

Sen. 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 Madame Chairs:

My name is Betsy McEneaney, and I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies at UMass-Amherst. With my UMass colleague Meg Gebhard, I recently studied how teachers access and think about student data, including test score data, and I have done consulting on this topic for the Hewlett Foundation.

I am here today to urge you to institute a moratorium on high-stakes testing.

First, as others are addressing in more detail, high-stakes tests such as PARCC may not align well with the kinds of knowledge in which students realistically need to gain proficiency. Accommodations for English learners and special ed students seem quite inadequate.

Second, I believe there is a prevalent misconception that test score results are routinely used to improve instruction. My research suggests otherwise. The tests ARE used to rank students and schools, and punitively identify "low performers." However, the Massachusetts teachers we interviewed often had difficulty accessing test data, especially accessing it in a timely fashion. Due to the politicized nature of the test results, teacher access is often mediated by gatekeepers. When we asked one teacher whether she would be able to get test score data on her students, she responded "The principal would definitely want to know what I plan to use it for." Some teachers reported having to borrow system passwords from those with authorized access. Other teachers had difficulty getting data from prior years or from schools attended previously.

The teachers we interviewed are not anti-test. They are most definitely NOT anti-data. But they have a broader view of what kind of data about students and their learning is relevant to their teaching than a simple thumbs up or down on a high-stakes test. And they resent that the current standardized testing regime robs them of inordinate amount of classroom time and attention, while producing data that are not much used to directly improve teaching.

As others concerned about this issue have said: "You don't fatten a cow by weighing it a lot." From my perspective, we're in a situation where we're doing a whole lot of mindless weighing!

Let's slow down, take the time to think hard about which tests are needed, which tests can really be used to improve teaching and learning, and what supports teachers, parents and students need to

understand what the test results mean. Thank you.

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cc: Joint Committee on Education Members & Staff  
Sen. Patricia Jehlen, Vice Chair  
Rep. Danielle Gregoire, Vice Chair