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My name is Debbie Tyrrell and I am speaking today as both a parent and as the President of the NJPTA.

Many of you would like to know the NJPTA's position on education standards. The NJPTA supports consistent, high standards in education that prepare our students for work or college. As parents and teachers we know that that is the best way to prepare students to achieve their dreams and to succeed in an increasingly uncertain world. That's why we support the common core state standards as a great step in the right direction.

We are also cautiously hopeful that the new PARCC tests will be a fair assessment against the standards and give parents and teachers the information that they need to help their children succeed. In states that are further along in their implementation of the standards and assessments we've seen year-over-year improvement in test scores which gives us a reason for optimism.

High standards and fair assessments ensure that every child gets the opportunity of a high quality education system that prepares them for college and a career.

As a mother of three, including two children still in public high school, I want nothing but the best for my children's future. However, more and more the bright future we promise our children is being taken away from them when they enter college. Over 32% of students at universities and colleges across the state are being placed into remedial courses in their first year according to the Department of Education's College & Career Readiness Task Force. This figure soars to 90% at some county colleges.

I can only imagine the immense financial burden this places on families across NJ and the distress it places on students who are being told they need to take the same courses again. My son will be attending a community college in the fall and I do not want to pay for classes that he should have received in high school. After listening to many friends share their children's stories of taking remedial courses, I believe PARCC is a critical early intervention tool to prevent this.

Colleges and universities across the country including many in New Jersey were involved in creating PARCC and many plan to apply a score of 4 or higher as an exemption from remedial courses. Additionally, PARCC is aligned with the kind of testing that students will experience with the SAT and ACT, helping to prepare our students earlier for entrance into college.

The skills that PARCC will assess are also the critical thinking skills that today's employers demand. Increasingly, employers are struggling to find the talent they need and are implementing tests to qualify candidates upfront. My oldest just completed a series of job interviews and in addition to a writing assessment she was given a problem-solving scenario after making it through the first round of

interviews. PARCC challenges students to apply what they are learning in the classroom so teachers can focus on building these kinds of skills, teaching them how to think, not what to think.

Inevitably when it comes to test taking, the conversation among parents turns to their own children. My eldest daughter did very well in school, yet she was not a strong test taker. The mornings of test days were filled with encouraging pep talks to calm her nerves and help her rise to the challenge.

I've heard similar stories from many other parents. It's no surprise that kids don't like tests, not just PARCC, any tests – the anticipation, the self-doubt, the margin for error. Transitioning to a new test will be challenging, but as parents, we need not breed fear in our children by being fearful ourselves in the face of uncertainty. Instead I see this transition to PARCC as an opportunity to better support my child.

I recently attended a PARCC training session at my local high school and was able to preview the English and the math section of PARCC . I was pleasantly surprised when the principal had two students sit with each parent and help them work through the problems that were presented. The students easily handled the computer and worked through the answers. When asked how they felt about PARCC, both sets of students said they liked having the test computerized, feeling it was more user-friendly.

And this is not technology for technology's sake. By conducting the test electronically schools will have powerful data to identify gaps in curriculum and improve resources for teachers. This data will also help parents understand which areas their child may need extra help in and for the first time be able to compare their child's performance to that of many students across the country. I'm also personally excited to see how schools will integrate this technology into classroom instruction throughout the school year in new and innovative ways.

This is the first year of an entirely new system and despite the best efforts of our schools, there may still be bumps along the way. However we know that moving to rigorous consistent standards and fair assessments is the best thing to secure the kind of future we want for our children. Whether we are parents, teachers or administrators, we all have our part to play in helping to make this transition work. And as we approach the first testing window in March, now is the time to come together to support our children and our schools as best as we can.