

MCAS grad test puts the squeeze on our students' high school education

MCAS defenders say the graduation requirement provides a standard, objective measure of achievement.

Public education advocates say the MCAS graduation requirement distorts and narrows high school education. It leads to dull test prep instead of teaching students problem-solving, creativity, critical thinking, and real-world skills.

MCAS defenders say MCAS shines a light on inequity.

Public education advocates say the ballot question doesn't eliminate MCAS, just its use as a graduation requirement.

MCAS scores are linked to parental income and education levels, opportunity gaps that educators and families already know exist. The MCAS graduation requirement has failed to address the unequal opportunities driving the test score gap. By disproportionately punishing high-needs students and schools, it widens educational gaps between the haves and have nots.

MCAS defenders say we're not doing students any favors by letting them graduate without passing a test.

Public education advocates say "low-stakes" testing — not tied to grades or the ability to graduate — is more effective for evaluating students and for identifying educational deficits. By making graduation contingent on MCAS performance, we punish students for being unskilled or anxious test-takers, regardless of their actual academic abilities.

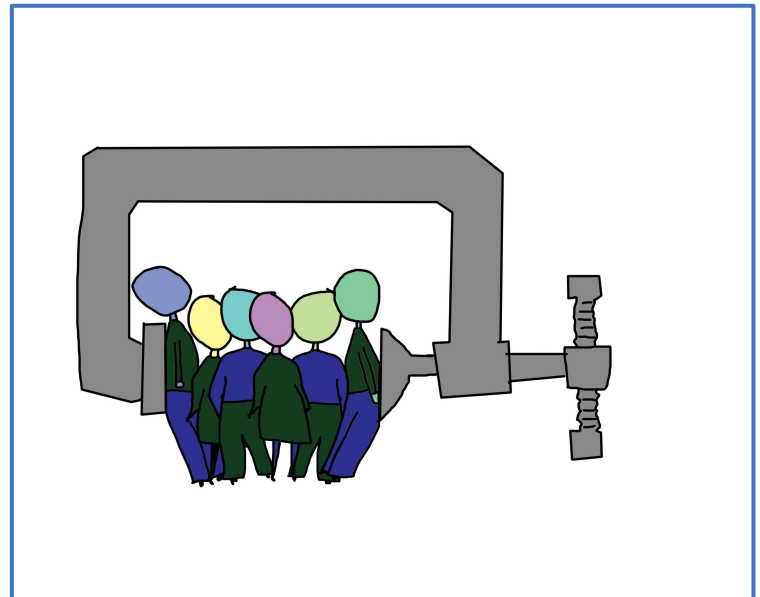


Illustration by Jean Powers

MCAS defenders say MCAS is not holding kids back from getting a high school diploma. Massachusetts' high school graduation rate has continued to rise. Most kids who drop out have already passed the MCAS.

Public education advocates say *graduation rates in other states have gone up faster than here.* And focusing on Massachusetts' overall graduation rate obscures what is happening to students from historically underserved groups. Massachusetts' graduation gaps for Latinx, Black and low-income students and English learners are all *larger* than the national average gaps for these student groups.

Defenders of the status quo say eliminating the MCAS graduation requirement will result in illiterate students gaining high school diplomas.

Public education advocates say *the graduation test has failed to improve literacy for our most challenged students.* Test scores rose when funding increased and sagged when funding leveled off. There's never been any evidence that testing made a significant difference for those students scoring near the bottom of their classes.

MCAS defenders say eliminating the graduation test will mean different graduation requirements in every district.

Public education advocates say *Massachusetts has among the most rigorous standards in the nation for English language arts, math, science, history and social studies, arts, world languages, and health.* State law requires districts to certify that students have met these standards to get a diploma. But state bureaucrats reduced this to passing three standardized tests. The ballot question and the Thrive Act restore the broader requirement.

MCAS defenders say the MCAS propelled Massachusetts from the middle to the top of the pack of states.

Public education advocates say *Massachusetts schools have always been ranked among the top in the nation, on average, though inequities persist.* National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) data shows the state still has among the largest achievement gaps in the nation.

MCAS defenders say stick with the test.

Public school advocates say *it's time to pull the plug on a policy that has failed for 20 years and puts high school education in a vice.*