

June 11, 2015

Dear Massachusetts legislators:

It is time to call a temporary halt to the excess of standardized testing in our state. Enough is enough.

When Ed Reform was instituted in Massachusetts the theory was to create a system of multiple forms of assessments to diagnose student learning in order to improve and enhance instruction. The use of a single purpose standardized test was not the idea. Unfortunately the MCAS became the be all and end all, and then, suddenly, MCAS, this highly touted so-called superior test was diminished in stature with the proposal to replace it with PARCC. But why?

As a member of the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education for 7 years, I can attest to the fact that our board never received a solid response to the question of why we suddenly needed this change to PARCC, and why it seemed to be inevitably coming.

The issue however should not be MCAS vs PARCC. It is a more fundamental issue: what is all this testing accomplishing anyway?

I can tell you with utter honesty that to this day, whenever I talk about my stance opposing the over-reliance of high stakes standardized testing in Massachusetts, your constituents agree and express frustration and disgust with our current reality. Affluent folks continue to pull their children out of the public schools to avoid the current testing climate.

We live in a democracy.

Our policies are not inevitable. What if in the case of our vast expenditures on standardized testing--and now on the proposed PARCC test-- that indeed the emperor has no clothes?

There is absolutely no question that in an era of limited resources for public education, our budgetary priorities have gone askew.

Funds that should be going toward remediation and social and emotional supports to needy populations are instead going to enrich the coffers of private sector testing companies. This will surely do nothing to address the growing inequity of the achievement gaps in our state. The opposite is occurring as our urban communities are further deprived of the enrichment activities needed to actually engage students in learning.

The stress on students, teachers and administrators created by our over-testing culture is undeniable and has been widely documented. Stress undermines learning, pure and simple.

Do the right thing: take the time needed to take stock of our current testing regime--the proposed scrapping of MCAS to be replaced by PARCC provides the perfect opportunity to assess the assessments. After all, we are Massachusetts, leaders in innovation and critical thinking. Let's apply that capacity for independent thought to a thoughtful review of what our state tests have accomplished and whether our future goals in public education would be accomplished by simply substituting a new allegedly improved testing regime. Will this approach enhance the critical thinking and creativity skill sets and capacity for teamwork the business community so craves? Will it produce an informed and engaged citizenry ready to tackle the global challenges we face today? These are the issues that need to be considered.

Please exercise your best collective judgement and courage to consider these questions and support a moratorium on PARCC and MCAS testing.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to our children.

Sincerely,

Ruth Kaplan