

Citizens for Public Schools President Ann O'Halloran statement to BESE

Oct. 22, 2013

My name is Ann O'Halloran, president of Citizens for Public Schools, a Massachusetts teacher for 30 years, now retired.

We are here today to ask you not to mandate another giant escalation of high-stakes testing in Massachusetts. Please do not approve the transition to PARCC for these reason:

1. PARCC will bring more testing and we already have too much.

PARCC requires two testing seasons per year instead of one. PARCC also adds two additional grades in high school to the test mandate.

2. The PARCC test items are not that different from MCAS.

PARCC set out to assess higher-order reasoning. But if you compare the sample PARCC questions with released MCAS questions, you will find them very similar. That includes the "performance-based assessment" questions. Compare the actual items, not what they're labeled.

3. The PARCC format has been a nightmare in other states.

The biggest change will be testing on computers. Other states have already run into major problems. An Associated Press report last spring said, "Many frustrated students have been reduced to tears and administrators are boiling over, calling the problems "disastrous" and "unacceptable."

Let's not have that here in Massachusetts.

To meet PARCC's requirement that children write on a computer, second graders with tiny hands are struggling to learn touch-typing, according to the *Boston Globe*.

What's more, the students and schools with the weakest computer skills and worst equipment are those that already tend to score lower. Computer testing will make achievement gaps seem even bigger.

I taught students with special needs and am very familiar with the extra stress MCAS imposes on those children. What computer-specific accommodations are provided so these children can be tested accurately and fairly?

Please don't go ahead with this. Look at what has already happened in other states before you leap.

At a minimum, don't punish students, teachers, and schools for their performance on highly-problematic assessments.

The debate over PARCC shows we need to reassess the whole test-and-punish policy. We were surprised to see the commissioner say, in arguing for PARCC, that “MCAS was never designed as an indicator of career or college readiness.”

If MCAS is not an indicator of the student’s readiness for the next stage in life, why have Massachusetts educators been bending every effort to raise their scores? Why have students been denied high school diplomas, and schools closed, on the basis of these scores?

And if MCAS is not an indicator of college and career readiness, PARCC will be no better. It’s time to return to the local districts the authority to assess their own students.