

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:

I am here today to testify on behalf of English Language Learners and their families about what I hope will speak to some particulars of the bill H340. Namely the call for a moratorium on PARCC testing, and the elimination of use of MCAS scores for assessing the schools and/or school districts, especially as these tests pertain to students who are not yet proficient in English.

Specialists in the field of Second Language Acquisition in Education have determined that becoming proficient in the *social language* of English takes between one and three years and proficiency in *academic* English, between three and seven years. These numbers are supported by the ACCESS test, which has been adopted by Massachusetts (and 32 other states) as the standard test for measuring English proficiency. The test is a comprehensive assessment of four areas: Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. Scores are reported in each category, and in four additional aggregates of Literacy, Oral Language, Comprehension and Overall. These scores provide valuable information to all teachers.

But I am not opposed to this test. What I do oppose is the fact that after they take this test, students who have not yet achieved proficiency in the ACCESS test, and who may have been in school for only one year, are required to take the ELA MCAS, which includes for seventh graders the Long Composition component. *If acquisition of academic English takes at least three years, why are we requiring students who are not yet capable of these tests, to sit for them?* And why do we require all students, regardless of English language proficiency, (anecdotally that can be an eighth grade student arriving from China and in the U.S. classroom for three weeks) to take the eighth grade science MCAS?

Administering the MCAS takes away more time from instruction. This is time lost to English language instruction and also content area instruction from qualified teachers. For each portion of the MCAS, a total of 2.5 classroom hours is spent. That makes 7.5 hours for seventh graders taking ELA MCAS, and 10 hours for eighth graders taking ELA and Science MCAS. Imagine the additional time spent in scheduling school staff, printing reports, sending letters, and discussing student progress. This is more valuable time and money lost, to give us results that are easily predictable. Time is money, and for these students, time is of the essence.

What I am proposing is to exempt those students who have not yet achieved proficiency status as measured by the ACCESS test from MCAS testing in ELA and Science. Or at least provide an opt-out category, made easily available to students and their families. Until we can do that, we are losing valuable time on tests that serve only to diminish the ACCESS test, to devalue student effort, to discourage them by reminding them yet again that they are in fact deficient and lagging far behind their English-speaking counterparts.

Sincerely,

Sarah Newcomb

cc: Joint Committee on Education Members & Staff
Sen. Patricia Jehlen, Vice Chair
Rep. Danielle Gregoire, Vice Chair