

June 11, 2015  
36 Seven Pines Ave #3  
Cambridge, MA 02140

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:

I write to you in support of H340. I am a parent of two children in Cambridge public schools, and a teacher in the Cambridge Public Schools. I started my teaching career in the Houston public schools in 1995, and taught in Seattle before teaching there, so I have seen the arc of standardized testing history from a wide perspective.

I teach geometry and calculus at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, and many of my students go on to major in STEM fields at such institutions as WPI, UMass, Harvard, and MIT. Our public schools are giving them a good education, challenging them, and granting them opportunities to succeed now and in the future. And for these students, standardized testing is a nuisance that they deal with and move past.

But this past Monday, when I walked through my school's office, I saw a 9th grade girl who was shaking and about to cry at 8 a.m. because she was anxious that she would fail the Physics MCAS. I talked with a special education teacher, who told me about the kids with special needs who will use the full six-hours of an MCAS test day. Some of them don't pass the first time, so they do re-take after re-take, and they can spend 18 days out of a year being tested and assessed. The special education teacher said it almost seems like it is "abusive" to make some of these kids sit there for six hours with a test that is so tough for them. That's 10 percent of the school year that we could spend teaching them—and these are the kids who really need the positive social interaction with a teacher, not the non-committal standoffishness of a proctor. If a kid is from a family without much formal education, this over-testing atmosphere can create the impression

that aiming for college is a years-long treadmill of standardized testing. The testing and assessments have gotten to the point of discouraging rather than helping the kids who really need an education.

Therefore, Massachusetts should reconsider our paradigm of standardized testing as a means to reducing the achievement gap. Any good scientist knows that if you have a theory, you don't just gather data to support your theory; you also look for data that contradicts your theory. Sure, there are some kids who survive the testing gauntlet and go on to college. But is this theory of testing working for *all* the children of Massachusetts? If kids with special needs and English-language learner students are losing learning time to do so much testing, is that giving them a better education, or a lesser one? With the PARCC looming on the horizon, threatening to take even more time away from kids' education, it is important that you give your fullest consideration to H340.

Sincerely,

Joel Patterson, Cambridge

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