

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:

Why we opt out

My name is Sarah Talbot and I am a paraeducator in the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District. My son, Jordan, is a sixth-grade student at Chestnut Hill Community School in Belchertown.

Over the past couple of years, I have given a lot of thought to the subject of high-stakes standardized testing and what it means for my students and my own child. I have watched my child become frustrated because the subjects that he loves, science and social studies, are never taught at the same time in his classroom, as each is taught for a month at a time in order to allow more time in the day to focus on English and Math in preparation for high-stakes standardized tests.

As an educator, I find it baffling that I am asked to differentiate instruction and find alternate means of measuring student proficiency, but high-stakes standardized tests, which measure a student's performance through only one method, are used to determine the success of a school and identify the needs of students.

This year, as the PARCC test approached, I found my own child exhibiting severe symptoms of anxiety. He had received the message (somewhere along the way) that his academic success and his potential as a student were dependent upon

the outcome of these tests. We spoke at length about what the tests are and what they truly mean: a mere snapshot of what the student is able to produce on a given day and time. Noting that my child had internalized that his worth as a student was to be measured by this one test, together we made the decision that he would opt out of high-stakes standardized testing moving forward. While he and I both felt (and remain feeling) secure in our decision, it was not an easy one. On the first day that he opted out, he was not provided with an educationally relevant experience, but was instead sent to sit in the main office, where students who are in trouble sit, until 1:45 in the afternoon.

During this time, his classmates walked by and he faced ridicule for being in the main office, while they were receiving snacks and gum in the testing room. The teasing was so bad that he begged me not to send him to school for the remainder of the testing days. As he had not been provided with an educationally relevant alternative to the PARCC test, I allowed him to stay home during the portion of the day that the test would be administered for the next two days. I find it absurd that in order to protect my child from having to sit in the main office and face ridicule, it was necessary for me to keep him home from school. In speaking to other parents regarding our decision to opt out, I was told that their students had taken their own stand; entering all A's on the test on one day and all B's on the next. I find this to be extremely frightening.

As the performance of schools and educators is measured by the results of these tests, falsified low test scores leave districts at risk of being rated as underperforming. I urge you to make a decision that does not leave students in the position of having to take matters into their own hands. Please support a moratorium on high-stakes standardized testing and HB 340.

Sarah Talbot,

Amherst ESP

cc: Joint Committee on Education Members & Staff

Sen. Patricia Jehlen, Vice Chair

Rep. Danielle Gregoire, Vice Chair