

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:

After 35 years of working as a general and special education teacher in an elementary school I will be retiring at the end of this month. I have seen many changes over the past three decades, but none as onerous as the high stakes testing mandate, beginning with MCAS and, this year, the introduction of PARCC.

As a special educator I am able to actually see the questions while I help students, though apparently by law I am not allowed to relate any of them to anyone in public. Therefore, you'll have to take my word for it that the items presented to third, fourth, and fifth grade students this year, (and in years past), will not be particularly useful in determining a child's ability to succeed, nor will they be a good measure of how well a teacher or a school functions.

I could relate many stories of students in tears, admitting they are just "guessing," or becoming "ill" just before the test begins. It's hard to explain to a nine-year-old why it is important for him or her to take this test, even though everyone, including the student, knows they will not be able to perform well, in spite of everyone's best efforts. The level of anxiety that elementary school students are experiencing has increased exponentially since I began teaching in the 80's.

I understand the need for data and standardized testing, but I consider the content of MCAS and PARCC to be so onerous that they cannot measure the important aspects of what makes a school high performing. These would include creating a safe and caring environment where teachers are focused on what is best for students, not for high test scores.

I see the time and energy (not to mention the money) invested in these tests as a huge diversion from the real work of teachers: building relationships with students and working in collaboration with colleagues to find the best way to create lifelong learners who possess critical thinking skills they can use to become successful adults.

It is my hope that the legislature will do the right thing and institute a moratorium on high stakes testing until a more thoughtful, and developmentally appropriate way of measuring student achievement can be created.

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 the Committee report it favorably from Committee as soon as possible.

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