

## **Testimony to the Joint Committee on Education**

**Thursday, June 11, 2015**

H. 497, an act to eliminate the use of the MCAS for high school graduation

H. 340, An Act relative to a moratorium on high stakes testing and PARCC

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Good morning. Thank you to the members of the joint committee on education for hosting this very important hearing. I am here to express my support for H. 497, An Act To Eliminate the Use Of the MCAS For High School Graduation, and H. 340, An Act Relative To a Moratorium On High Stakes Testing and PARCC, as well as S. 294, S. 311, H. 418, H. 3395, and S. 257.

My name is Carlos Rojas Alvarez. I am a graduate of the Boston Public Schools, and serve as an alumni staff at Youth on Board and the Boston Student Advisory Council. Our mission is to place young people at the center of decisions that affect and impact our lives. We believe that if adults and decision-makers follow the lead of young people, good things happen. Our responsibility is to advise the Boston School Committee and the Boston Public Schools on school policies that are important to young people, who come from high schools across the city.

I also serve as campaign coordinator at the Student Immigrant Movement, the largest undocumented youth-led immigrant rights organization in Massachusetts. We are committed to identifying, recruiting and training immigrant youth to fight for equal access to higher education for all immigrant students regardless of status and to provide their families the dignity and respect they deserve.

I should also mention I have a younger brother at the Edwards Middle School in Charlestown. He'll be going to the Boston Community Leadership Academy next year.

As you can imagine, I work with young people who are brilliant, brave, resilient, creative, imaginative, and capable. I live with one. Many of them also struggle to let their talents and skills and thinking shine through

Scantron sheet after Scantron sheet, which increasingly determine their success, their ability to be promoted, their ability to graduate and continue to develop and hone their talents and skills. I bring you our collective thoughts.

We are unequivocally opposed to high-stakes testing being used as an indicator of how ready a student is to be promoted or to graduate. We reject the notion that a set of multiple-choice questions and a Scantron sheet can determine the totality of a student. In fact, studies show that high-stakes standardized testing serves as a definite indicator of one thing -- class. That's unfair. We are opposed to high-stakes testing being used to evaluate and blame our teachers, who often have no choice but to scrap teaching plans in order to prepare their students for tests that only measure a narrow and limited form of ability, in order to keep their jobs or keep their schools from closing. That's unfair.

As Representative Provost so succinctly mentioned, high-stakes testing causes tremendous psychological stress, anxiety and negative feedback loops in students. I can tell you that personally, as someone who stayed up tossing and turning through middle school, worried about the MCAS, or as the older brother of a student, and as someone who works with young people, who put themselves down because of what their MCAS scores tell them about themselves.

When a test is the be-all and end-all, our young people are compromised. They are limited and inhibited. They are not being helped or supported. Their knowledge, skills and talents are not being recognized. High-stakes testing hurts all kids, but especially kids who come from under-resourced families and communities, including immigrant students and English Language Learners. By tying graduation requirements to high-stakes testing, kids who need comprehensive and individualized support to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to successfully graduate fall through the cracks. While testing is one form of measuring intelligence and capability, we know that there exist numerous successful models for gauging career and college readiness that are actually tied to real-world skills, not just test-taking. When tied to promotion and graduation, high-stakes testing contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline and unfairly targets students who need more support, not just more requirements, to succeed.

Finally, we want to have a real conversation about the actual tools and resources that our schools need, in order for our young people to have the schools they deserve. We want to talk about:

- Authentic student, parent and teacher voice and decision-making in schools
- Universal Pre-K and quality extended learning time, which is proven to significantly increase success and outcome
- Wraparound supports that acknowledge and embrace that when young people come to school with psychological and emotional hurts and trauma, they do not learn well. We cannot ignore those problems if we are serious about closing the opportunity and achievement gap.
- Health services that fill the gap where our society allows young people to not have access to the adequate health services they need in order to be healthy and at the top of their game to learn.

For all of that to happen, we want to have a serious conversation about the funding pie. It isn't big enough. And we can waste our time trying to think of ways to slice it up, knowing, at the end of the day, that it won't get the job done, or we can be proactive about increasing the pie. It is fair and just in our society to ask all people, and institutions, to pay their fair share of taxes in order to adequately fund the schools our communities deserve.

I hope you will take all of their thoughts into serious consideration and can't wait to work with you to place young people at the center of the conversations we need to be having about public education in Massachusetts. We're ready when you are.

Thank you.