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Testimony to NJDOE regarding State Board of Education Northern Regional Public Testimony - April 24, 2023, Revisions to New Jersey Student Learning Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics

Good evening. My name is Sarah Sterling-Laldee. I am the Director of STEAM Education for the Paterson Public Schools. As my title suggests, I oversee curriculum and instruction services for the content areas of Science & Engineering, Instructional Technology, Fine and Performing Arts and Mathematics for our district. In Paterson we have pulled these departments together under one umbrella to be intentional about our support of cross-curricular initiatives. We develop opportunities for interdisciplinary learning not only in our curricula and classrooms, but also in after school and summer programs for youth and professional learning opportunities for our staff. I previously served as a middle school Science and Social Studies teacher in Paterson, and as Supervisor of Science for K-12 in both Paterson and New Brunswick. In both communities that I have served, there has been a constant tension between engaging in core content and related skills and what many might think of as stretch content and skills. We have historically prioritized the development of basic reading and mathematics skills over other content and skill sets. While I would never argue against foundational literacy and numeracy skills as critical components of our children's education, a narrow focus on these topics in isolation has meant that students in communities like mine are often underexposed to the Sciences, the Arts, and many other content areas.

It is my firm belief based on my own classroom experience and evidence from the many classrooms that I support, that students learn best when they can make connections between discrete skills and concepts and apply them in novel situations based in the world around them. In our daily lives as adults, we shift seamlessly between skill sets to accomplish goals in our home and professional lives. Our students benefit from similar opportunities that mirror the world they live in now, and help them prepare to enter into adulthood as responsible, conscientious, and critically engaged thinkers and doers. As we all know, our world continues to change at a pace that far exceeds our comprehension. While this makes it challenging to provide learning opportunities that anticipate these changes, standards revisions like the ones that are currently under review for ELA and Math help prepare our children to pivot in a changing world.

I'd like to specifically highlight the establishment of the Data Literacy domain in Mathematics, and inclusion of the Climate Change standards in both areas in this regard. The coupling of the Data Literacy domain and Climate Change standards opportunities in Mathematics are a prime example of making real world connections to discrete skills across content areas. The learning opportunities proposed in the new standards revisions will prepare our children to engage in new and emerging careers that utilize data science in critical decision making to support healthy communities and a thriving planet.

Furthermore, including the Climate Change Standards in ELA and Math, particularly in grades K-5, create additional opportunities for students to engage in foundational Science and Civics learning that are critical to their future success in STEM classes and potential STEM careers, and as active citizens. Our youngest learners lost so many opportunities to engage in authentic STEM learning throughout the pandemic. Our new standards revisions provide a roadmap to remedy this through frequent, thoughtful engagement with real world solution making.

It is my sincere hope that these revisions will be adopted and that we can begin the challenging but very rewarding work of implementing the revised standards. This will require thoughtful, collaborative approaches to teacher professional development and ongoing instructional coaching. In Paterson, we are enthusiastically poised to embark on this work as it helps meet our goal to support learners who can best care for themselves, their communities and their planet.