

Testimony in Support of H.497, H.340, H.418, S.311, S.294, and H.3395

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I am testifying in support of in support of Bills **H.497, H.340, H.418, S.311, S.294, and H.3395**, which would prevent the misuse and overuse of statewide assessments in Massachusetts.

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and other high school exit exams were implemented for two principal reasons: to reverse the supposed rising tide of mediocrity in our public schools, and to close the achievement gap between different groups of students. The best available research indicates that these tests accomplish neither of these aims, but instead continue to harm many of our most vulnerable students (Grotsky, Warren, & Kalogrides, 2008; Holme, Richards, Cohen, & Jimerson, 2010; Lee, 2008; National Research Council, 2011).

One of these unintended consequences is the disproportionate denial of diplomas to two of our most vulnerable groups, students with disabilities and English language learners. The high stakes testing diploma requirement has been exacerbating instead of diminishing the opportunity gap for these students. In 2010, 69% of the high school seniors who failed to pass the MCAS had a disability and 11.5% were English language learners. In 2014, 75% of the high school seniors who failed to pass the MCAS had a disability and 18.5% were English language learners.

Although Massachusetts has an alternate assessment for students with disabilities, it is a dead end for almost all the students who take it. Last year, *only 1 of 964 high school students in special education who attempted the English language arts alternate assessment was able to earn a passing score*, and only 3 of 979 were able to pass the math version.

Since the inception of high stakes testing in Massachusetts, more than 38,000 high school students have failed to pass the MCAS requirements by the end of their senior year, including nearly 25,000 students in special education. The denial of a high school diploma can have life-changing consequences for individuals. The average yearly income for individuals without high school diploma is \$11,000 (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009).

In addition to the disproportionate denial of high school diplomas to vulnerable groups, failing the 10th grade math MCAS has been shown to increase the probability that low-income urban students will drop out of school (Papay, Murnane & Willett, 2010). Furthermore, my colleagues and I have found that repeatedly failing the 10th grade MCAS has adverse effects on academic motivation, emotions, goals, and self-perceptions of English language learners (Kruger et al., under review). As one of our research participants' poignantly said, "everything shut down in my life because I don't have high school diploma, everything... Even my girlfriend left me. ... she's in college now and I'm still in high school. ...she's looking for a better life, and I cannot give ... her a better life."

I support Bills H.497, H.340, H.418, S.311, S.294, and H.3395 because they will help prevent the unfortunate, life-changing effects the MCAS has had on so many students.

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