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TO: Chief School Administrators/
Charter School Lead Person

FROM: Christopher D. Cerf, Acting Commissioner

SUBJECT: 2008-2010 Erasure Analysis Reports

Today we are releasing three erasure analyses reports of 2008-2010 NJASK. I am writing to provide you information about those reports, and the steps that we are taking at the state level to continue to ensure the integrity and accuracy of our data.

The quality and integrity of data is of utmost importance to all of us as educators across New Jersey. At the state and district level, we use this data to measure our progress and to ensure we are helping students to grow year after year; to identify trends and inform where we need to bolster curriculum and instruction; and to target professional development for our teachers. At the school level, our teachers are increasingly using data to identify the needs and progress of individual students, and to target instruction to the needs of those students. This data is a crucial resource for all of us as we work to ensure that all of our students are on track to graduate from high school college- and career-ready.

Since 2008, we have asked Measurement Incorporated (MI), our state assessment contractor, to provide us with a report on erasure patterns for NJASK at the school and grade levels. We use these reports both to evaluate statewide trends from year to year, and to identify potential testing irregularities at the individual school level.

The key finds of these reports are:

- The average number of “wrong to right” erasures in 2010 across the state was 2.43 per student.
- The percentage of “wrong to right” erasures among all erasures was 58.5% in 2010, compared to 56.9% in 2009.
- In total, 120 schools are listed for having “wrong to right” erasure marks over 2 standard deviations above the mean. Note that our choice of 2 standard deviations was arbitrary, and does not necessarily indicate that the erasure rate at these schools is statistically significant.
- In conversations with testing experts, we believe these results to be in line with trends across the country.

I want to be very clear about how we use these reports. **In no way do these reports prove that cheating occurred, nor do they implicate any school or teacher in wrongdoing.** High instances of erasure marks, where wrong answers are changed to right answers, happen for many reasons, including students checking their work or students making mistakes in tracking their test with the answer folder.

Therefore, we have always used these reports as one data point with which to identify possible testing irregularities. I urge you as well not to rush to judgment or assume that wrongdoing occurred at any school simply because it is included in this report.

The recent wave of cheating scandals across the country has reminded us that even though the vast majority of our teachers and administrators are honest, hardworking professionals, a small handful of unethical people sometimes do unethical things. These actions not only threaten the integrity of our data, but worse they undermine the hard work of their students and demean the passion and commitment of their fellow teachers. We will continue to be vigilant in monitoring potential testing irregularities and acting with the full authority of the Department when we find an infraction.

Looking forward, we are continuing to take steps to ensure the integrity of our data.

First, we are strengthening our internal data systems and refining the types of data we collect. For example, we are working to collect classroom level data for the 2012 NJASK, rather than simply school- or grade-level results. In addition, we are exploring new ways to identify potential irregularities, such as using the Person-Fit analysis, which matches wrong-to-right erasures with a student's ability, and which may be used to investigate potential tampering.

Second, we will be asking districts to examine a number of schools listed in this report that have significantly higher erasure marks at one or more individual grade levels, in order to identify whether security protocols were followed correctly during the testing period and to identify whether any other irregularities occurred.

Finally, we will be asking our Office of Fiscal Accountability and Compliance (OFAC) to conduct examinations into a small number of schools where significantly higher erasure marks at the school level warrant a comprehensive review. We will also ask OFAC to review three charter schools where there are high numbers of erasure marks at one grade level, because they do not fall under the purview of any specific district.

In addition to these steps, we will continue to examine all schools in these reports with other data points throughout the coming year to identify whether additional schools warrant more formal inquiries.

We will follow up with districts that will be involved in these reviews with additional details and guidance.

CDC/JB/pl/2008-10 erasure analysis reports - memo

c: Members, State Board of Education
DOE Cabinet
Executive County Superintendents