Talking Points for Legislators and state and local Board of Education members

1. **Propose an alternative to PARCC as a graduation requirement.** This policy is extremely detrimental to secondary English learners (ELs). PARCC 10 is administered in 10th grade. Newly arrived ELs do not have enough time to acquire the academic language needed to pass the PARCC in 10th grade. In the past, the HSPA was administered in 11th grade with additional administrations in the senior year, which provided multiple opportunities to demonstrate academic achievement. Under the current proposal, ELs would most likely fail PARCC 10 (only 6% passed in 2016) and thus their only pathway to a high school diploma would be the portfolio assessment. The portfolio assessment is very cumbersome especially for high schools with a significant number of ELs. We advocate allowing the ACCUPLACER Write-placer to remain as a substitute high school graduation assessment for ELs. It has been developed for ELs and many community colleges use this assessment for placement in the ESL program.

2. **PARCC ELA or any new standardized assessments should be available in Spanish.** The NJ ESSA plan states:

   *Describe how the SEA will make every effort to develop assessments, at a minimum, in languages other than English that are present to a significant extent in the participating student population by providing: 1. The State’s plan and timeline for developing such assessments; Within the next year, New Jersey will be releasing requests for proposals for science, mathematics and ELA. Through the requests for proposals, New Jersey will explore the possibility of creating assessments in Spanish based on available funding and vendor capabilities. (p.48)*

   New Jersey has a bilingual Education Law [NJAC: 6A:15] which mandates bilingual education classes when there are 20 or more students from the same language background. Offering the standardized assessment in Spanish will allow these districts to align the assessment with the language of instruction and students will be able to demonstrate their skills in their native language while they are in the developmental process of acquiring academic English. The current policy of mandating assessment in English does not provide a valid evaluation of what ELs know.

3. **ELs at the secondary level should be exempt from PARCC ELA (or any standardized assessment) for the first year in the country**, similar to the allowable exemption for students in grades 3-8. It is a waste of instructional time for students who are beginning English learners to be forced to sit in front of a computer and attempt to answer linguistically complex questions in a language they do not understand.

4. **NJTESOL/NJBE also supports protections for DACA students, undocumented students and their families.** This is an extremely vulnerable population and we ask that they be provided as much protection as possible. We encourage our chapters and districts to offer Know Your Rights training.
5. A major discrepancy across the state of NJ, is addressing the needs of English learners who may also have special needs. Even though, there is an IDEA law, it is often interpreted quite differently across districts. Specific guidance and procedures need to be developed so that these children can obtain the needed support. Therefore, NJTESOL/NJBE supports introducing legislation that will direct the NJ Department of Education to develop guidance in identifying English learners who may also have special needs.

6. Since there are over 72,000 English learners in NJ and over 80% of districts have some type of program for English learners, it is important that all teachers have some training in Second Language Acquisition and strategies to use when working with English learners. NJTESOL-NJBE supports introducing legislation that mandates teacher education programs to require all teacher candidates to take at least one three-credit course that addresses the needs of this special population.

7. Support expansion of universal Pre-K. Preschool programs are critical for English learners. Currently 100 more districts are eligible for state funding. Many of these districts enroll significant numbers of ELs. High quality preschool programs have proven to be effective for closing the achievement gap. Once the expansion occurs, it is also incumbent on the New Jersey Department of Education to revisit the Preschool guidelines. Bilingual education is mandated from K-12, but not in preschool, which results in a huge disconnection between preschool programs and services for ELs and the mandated programs in kindergarten.

If districts are mandated to have bilingual programs in kindergarten then those districts should also be providing native language support in the preschool program.

One of the major obstacles to this dilemma is the lack of certified bilingual teachers across all grade levels. New Jersey legislature and teacher education programs must do more to recruit and train bilingual teacher candidates to staff bilingual preschool classes, bilingual -12 programs as well as the growing dual language initiative. New Jersey should provide funding and/or grant programs for teacher training to address this critical shortage.

8. Adopt legislation which will mandate New Jersey State Colleges and Universities to establish criteria to translate the New Jersey Seal of Biliteracy into college credits. (See Minnesota law below.) Granting college credits for this achievement will encourage more students to seek the Seal of Biliteracy, accelerate the acquisition of their college degree and save money for students attending New Jersey colleges.

9. Other concerns that have been raised are:

- The Driver’s Education test in Health classes is only offered in English. Yet if you go to the DMV, it is available in 21 languages.
- Class size with ESL and bilingual teachers
- Recommended number of ELLs in general education classes