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Testimony given at the Joint Committee on Education, MA Statehouse, June 11, 2015

Thank you Co-Chair Alice Peisch and the Joint Committee on Education for hearing this testimony.

I am Jonathan Rappaport, Executive Director of Arts|Learning, and I am testifying in support of the various bills submitted including S294 and H340 seeking a moratorium on high-stakes testing in Massachusetts. I come to you as a 38-year public-school veteran, both as a teacher and administrator. I was on the panel that wrote the current MA Arts Curriculum Framework, and I strongly support rigorous learning standards. However, I believe that high-stakes MCAS, and now PARCC, has had a significant deleterious effect on arts education of many students in the state. A national 2007 study by the Center on Education Policy reported that since 2001 (year of NCLB implementation), 44% of school districts nationally had reduced the time spent on science, social studies and the arts by an average of 145 minutes per week in order to focus on reading and math.¹

I observed this first hand as the arts coordinator in the Worcester Public Schools; one middle school eliminated all music and art for children with low academic achievement. These students had double math and/or ELA periods daily. School became a joyless place, with nothing to look forward to, day in and day out. Ironically, on the other side of the city, students at the Worcester Arts Magnet School had *less* reading and math and 50 minutes of arts daily, and their academic achievement was soaring. To this day, WAMS is rated as a Level I school.

¹ Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, 2010

(Such results have been reported around the country for decades. For example, a 2012 study on arts education in Chicago Public Schools² found that fourth graders who started with the arts education program in 2009 saw an 11.5 percentage point gain in composite test scores meeting or exceeding state standards by the time they finished the arts program in sixth grade in 2011. They also scored on average more than 11 percentage points higher than fourth through sixth graders at the same school who did not take part in the arts education program, according to the study.)

Other amazing urban success stories across MA include the Peabody Elementary School in Cambridge, the Orchard Gardens School in Boston, and the Edwards Middle School in Boston. All these schools have several commonalities: increased arts instruction, often resulting in less time for reading and math, yet much higher academic achievement across all subjects in spite of significant populations on free- or reduced-lunch.³

Meanwhile, America is facing a "creativity crisis," as standardized testing and rote learning dumb down curricula and jeopardize the country's economic future. A 2010 College of William & Mary study⁴ found Americans' scores on the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking have been dropping since 1990 for over 20 years, and researcher Kyung-Hee Kim lays part of the blame on the increase in standardized testing: "If we neglect creative students in school because of the structure and the testing movement... then they become underachievers."

In national surveys of business leaders, creativity and "out-of-the-box" thinking are top skills desired by employers. Out of hundreds of managers across the country, 73% think

² <http://www.howtolearn.com/2012/03/arts-education-leads-to-improved-standardized-test-scores/>

³ Data available on the MA DOE website for each school

⁴ Lee, K.H. (2011). *The Creativity Crises: The Decrease of Creative Thinking Scores on the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking*. Creativity Research Journal, 23(4), 285-295.

creativity/innovation will increase in importance in the coming years.⁵ Yet only 5% of American voters rank schools at 9 out of 10 in teaching creativity/innovation.⁶

Ironically, inclusion of dance, music, art, and theatre are the very subjects that can improve student creativity and innovation, yet these subjects have been marginalized by a combination of time limits due to excessive standardized testing and test preparation, which in turn eats up precious financial resources that limit budgets available for the arts.

We know that standardized tests measure only a fraction of what makes education meaningful. According to late education researcher Gerald W. Bracey, PhD, qualities that standardized tests cannot measure include "creativity, critical thinking, resilience, motivation, persistence, curiosity, endurance, reliability, enthusiasm, empathy, self-awareness, self-discipline, leadership, civic-mindedness, courage, compassion, resourcefulness, sense of beauty, sense of wonder, honesty, integrity."⁷ Many of these traits are fostered by sequential arts education programs.

Isn't it time that we stop, take a breath, and truly analyze what we are doing to our children, our teachers, and our schools? I urge you to support a high-stakes testing moratorium in Massachusetts.

Thank you.

Please see attached pages for additional information.

⁵ ***Are They Really Ready to Work?***, a 2006 study conducted by the Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management.

⁶ ***Beyond the Three Rs: Voter Attitudes toward 21st Century Skills***, a 2007 national poll commissioned by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills

⁷ Valerie Strauss, "The Myths of Standardized Testing," ***Washington Post***, Apr. 15, 2011

"Teaching to the test" is replacing good teaching practices with "drill n' kill" rote learning. A five-year University of Maryland study completed in 2007 found "the pressure teachers were feeling to 'teach to the test'" since NCLB was leading to "declines in teaching higher-order thinking, in the amount of time spent on complex assignments, and in the actual amount of high cognitive content in the curriculum."

Bruce Jacobs, "No Child Left Behind's Emphasis on 'Teaching to the Test' Undermines Quality Teaching," *Endeavors*, Dec. 2007

Linda Valli, and Robert Croninger, "High Quality Teaching of Foundational Skills in Mathematics and Reading," drdc.uchicago.edu (accessed June 20, 2011)

NCLB tests are drastically narrowing the curriculum. A 2007 survey of 1,250 civics, government, and social studies teachers showed that 75% of those teaching current events less often cited standardized tests as the reason.

