

*Dear Madame Chairs and Members of the Joint Education Committee:*

*Let me begin by thanking you for the opportunity to present this testimony in support of H.340 and S294. I apologize that I am unable to be there in person, but I am proud to have one of my Ludlow teachers present this testimony on my behalf. My name is Dr. Todd H. Gazda and during my 14 years in education I have been a middle and high school teacher; a middle and elementary school principal and I am finishing up my third year as the Superintendent of the Ludlow Public Schools.*

*There is currently a decision being debated in our Commonwealth; that being whether to stay with the MCAS assessment or transition to PARCC. In my mind however, the discussion is, and should be, larger than that narrow focus. It is not a matter of which standardized test we use, but rather we need to ask ourselves, is it time to reevaluate how we are using standardized tests and is that use having the desired effect of improving our educational system? I would assert, and the data seems to support, that the answer to that question is “no”. In reality, the reliance upon standardized test scores as the primary metric whereby we judge student achievement and teacher effectiveness in our schools has had a detrimental impact on our schools in that it is working to inhibit true reform.*

*For over 15 years now educators have labored under this accountability driven reform effort. One would imagine that we would have seen substantial changes in the performance levels of our students as a result of the billions of dollars invested into these efforts. Well, data driven decision making is the quintessential catch phrase of this accountability movement, so let’s review the “DATA” to see how successful these reform efforts have been in improving the performance of our students.*

*Attached to this testimony (see Appendix) are graphs depicting achievement and growth model data, in ELA and Math, for every school district in the state of Massachusetts for Spring 2014. These graphs were generated using Edwin Analytics, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's data collection resource for school systems. It is evident that after over a decade of this current “reform” movement, the overwhelming trend remains that school districts with higher poverty show lower achievement and growth than those with lower poverty. Is this really a surprise?*

*If the results remain consistent after over 15 years of these reforms why are we not hearing policy makers such as yourselves loudly demanding change? Why does the discussion from those with the power to mandate change merely revolve around changing the tests and accountability measures we are using? What these tests seem to truly measure is the relative affluence of the communities in which these schools reside. There are easier ways to measure poverty levels than by taking time away from instruction to give standardized state assessments. Data like that displayed in the attached graphs are often used to support the assertion that schools are still failing our society. I would assert that it is rather our society that is failing our schools.*

*Our current system rewards compliance rather than creativity. It inhibits creative professionals from taking appropriate risks with their lessons and practice because failure comes with severe consequences for both the individual and the school. No one ever achieved greatness merely by*

*having someone look constantly over their shoulder. Greatness occurs when remarkable people are inspired to push beyond the ordinary. It occurs when we have time to reflect on our current practices to create curriculum, units and lessons that engage students and ignite their passions. We will not achieve true reform in our educational system until we break free of these bonds that are driving us towards mediocrity. The "stick" approach to education is not getting us the gains we need so it is time to find the carrot.*

*I therefore implore you to stop and rethink the direction we are headed. We need to stop believing that more of the same will elicit a different result. I challenge you to imagine an educational system where the billions of dollars pumped into Testing and Evaluation were rather directed into professional development and educational supports to facilitate necessary change in our instructional practices. I challenge you to imagine professional development for teachers that involved learning new strategies for reaching struggling or disengaged learners rather than merely being trained in how to fill out the appropriate forms or upload the necessary evidence to prove we are doing our jobs. I challenge you to imagine K-12 and higher education professionals working together to change the way we train our teachers so that they have the skills necessary to ready our students for the world they will face. Currently we do not have either the time or available resources to realize these dreams.*

*Before you today are two bills H.340 and S.294 calling for a moratorium on state testing and an evaluation of our current state assessment practices. I am proud to be a Massachusetts educator. Our commonwealth has always been a leader when it comes to educational innovation. However, to some extent we have now relinquished that position and are following the herd allowing others to dictate our course. It is time for us regain that leadership role. It is time for us to demonstrate the power of policy makers, educators and communities coming together to change the system to best meet the needs of our kids. Given the right political will-power and courage, the results would be powerful and work to facilitate positive change in our schools. And don't get me wrong, change is most definitely needed. The problem is we keep getting handed more of the same.*

*Thank you for your time and consideration.*

*Sincerely,*

*Todd H. Gazda, Ed.D., JD  
Superintendent, LPS*

Appendix is here: <http://superintendentlps.blogspot.com/2015/06/no-matter-how-far-youve-gone-down-wrong.html>.