



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Acting Commissioner

August 30, 2022

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Newark, New Jersey 07105

Mr. Harry Lee, Executive Director
New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association
1 AAA Drive
Hamilton Township, New Jersey 08691

Ms. Julie Borst, Executive Director
Save Our Schools New Jersey

Dear Colleagues:

I am in receipt of your correspondence dated August 9, 2022, regarding the administration of the Fall 2022 Start Strong assessment for students in grades three through eleven. As partners in educating New Jersey's over 1.4 million students, I appreciate the benefit of your perspective.

The Start Strong assessments were piloted in the fall of 2020 as an opportunity for local educational agencies (LEAs) to obtain near instantaneous results of administration that articulate the various levels of support each student may need to be successful with on grade-level content. Intentionally brief by design to maximize instructional time, the Start Strong assessments provide valuable data to address students' unique learning needs at the outset of the school year. The design of the assessment was done so in a way to minimize the disruption of teaching and learning while providing actionable data to support individual student learning. Early identification of the most appropriate level of supports that students need in English Language Arts, mathematics, and science based on NJSL (New Jersey Student Learning Standards) is an essential tool to complement LEAs existing efforts to gather standards-based data.

The New Jersey Department of Education (Department) recognizes there are many programs and assessments utilized by LEAs to identify student progress and needs throughout the school year and commit to continual evaluation of the implementation of assessment systems. One benefit of the Start Strong assessment is the consistency provided across LEAs in the data collection so that State-level progress can be observed. In the unprecedented time that we continue to navigate, uniform data collection is critical for the development of state programs and guidance to LEAs. By offering the Start Strong assessments, the Department is able to provide LEAs longitudinal data, to not only teachers and schools, but also to students and families so that they too, can make informed decisions about supports.

With the reinstatement of the New Jersey Student Learning Assessments (NJSLA), the Department is eager to share valid and reliable summative level data with districts, however, with a two-year pause in the administration, longitudinal trends are at risk. Through the second administration of the Start Strong assessments, LEAs and the State will have two data points to evaluate current programs prior to the receipt of Spring 2023 data the following school year.

The testing window of the Start Strong assessment allows the resulting data to be analyzed and outcomes integrated into instructional practice to address student learning needs in a timely manner and prior to the current year instruction in the NJSL. The Department acknowledges the early part of the school year as critical for building the necessary foundations between educators and students and the importance of establishing social emotional learning practices. As such, the Department will extend the testing window to October 21, 2022 to allow additional administrative flexibility to ensure the integrity of student identification data, and to schedule the assessments at unique times for individual LEAs.

While the Fall 2022 Start Strong assessments will not be used to satisfy federal accountability, the importance of the data LEAs are still required to report, school-level participation and performance, as a statewide measure of learning resources cannot be underscored.

I share your sentiments that we are all working for the same goals – promoting student achievement, identifying areas where learning acceleration is needed, and ensuring the social

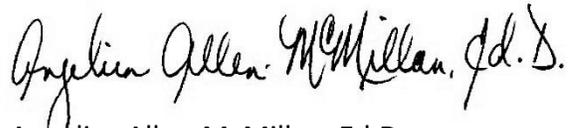
August 30, 2022

Page 3

and emotional wellbeing of our students. This administration of the Start Strong assessments will ensure that individual supports can be provided, and every student has equitable access to a high-quality education.

Thank you for being an ongoing partner in the success of New Jersey's education systems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angelica Allen-McMillan, Ed.D." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and 'M'.

Angelica Allen-McMillan, Ed.D.
Acting Commissioner

AAM/JS/KW/JB/amr

c: The Honorable Phil Murphy, Governor
New Jersey State Board of Education
Senator Vin Gopal
Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt