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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:

As a teacher and parent in the Cambridge Public Schools, I am here to urge you to support H340.

I want to emphasize how dramatically the culture of standardized testing has hindered our daily instruction, far beyond the official state testing season each spring.

In our district, Cambridge, and in districts around the state, the data collection madness has descended into the realm of the absurd. Right now, my fourth graders are in the midst of their year-end assessments. I'm not talking about the two mornings of MCAS reading comprehension, full day of MCAS long composition, and two mornings of Math MCAS which they already completed in March and May. Because now that those high-stakes tests are complete, we have moved right into the district's mandated assessments, which have included:

- A narrative writing prompt
- A spelling assessment
- Multiple oral reading assessments
- Two different computer-based reading comprehension assessments
- A district-level math assessment modeled on the PARCC test
- A computer-based math assessment
- Fact fluency assessments in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division

When will we say “enough is enough?” In the misguided frenzy to ensure students' proficient performance on the standardized tests each spring, we are now providing students with multiple weeks of district-level testing each September, January, and June. And so we've arrived at the ludicrous reality that nearly half of the school year has been rolled into a continuous testing season.

Over the last few years, I've seen the change in students' relationship to learning. Classrooms in my school have always featured interdisciplinary project-based learning designed to motivate and engage children in higher-order thinking. When we aren't taking tests, we're meeting with historians, researching primary and secondary sources, and creating picture books about American history. We're

using our knowledge of area, perimeter, and budgeting to design, build, and furnish our own model clubhouses. We're discussing complex text in book clubs. But in this current climate of testing and more testing, morale is down; disengagement is up. Kids who are typically animated, curious, and motivated learners are now bored, anxious, and apathetic.

It has been hard for teachers to speak out about overtesting. We have worried that the public will perceive our critique as a self-serving attempt to deflect accountability or to reject rigor. But as we contemplate implementing the PARCC, an even more outrageous standardized test, teachers are deciding that silence is no longer an option.

Please hear our voices. We are the professionals who know what the children of the Commonwealth truly need. Before implementing any new standardized tests, let's take the time that's needed to engage parents and teachers in an open discussion of what kind of assessment system we want for our children.

Tests don't close the achievement gap. Tests don't build community. Tests don't inspire young learners. *Teachers* do.

Sincerely,

Karen Engels
Grade 3 and 4 Teacher
Cambridge Public Schools