

Creating our own local branch of Citizens for Public Schools enabled parents and teachers within our local community to organize around testing issues. Much of this past year was spent listening to our fellow Cantabrigians' opinions. We learned what people's concerns were. We learned that there was not a lot of interest in the opt-out movement in Cambridge. But there was interest in the Less Testing More Learning campaign. People in Cambridge were willing to sign petitions, read articles, and participate in discussions with neighbors and friends. They were willing to advocate at School Committee meetings.

In the spring of 2014, two Cambridge parents, Ann Barnes and Erica Pastor, started a petition to "Pause PARCC" in response to the upcoming PARCC testing that was to be piloted in our schools. Over 400 parents, teachers, and community members signed the Pause PARCC petition. The petition was presented to the School Committee, and the School Committee voted not to adopt PARCC for the 2014-2015 school year.

Following the success of the petition, Ann Barnes, Erica Pastor, and I created the Facebook page Cambridge Citizens for Public Schools. Our goal is to facilitate local online discussions of the testing issue. About 300 people currently follow the page. It has been a useful tool to communicate with members of our community and to build a citywide movement around Less Testing More Learning.

In January, Cambridge Citizens for Public Schools co-sponsored a forum with the Cambridge Education Association. The forum consisted of a screening of the documentary Good Morning Mission Hill, and community discussion before and after the film. It was well-attended by parents, teachers, and some School Committee members. At the forum, we asked the question: "What should public schools look like in Cambridge? Here were some answers:

- Schools should be joyful.
- They should treat students, teachers, and support staff respectfully, and as capable, creative innovators.
- Students should be engaged.
- Teachers should be given the time to teach in a deep way.
- Schools should be effective and inclusive, with resource-heavy classrooms and lots of classroom management training and support for teachers.
- Schools should accommodate different learning styles.
- Schools should provide Whole Child Education.
- Schools should reduce the amount of testing.

The amount of standardized testing in Cambridge exceeds the amount mandated by the state. During this past year, we learned that all first and second graders in Cambridge must complete at least 27 written standardized assessments per year. Third, fourth, and fifth graders must complete at least 34 per year.

The Less Testing More Learning Week of Action was a great success in Cambridge. It marked a cultural shift within the community. In the fall of 2014, one teacher told me that she and her colleagues felt afraid to express anti-testing feelings; they were afraid for their jobs. But by late spring, the union had clearly become more supportive and outspoken about over-testing. During the Week of Action, teachers and parents wore Less Testing buttons, and Less Testing bumper stickers popped up around the city. Cambridge parents and teachers spoke at the State House hearing in June.

When Marjorie Decker introduced the bill H.340, Cambridge Citizens for Public Schools reached out to the community, to encourage others to support this bill and to sign a petition to support Cambridge teachers in urging the Mass State Board of Ed in voting against the adoption of PARCC. This petition was circulated widely via the Cambridge parents' listserve, the Facebook page, and through communicating with leaders in the Cambridge Education Association, City Council members, and the School Committee. The Cambridge City Council voted to support the bill, and the School Committee followed suit. So far we have 468 signatures (of mostly Cambridge residents). The petition is still open and people continue to add their names.

Going forward, Cambridge Citizens for Public Schools is in the process of planning more community forums. We are hoping to co-sponsor a forum with the Cambridge branch of Black Lives Matter. Two major events are happening in Cambridge this fall: the search for a new superintendent (scheduled to be completed by October) and the School Committee elections. I am one of the new candidates running for School Committee. Less Testing More Learning plays a large role in my campaign platform. Several of the other candidates are supporting Less Testing as well. I think this a good sign that testing issues are starting to play a larger role