

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:

Dear Honorable Senators, Representatives, and Members of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education,

As president of the Revere Teachers Association, I am supporting H340 on behalf more than 600 teachers.

I have been a teacher in the Revere Public Schools for 11 years. In that time, I have seen broad changes in the city and in its schools. When I started, the MCAS and the curriculum frameworks adopted in 2000 still felt new. The testing and accountability movement had shocked the system, and Revere was not doing well.

But the results of MCAS drove change. Teachers and administrators became focused on the data – we learned to read into it, even though the reports were always about last year’s students. We spent more time on Math and English. Scores rose. Revere became a model for city schools – both more diverse and higher performing than it was a decade ago.

So, there are many who would hold up Revere as an argument *against* this bill, but that would be a terrible misreading.

The MCAS marked a change in philosophy twenty years ago, a paradigm shift that has already had its effect. Our schools have adapted, raising rigor, becoming data driven, focusing on results.

PARCC cannot offer a transformation like that. It’s already been done. PARCC is just another test.

I teach math to “at-risk” students, adolescents whose legal, academic, disciplinary, or attendance records show they are likely to drop out of high school. I teach smart kids, but they are kids who have learned that tests label them as failures.

When they come to me as ninth-graders, they are anxious about graduation. They know they have some catching up. With two years’ lead time, my school can catch them up, but if we don’t – if they get that “Failure” label and still have to worry about the MCAS as an eleventh-grader – we lose them. I remember that these measures were meant to leave no child behind, but I have seen them push too many out the door. This would only get worse if we gave multiple tests every year, and beyond that is the disruption to learning that comes from giving so many tests.

The PARCC testing procedures required two fully licensed teachers in each room to supervise testing. At my school, this meant there were four teachers who became proctors. For three weeks, they could not teach their classes. I can't even estimate the number of student hours wasted across the state to meet the administration requirements. I don't want to contemplate how many students with disabilities had to go without services from special educators or counselors because removing those teachers strands students without any teacher in class.

The reason I deeply support H340 is not that it cuts testing, but that it demands answers to very important questions. What are the time and cost implications? How do these tests affect teaching and learning? How can we measure success without the drawbacks of standardized testing?

The Board of Education cannot be allowed to rush adoption of the PARCC test next fall on the assurances of Pearson that it worked well for Massachusetts students.

I ask you to support H340, An Act relative to a moratorium on high stakes testing and PARCC, filed by Rep. Marjorie Decker (D-Cambridge), and request the Committee report it favorably from Committee as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Erik J. Fearing, President

Revere Teachers Association

cc: Joint Committee on Education Members & Staff

Sen. Patricia Jehlen, Vice Chair

Rep. Danielle Gregoire, Vice Chair