

To the Boston School Committee:

At the Boston School Committee meeting on September 17th, Interim Superintendent McDonough recommended that all students in grades 3-8 and in grade 11 take the PARCC this year in order to better prepare for the potential transition from MCAS to PARCC. Tenth graders will still be required to take and pass the MCAS as a graduation requirement.

As teachers, students, family members, and administrators within Boston Public Schools, we do not support this recommendation. We refuse to subject ourselves to yet another high-stakes standardized assessment that negatively impacts our curricular and instructional choices.

We have serious concerns about the increase of testing in all of our schools. To be clear, we do not necessarily believe that the MCAS is a better assessment than PARCC. As Lisa Guisbond, the executive director of Citizens for Public Schools, has stated, "With PARCC versus MCAS, districts have been given a false choice. They have to pick which of two flawed punitive systems will do the least harm to their efforts to engage and educate their students."¹

We, the undersigned, believe that using test scores to evaluate teaching and learning is unjust and inequitable. Rather than pouring time, energy, and money into a new testing program, we demand that the district reevaluate the ways in which it measures school and student achievement. Boston students deserve better.

<http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/boston-say-no-to-parcc>

¹<http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/09/15/boston-superintendent-embraces-new-standardized-test-trial-run-sup-plant-mcas/BriNyGTkr8xhXT6BcSABYI/story.html>

Additional Research/Resources

The stated purpose of the new PARCC assessments is to understand whether our students will be "college-and-career ready." However, we do not believe that the best way to ensure our students' college-and-career readiness is to subject our students to yet another test. Not only does it exploit our children as guinea pigs, but it is also a waste of instructional time.

Unlike last year, we will get data from the PARCC assessment. However, we will not receive any sort of data on spring 2015 exams until next October/November of 2015. This data is not useful to actually inform instruction, AND...

The new PARCC assessments also require two separate subjects (ELA and Math) to be tested at two separate times each year (as a Performance-Based Assessment and as an End-of-the-Year Assessment). In other words, there would be even more tests administered each year than are currently given under MCAS, especially at the high school level where MCAS in ELA, Math, and Science will still be required.

We are not alone in this perspective. Education leaders at both the state and national level have recently made public statements that question the legitimacy of high stakes standardized testing as sound policy for our schools. Last week our current Commissioner of Education Mitchell Chester expressed concern about over-testing in schools across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. He expressed interest in conducting a study to better understand the impacts of testing on our students. Even more significantly, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan admitted "testing issues today are sucking the oxygen out of the room in a lot of schools," and "a fair chunk of [the responsibility] sits with me."² If Duncan, a key player in upholding standardized testing as a way to measure student and school success, can admit that high stakes testing negatively impacts teaching and learning, we must reconsider exposing our students to assessments like PARCC.

Across the country and within Massachusetts, parents, educators, and school leaders have challenged standardized testing. In Rhode Island, a three year statewide moratorium on the use of standardized testing as a high school graduation requirement has been instituted as law, and Commissioner Deborah Gist has begun a year long review of local and state assessment systems. Last year in New York, "parents of over 10,000 students joined the "opt-out" movement, refusing to submit their youth to Common Core" testing,"³ while both Worcester and Norfolk have passed resolutions that allow parents to opt out of taking PARCC pilot tests.⁴ It is clear that a variety of stakeholders are gravely concerned about the amount of testing we are forcing on our students to the detriment of their learning experiences. Thus, it is highly inappropriate to adopt or even pilot a new test, that will only take more time away from valuable and authentic instruction.

<http://www.providencejournal.com/news/education/20140902-gist-and-educators-look-into-the-issue-of-over-testing-students.ece>

<http://www.fairtest.org/Common-Core-Testing-Horror-Stories>

² <http://brookline.wickedlocal.com/article/20140912/OPINION/140918288>

³ <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/education-uprising/pencils-down>

⁴ <http://www.citizensforpublicschools.org/what-we-know-opting-out-of-parcc-pilot-tests/>

<http://education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/strategies/topics/Keeping%20Fit%20for%20Learning/stress.html>

There are alternative assessments we can use to inform teaching and learning in a more meaningful way:

At the Boston Arts Academy, teachers have developed several assessments besides the more traditional exam in order to better understand our students and what they have learned. For example, the senior capstone is the Grant Project, where students must use their artistic and academic experiences to create a community service project. They write a grant proposal and present it to multiple community judges to assess their creativity and feasibility of ideas. Students who are granted receive up to \$500 to complete their projects and are eligible for graduating with distinction, a designation that is based on GPA in most other schools.

Other schools, such as the Young Achievers School, Edwards Middle School, and Mission Hill Schools also use portfolio projects, much like a capstone projects that demonstrate both skills and knowledge. Some schools, just as the Boston Day and Evening Academy and the Charlestown High Diploma Plus program also use performance based measures instead of traditional assessment systems.

Sources to use:

<http://www.fairtest.org/common-core-assessments-factsheet>

<http://dianeravitch.net/2014/04/02/a-discussion-of-parcc-common-core-test-question-picky-and-pointless/>

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2014/04/field_testing_an_on-the-ground.html?cmp=ENL-EU-NEWS1

check the video: <http://parentingthecore.wordpress.com/2014/03/03/parcc-online/>
<http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/2013/11/07/student-test-scores-drop-significantly-due-to-adoption-of-more-rigorous-standards/>

<http://vamboozled.com/new-tests-nothing-but-new/>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2014/08/17/a-painful-analysis-of-new-common-core-tests-and-the-n-y-results/>

<http://www.networkforpubliceducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Cong-Hearings-Why-We-Need-Them.pdf>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2014/09/24/test-reform-movement-picking-up-steam/>

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2014/09/common-core_assessment_group_revises_testing_time.html?cmp=SOC-EDIT-FB

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/24/us/academic-skills-on-web-are-tied-to-income-level.html?ref=education&_r=1

<http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/09/28/fewer-mass-schools-even-with-high-mcas-scores-earn-top-rating/1bcgwE8ROCK8pAEmC7vv0H/story.html>

<http://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/local/2014/08/23/vermont-education-secretary-pushes-back-testing/14469139/>

performance based assessments study (http://www.ccebos.org/research/Ready_for_the_Future.pdf)