["Survey Finds Teaching to the Test Has Negative Impact on Use of News in Classrooms: Carnegie-Knight Task Force Urges More Emphasis on Civics Education," www.knightfoundation.org, Jan. 12, 2007]

An obsession with testing robs children of their childhoods. NCLB's mandate begins in third grade, but schools test younger students so they will get used to taking tests. [Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, 2005]. Mar. 2009 research from the Alliance for Childhood showed "time for play in most public kindergartens has dwindled to the vanishing point, replaced by lengthy lessons and standardized testing." [Edward Miller, and Joan Almon, "[Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School](#)" (167 KB) , www.allianceforchildhood.org, Mar. 2009]. A three-year study completed in Oct. 2010 by the Gesell Institute of Human Development showed that increased emphasis on testing is making "children feel like failures now as early as PreK..." [Gesell Institute, "[Gesell LEAD Press Conference: Study Results](#)" (81 KB), www.gesellinstitute.org, Oct. 14, 2010]

Arts Education Leads To Improved Standardized Test Scores

By [Pat Wyman](#) on March 3, 2012

[<http://www.howtolearn.com/2012/03/arts-education-leads-to-improved-standardized-test-scores/>]

A three year study at three schools in Chicago shows arts education programming was a factor leading to improved standardized test scores.

The report on how arts education affects results was released this week by the educational arts non-profit Changing Worlds and Loyola University.

The study on *arts education* is just the latest calling for more arts education in Chicago Public Schools.

The study found that fourth graders who started with the arts education program in 2009 saw an 11.5 percentage point gain in composite test scores meeting or exceeding state standards by the time they finished the arts program in sixth grade in 2011.

They also scored on average more than 11 percentage points higher than fourth through sixth graders at the same school who did not take part in the arts education program, according to the study. **13 ways high-stakes standardized tests hurt students**

13 Ways Standardized Testing Harms Students

By [Valerie Strauss](#) March 11, 2014, The Washington Post

Here are 13 ways that high-stakes standardized testing harms students, from the [Yinzercation blog](#) by [Jessie B. Ramey](#). She is the parent of two children in Pittsburgh public schools and a historian of working families, gender, race and U.S. social policy and teaches women's studies and history at the University of Pittsburgh.

- **Lost learning time:** There's less time for learning with testing and test prep (for example, Pittsburgh students now take 20-25, or more, high-stakes tests a year, with new tests this year in art and music).
- **Reduced content knowledge:** Students are learning how to take high-stakes-tests, but cannot demonstrate subject mastery when tested in a different format. [Koretz, 2008]
- **Narrowed curriculum:** With a focus on reading and math scores, students lose history, world languages, the arts, and other programs.
- **Shut out of programs:** Stakes exclude students when test results count as extra weight in magnet lotteries or for entrance to gifted programs or advanced courses.
- **Diverted resources:** Schools that perform poorly on high-stakes-tests are labeled "failures" and sometimes have resources taken away from them. The hundreds of millions of dollars spent on testing in Pennsylvania are not available for classroom education.
- **School closures:** Schools labeled as "failing" on the basis of test scores can be threatened with closure. These schools are usually in communities of color.
- **Loss of curiosity and love of learning:** Bubble tests are developmentally inappropriate for the youngest learners. Emphasis on "skill drill and kill" fails to stimulate children's imagination and limits their natural curiosity.
- **Blocked access to facilities:** Many schools find their computer labs taken over by testing for weeks on end and not available for learning.
- **Harmful stress:** Children are pressured to not only demonstrate their knowledge but to represent the effectiveness of their teachers and their schools. Teachers are reporting children throwing up, losing control of their bowels, and increased commitments for psychiatric and anxiety issues.
- **Internalized failure:** Struggling students who are forced to repeatedly take normed tests (which are designed to fail a certain portion of test-takers) begin to believe they are "bad" or "worthless" students who cannot succeed in school.
- **Grades:** Some high-stakes tests are included in students' grades.
- **Graduation requirements:** The NAACP has protested Keystone graduation exams, saying they force too many children out of school on the basis of a single score.
- **Altered school culture:** Schools must empty their walls and hallways for many weeks. Classes are under lock-down with limited access to restrooms, and some schools turn to daily announcements or even pep rallies to "prepare" students for testing.



<http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt/moonbrja.html>

Reference:

Moon, T. R., Brighton, C. M., Jarvis, J. M., & Hall, C. J. (2007). *State standardized testing programs: Their effects on teachers and students* (RM07228). Storrs: University of Connecticut, The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.

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State Standardized Testing Programs: Their Effects on Teachers and Students

Tonya R. Moon

Catherine M. Brighton

Jane M. Jarvis

Catherine J. Hall

Conclusions

1. Teachers and students feel a tremendous amount of pressure associated with high-stakes testing to produce high student test scores.
2. The pressure felt by teachers associated with high-stakes testing results in drill and practice type of curriculum and instruction.
3. There appears to be a consistent increase in test preparation activities in the period immediately preceding the administration of a test, ending abruptly following the test.
4. Teachers generally perceive a top-down filtering of test-related pressure, beginning with central office administrators down to the classroom level.
5. There is a clear feeling among most teachers that the focus on minimum standards and basic skills has diminished both the richness and depth of the curriculum and professional autonomy over curricular and instructional decisions.
6. The pressure felt by high-stakes testing is greater in disadvantaged schools and results in more drill and practice instruction.
7. There is a firm belief among teachers in both low-stakes and high-stakes testing environments that the pressure to improve student scores is steadily increasing.
8. Gifted and talented students feel pressure to perform well to bring up all scores, which can often result in disengagement from the learning process.
9. Many gifted students report frustration and resentment at the slow pace of learning and repetitive nature of test preparation.
10. It appears that the current high-stakes testing movement affects gifted students by providing a curricular ceiling that is well below their own academic potential.