

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:

Hello, my name is Ruthie Page Weinbaum. I live in Amherst, Massachusetts, which is where I go to school. I have been taking MCAS since third grade, and I am in sixth grade but never really realized how negative this kind of testing could be until last year. After hearing what has gone on around the state regarding PARCC and MCAS, I know that action is very necessary.

Standardized tests are meaningless. Students spend months preparing, wasting potential learning time, and when the test rolls around, many students become stressed over something incredibly unnecessary. I can speak firsthand to that. When I had reading comprehension MCAS tests this year, we prepared for about a month and a half. The night before the test, I became nervous, and this is saying something, because I almost never stress over tests. But this time, I was worried for one reason: My class and I had been studying practice tests for months. Sometimes I got perfect scores, sometimes I completely messed up. After studying to fit this very specific format, all I was thinking was, what if this time I don't get off easy? What if I draw a blank? What if I can't fill up the lines? Or I don't have enough space? In the back of my head, I knew the scores were meaningless, but at the time, all I could think about were the countless times my teachers said, "If it isn't a four, make it one," or "You don't get any points for creativity." I knew that I had at least some talent for writing, but when I wrote these open responses, I didn't feel like I was writing my choice of words on the paper. I felt I was writing what the test was choosing for me to write. This is why they call it "teaching to the test." Students are not learning anything that will help them ever in their lives, EXCEPT for this one specific test. The only reason I've ever heard

anyone say they like MCAS is because a) we get candy, b) we have no homework, and c) we get extra recess. The test has no positive, lasting effects.

Another reason it is pointless is because teachers already know where their students' knowledge is – I know that for a fact. We have tests at the end of almost every unit in almost every subject, and those are for the sole purpose of HELPING KIDS TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL, not to see whether the teacher, school, or district is doing well. When kids show they are struggling in an area on a unit test, they are placed in a small group at their level so they can get more individual attention. Teachers are thinking about this sort of thing all the time. By saying students need to take an additional test to find out the same information, you are taking away a teacher's authority in the eyes of kids, even when the teachers are the only ones who really do know what they're doing.

Although I complain about it often, I do really love some parts of school. There are many things I like about school – including music, library, and computers. I love reading because I learn something new every time I read a book. I love writing essays because I can find and refine new and old arguments. In the rest of school, creativity DOES matter, in fact it is encouraged, unlike in MCAS. I even like math – just NOT when it's part of a test. I like math because there's only one right answer, and I learn new ones every class. I love learning. I love learning because I know it is helping me to become a better student and person in general. And no test can say otherwise.

Sincerely,

Ruthie Page Weinbaum

cc: Joint Committee on Education Members & Staff

Sen. Patricia Jehlen, Vice Chair

Rep. Danielle Gregoire, Vice Chair