

Attleboro Education Association



June 11, 2015

Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz, Chair
Joint Committee on Education
State House, Room 111
Boston, MA 02133

Rep. Alice Hanlon Peisch, Chair
Joint Committee on Education
State House, Room 473G
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Madam Chairs:

My name is Adeline Bee and I am an English and Journalism teacher at Attleboro High School, where I have worked since 1999. I have been the President of the educators' union for the last six years. I serve as an MTA District Director, participate in LPAT meetings, am a school committee member and am a longtime Democratic State Committeewoman. I began teaching in 1974 in Georgia, and have since taught English or American Government in Alabama, Kentucky, the D.C. area and Massachusetts.

As a child, my scores on standardized tests were below average, even though my grades were usually straight A's. At sixteen, I graduated from high school. Three years later, after attending school full-time and working at least half-time, I graduated from the University of Georgia without any debt, after personally paying for the majority of my schooling. I have two masters, one from Lesley University and one from Endicott College. My test scores obviously were **NOT** an indicator of future success. I am so glad my parents emphasized my grades, not my standardized test scores.

But, unfortunately, that is not what most parents today think. The corporate world has somehow decided that educators — by the way, the same ones who taught them — are not accountable. So what do they do? They set out to create tests and more tests, and then make these robotic tests a graduation requirement, tie them to an educator's evaluation and to how a district is assessed, not caring about poverty, ELL students or special needs students, who take the brunt of the stress. What monster has been created?

I'll tell you, these tests have taken over education, but worst of all is what they are doing to children, children of all ages. Kindergarteners and first-graders are so worried about tests, they are throwing up before school. Third-graders are scared of failing; sixth-graders are so stressed about time limits that the test becomes a high-stakes race. Visits to the nurse and counselors are increased, especially with at-risk students, during high-stakes testing. Is that really what we want

for our children? Practice tests given two weeks before the test, another nine hours, show how much the students struggle. Week after week, during this onslaught of tests, passing is the only thing the students can think about. Their anxiety is manifested in more and more hurtful ways as they grow. So once in high school and sometimes before, anxiety and stress become anorexia, cutting, bulimia, skipping school, drug use, medical visits, medication, and family fighting.

This year alone, in one of my classes, 28% showed above average to severe anxiety, which became significantly worse as the year progressed; at least two were hospitalized, one was home more than at school, bulimia and anorexia were both present, and their grades suffered. But, more than that, they suffered physically and emotionally. They are not happy teenagers. They are often depressed, smile infrequently, and have high absentee rates. Because of the stress, their families are also affected. This is how this year-after-year barrage of tests is affecting some of our children.

My heart aches watching them try to meet the ridiculous goals adults have set for them. As you know, timed tests only test how fast a child can answer something, not how much he or she actually knows. Down the road, not one of these standardized tests will make a bit of difference to them, their families, their significant other, or their future employers. High-stakes tests do not show whether a child is or will be successful. High-stakes tests do not measure motivation. AND most of all, high-stakes tests do not promote learning.

Last year, the Legislature budgeted \$28,906,725 for MCAS and its alternative assessments. The House has again budgeted the same number for FY16. What could we do with that kind of money in our schools? More technology, smaller class sizes (the one thing consistently proven to make a difference), more language classes ... maybe beginning in elementary school, guidance counselors at the middle schools, more psychologists to treat the high number of children with serious needs, better special needs programs, more art and music offerings, or, just hire 900 more teachers? The unfunded needs are endless, and as more and more of our children are diagnosed with special needs, it pits regular education against special education, not a battle fair to any child.

As you can imagine, I am in total support of H340, An Act relative to a moratorium on high-stakes testing and PARCC, filed by Rep. Marjorie Decker (D-Cambridge) and cosigned by over fifty House and Senate members. Personally, I would like to see both the MCAS and PARCC eliminated completely. I respectfully request that H340 be favorably reported out of committee as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Adeline M. Bee

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North Attleboro