

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:

My name is Jean Fay. I have worked as a paraeducator for the Amherst public schools for eighteen years. As a special education paraeducator I work with some of the neediest and most vulnerable students. I do my best every day to help my students succeed, and to create a nurturing environment for learning. I am constantly providing them encouragement, but also letting them know that I am there to help whenever they need it. However, when it is testing time, I am instructed to tell my students, these same students who trust that I will help them when they need it, that I can't help them. I see their frustration turn to anger, and many times, to tears. There is no data that is so valuable that it is worth making a child cry.

Fred Rogers so wisely said that the real work of childhood is play. Our younger students aren't learning the social skills necessary to positively interact with each other because time that used to be spent playing is now spent on testing and assessments. I see an increasing number of students in first and second grade frustrated to the point that they act out because they don't possess the skills they need to interact with peers in a positive and appropriate manner.

When I run into former students, now grown and out of high school, one of the first things they ask me is if I still do read aloud with chocolate chip cookies on Fridays. I can assure you that not once have I been asked if I still give tests. My students have developed a lifelong love of reading, something that can't be pie-charted, bar graphed, datified, or bubbled in.

As president of the Amherst Pelham Education Association I hear from many educators who struggle with the desire to really reach their students by challenging them as they teach them to think, to reason, to question and explore, while they are being asked to squeeze more assessments and testing into an already packed

school day. We have all morphed from educators into data collectors. We need to stop and remember that we are talking about the education of children, all unique individuals, not a production line in a factory.

I urge you to do the right thing for the children of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The time has come to realize that we owe it to our children to provide the very best education possible in a nurturing environment that promotes real learning instead of learning how to take a test.

Sincerely,

Jean Fay, Amherst

cc: Joint Committee on Education Members & Staff

Sen. Patricia Jehlen, Vice Chair

Rep. Danielle Gregoire, Vice Chair