



Barbara Madeloni, President
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Ann Clarke, Executive Director-Treasurer

July 30, 2015

Paul Sagan, Chair
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street
Malden, Massachusetts 02148

Dear Chairman Sagan:

The Massachusetts Teachers Association represents more than 110,000 educators, from preK to higher education. Our members are well-informed, active in their communities, committed to public education as foundational to democracy, and dedicated to the well-being of our Commonwealth. It is with pride, therefore, that I inform you that our membership has taken stands in support of parents who wish to opt their children out of standardized testing and in opposition to the proposed switch to PARCC. MTA educators have instructed us to not only inform you of our position, but also to work with students, parents and community partners on these vital issues.

In relation to students opting out of high-stakes standardized testing, the MTA believes:

- Parents in Massachusetts deserve the opportunity to opt their public school students out of high-stakes standardized assessments; this should be their choice.
- School districts should be required to provide all parents each year with written information fully explaining their right to opt students out of high-stakes assessments.
- Students who opt out of high-stakes assessments should not be included in data used by state or federal entities in “grading schools,” determining a school’s perceived success or failure, or imposing other punitive measures.
- No parent or student should be treated in any punitive way based on a parental decision to remove a student from high-stakes standardized assessments.
- Open dialogue is essential in the parent-educator relationship. Educators are trusted community leaders and must be treated as such. No educator should be disciplined in any school or district for discussing with students, parents or community members the options for opting students out of high-stakes standardized assessments. This should apply to individual conversations, parent/teacher conferences, community meetings, and any other social or professional conversations. The rights of free speech should apply in every situation in discussing student opt-out options.

The MTA will act to defend any member who faces discipline or dismissal for taking any of these actions. The MTA will develop a document concerning opting out that is appropriate for distribution to parents with questions about opting out and will disseminate it as appropriate. We will also support parents and students who opt out.

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These decisions emerge from our membership's deep understanding of the devastating impact that high-stakes standardized testing is having on students, educators, and the possibility of meaningful and joyful education in the interest of democracy. Our members know from professional experience that teaching and learning cannot be standardized and that students develop in different ways at varying rates. They also know that our schools are strong only if parents, students and educators work together.

Therefore, they support the right of parents to opt their students out of standardized tests in the interest of protecting children, making a statement about the insidious impact of testing on all students and schools, and as an act of protest against the profiteering that standardization allows.


Furthermore, our members understand from knowledge and experience that the proposed move to the use of the PARCC exams would represent a doubling down on the worst aspects of recent "reform" efforts. Indeed, such a shift would propagate an even narrower concept of what it means to learn, create significant disruptions in our schools, funnel much-needed resources to private companies, and further standardize teaching and learning.

As we actively work to inform and support parents looking to opt their students out of high-stakes standardized testing and to oppose the move to PARCC, we ask for your courage, vision and leadership in assisting our efforts.

Sincerely,



Barbara Madeloni
MTA President



Janet Anderson
MTA Vice President