

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 and Members of the Joint Education Committee:

My name is Laura O’Keefe and I am a 16-year educator in Massachusetts Public Schools, as well as a lifelong resident of the state and parent of three children ranging from college age to grade 5. I speak today for a countless number of colleagues when I say that the changes we are witnessing in education are shocking and deplorable. The narrowing of curriculum, fueled by the increased demands for standardized test scores, detracts from the quality of education that our students deserve.

Since the implementation of No Child Left Behind, we have witnessed the systematic decimation of non-tested subjects. It is widely known today that social studies and science are taught sporadically at the elementary level, so that more time can be devoted to drilling students in English Language Arts, Math, and test prep. There is little time left for exploration in subjects that are not only necessary to the development of future citizens and problem-solvers, but that once enriched students’ learning. Electives like art, music, home economics, technology, wood shop, and drama have been driven out of our schools and replaced with extra-long blocks of math and reading. Students used to look forward to applying their skills and using their imaginations in new and creative ways.

The increasing number of tests that students are required to take is alarming. It includes pre-and post-assessments, DDMs, BAS, SRI, SMI, DRA, etc., and culminates in the state tests, by which time students are fatigued and discouraged by the data points that label them. We are creating a generation of students overwhelmed with anxiety and afraid to take risks. Testing is not learning. These tests are making kids sick. In fact, the MCAS Administrator’s Manual now includes a protocol on how to respond when students vomit on the tests. What are we doing?

In the name of “accountability,” we are robbing our students of the education they deserve. As a teacher and a mother, I do not want children to be used as accountability measures, when in fact, no standardized test could ever show meaningful student growth. Teachers assess students every single day — that’s our job. Good teachers foster learning and measure progress in a myriad of ways; we develop relationships with our students and differentiate our instruction to meet their needs. We see their potential in ways that these profit-driven standardized tests cannot.

Teachers across the state implore you to support our efforts to see our students as more than test scores. We crave innovative and purposeful learning opportunities in our classrooms. Please support House Bill 340 and others that seek to reduce the punitive effects of high-stakes testing and the guise of “accountability” in our schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Laura O’Keefe

Ludlow