

Sen. Sonia R. 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:

I have been carefully observing and reading about the impact of the current load of high-stakes standardized testing in our school system. While I do believe that our education system is more accountable to parents and students with some form of standardized testing repeated on a regular basis to track progress, I sincerely believe that our state and federal departments of education have been rushing us down a pathway of ever-increasing assessment loads and using the results of standardized assessments for purposes for which they were not intended, and that have no basis in research — like to evaluate teacher performance and to penalize schools and districts. We need to take time to stop and reassess how we got here and where this hyperfocus on assessment is taking us.

For the past 10 years we have been reacting to federal and state mandates to increase the testing load and guarding against the potential consequences of not achieving benchmarks from NCLB and RTTT. The performance levels for teachers, schools, and districts were created using mathematical formulas and systems that were designed for businesses, rather than systems based in research about what truly produces the best environment for growing thoughtful, creative, lifelong learners who will be successful after high school – and who can do well on the tests that allow them entrance into postgraduate studies. In addition, we have also allowed a level of stress to enter the education system that is having a detrimental effect on both teachers and students.

I am impressed and relieved that there is legislation that we can support that would direct us to take a timeout to get a better handle on what we assess, why we assess, how we assess, and how much is the optimal amount to assess, in order to ensure that all students are moving forward with their education and are able to achieve at similar levels across economic classes, learning profiles, and linguistic differences.

The moratorium on PARCC would stop this rush to adopt a system that is not ready for prime time. Massachusetts already has a test that is fully aligned with the Common Core. It is a test that was part of a reform effort that made Massachusetts a national leader in education. Why would we voluntarily give up the control we have over our own testing system to a multistate consortium? Why would we decide next fall about adopting a test for the spring that is still undergoing review and changes? What is the rush?

This bill would allow us to step back, and take the time to convene a broad task force of parents, teachers, administrators, school committee members, educational researchers, and others with a stake in how we educate our children. The task force could do what the Common Core would have our students do: make informed, evidence-based decisions about the proper role of standardized assessments in our public schools. I believe we should have this important conversation before we make a high-stakes decision about who will control the future of testing in Massachusetts.

I am in support of H340, An Act relative to a moratorium on high-stakes testing and PARCC, filed by Rep. Marjorie Decker (D-Cambridge), and request it be reported out of committee favorably as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Linda Hanson
President, Arlington Education Association

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