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Wildwood Public Schools

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RE: ESSA Testimony Before NJDOE

To Whom It May Concern:

Good afternoon my name is Kenyon Kummings, Superintendent of Wildwood Public Schools in Cape May County. Our district has a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students and is racially and ethnically diverse. I am here today to testify primarily on the use of free and reduced lunch status as a metric within any school accountability system, and primarily when identifying peer schools for use in the school performance reports. The school performance report took the place of the school report card and groups schools according to several measures that include percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch.

The performance report is the New Jersey Department of Education's main vehicle for communicating with the public regarding the status and performance of our schools. We know from peer reviewed studies, and over two decades of data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), that there is little causality between reduced lunch status and student performance, but strong causality between free lunch status and student performance. To aggregate the two is to create an inaccurate portrayal of the social conditions that a school is charged with navigating. For example, the composition of our elementary school is 90% free and reduced, with 85% free and 5% reduced. Under the current system, our school could be grouped with a school with the inverse of that distribution that is 5% free and 85% reduced. Those numbers represent two very different schools within two very different communities.

My request is that the department look to abandon the use of the percentage of students receiving reduced cost lunch and rely on either the free lunch rates exclusively, or the state of New Jersey's direct certification numbers that indicate if students are involved with the School Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Food Distribution Programs and/or are foster children. This would be a standardized metric that would result in a more accurate portrayal and grouping of schools on reports such as the school performance report, or its next iteration.

Sincerely,

J. Kenyon Kummings
Superintendent

CHILDREN FIRST!!!

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