students who opted out of the PARCC come to school anyway and sit in a study hall in our Commons, spending three hours of uninterrupted time preparing for those other tests. If it has meaning to them, New Jersey students do not shy away from the hard work. Continuing the multiple pathways for students to meet graduation requirements is among the most important aspect of this code, and I support that wholeheartedly.

- I also fully support the widespread and earlier sharing of state test data with staff, students and their parents. As soon as educators have this performance information, we can respond appropriately to meet each student’s needs.

- Among the most heartbreaking aspects of any standardized test is when it is administered to a student who does not have the capacity to succeed at that time. Allowing English Language Learners to take a board-approved English proficiency test in lieu of the PARCC ELA 10 is both educationally appropriate and humanistic, and I fully support this aspect of the code. I also would urge the Department to take that a step further by working toward ensuring that the Algebra I PARCC assessment is available in any language that a student needs. A first year ELL student may know the math but cannot manage the literacy skills needed for the instructions, word problems, or open-ended responses required, in essence being subjected to two literacy tests because their language limitations are equally evident on both assessments. These are capable students, but they are confronted with an unattainable goal, which is frustrating and disheartening.

- It is critical that we continue to support the current portfolio process as an appropriate mechanism to assess district proficiency for graduation purposes. The process is a necessary way for many students, including test-averse students, ELLs, and classified students (who are the populations most at risk of failing to meet graduation requirements through standardized assessments) to demonstrate proficiency for state graduation purposes. It is critically important to continue this option for students now and in any future assessment system.

- Finally, more is not always better. Assessments at key points, such as Algebra I and ELA 10, allow us to measure and compare student performance. Having more tests such as Algebra II and ELA 11 is just more... not better. Doing away with them does not reduce the quality of education in New Jersey. To the contrary, it restores valuable instructional time that enables educators to work closely with their own students and use local assessments to determine the need for remediation and enrichment. My district has
thriving PLCs, and the teachers use that time to create common assessments, analyze results, identify best practices, provide timely remediation and enrichment, and inform decisions about curriculum and instruction. This is where the rubber meets the road in education, in those daily interactions and learning experiences that truly support our students’ learning. I am confident that there is no other critical information to be gained by Algebra II and ELA 11 testing that we do not already know based upon our daily work with our students.

State assessment does not need to be something that students are subjected to but something that they can invest themselves in because they see the benefits. In a perfect world, the state assessment test required for high school graduation will align with our state learning standards and objectives, but will also be relevant to high schoolers. I support the proposed code changes before the State Board today and hope that our future high school graduation test will meet both needs – relevance to students and soundness as an educational tool to promote student learning. New Jersey students deserve nothing less. Thank you.