

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:

Good morning Madame Chairs and Members of the Joint Education Committee:

My name is Diane Ogorzalek, and I am a special education teacher and a parent in the town of Ludlow. I am here to voice my support and urge you to pass House bills 340, 294 and 460.

I love kids, and for the past 17 years, I have loved being a teacher, but teaching today is becoming increasingly difficult. This is largely because an inordinate amount of pressure is put on students and teachers to raise scores on standardized tests. This pressure is compounded by the fact that these tests are so grossly inappropriate for so many of my students. Students with special needs are complex. They have attention and memory issues, cognitive delays, reading disabilities like dyslexia, or they may struggle with dysgraphia or autism. These are the students I work with every day, and I am inspired by their bravery, their creativity and their consistent effort in the face of overwhelming obstacles. My job is to harness their potential and encourage them to do their best.

In the classroom, I am mandated to differentiate instruction and meet diverse needs all year long. Good teaching practice dictates that I modify lessons and adjust my teaching so that all learners can access the curriculum. I am proud of the classroom climate that I create, which welcomes all learners — where all kids know they can succeed. Unfortunately, that positive momentum crashes when my students are forced to take high-stakes tests. These long and tedious tests often contain passages that are well beyond grade level, they take hours and days to administer, and they don't measure the capabilities of my students. Rather, they undermine all of the hard work we do. Kids who I encouraged all year long become discouraged by the test. Students feel pressure, anxiety, and frustration. They are defeated. So many complain that they feel stupid and incompetent. Parents no longer want their children to participate in these tests, having seen the negative effects for so many years. As a teacher, I am heartbroken to see my students and their families in such pain. They deserve better!

I hold myself accountable to my students and their families every day. I am there to be supportive. High-stakes tests are punitive. The results are used to punish. They punish the poor, the non-native speakers and the disabled by withholding diplomas from students who have met all other requirements. These students have had to work twice as hard to attain their h.s. credits, only to find that the rug is pulled out from under them at graduation because they've missed the score by a couple of points. Students are devastated. This practice hurts so many, and it helps no one. It's our most vulnerable students who are suffering!

The voices of teachers, students and their parents are loud and clear: put an end to high-stakes tests! Children are not data. I am not a tester, I'm a teacher.

Thank You

Diane Ogorzalek  
Ludlow