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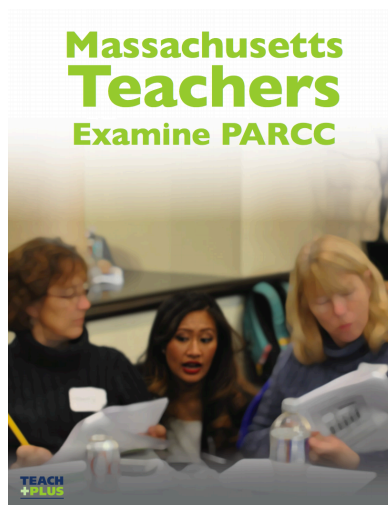
# **Teacher Roundtable: Educators Address the PARCC vs. MCAS Decision**

## Introduction

As the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education makes its decision on whether to adopt the PARCC assessment or go back to MCAS, a critical factor is the voice of teachers.

Teach Plus Massachusetts Teaching Policy Fellows – a group of demonstrably-effective teachers from across the Commonwealth – released a report, “Massachusetts Teachers Examine PARCC” that shares findings from the feedback of 350 classroom teachers from 74 districts in Massachusetts who extensively analyzed the PARCC assessment. Almost two thirds of the teachers (72 percent) reported that PARCC is a higher quality assessment than MCAS, while only seven percent thought MCAS was higher quality. Based on their findings, the group of Policy Fellows recommend the adoption of PARCC in Massachusetts.

In addition, teachers have shared their views in the media. This teacher roundtable is a compilation of a selection of published teacher-written pieces addressing the Board’s important decision.



# Letter: For students' readiness, these teachers push for PARCC

*The Herald News*  
(11/05/2015)

On Nov. 17, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) will vote on whether to replace MCAS, the state's 17-year-old testing system, with the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) assessment, or something policymakers are referring to as "MCAS 2.0" — a test of uncertain content and format that could take years to develop.

The vote has raised concerns for stakeholders ranging from parents and principals to politicians. As teachers, the choice for us is clear: the PARCC assessment makes good sense for students in Massachusetts. Many of us have been preparing students for the PARCC assessment for two years and implementing the standards it measures for five. Some of us, including those who teach in Boston Public Schools, administered a pilot PARCC assessment last year instead of MCAS. We have observed consistently that the rigor of the assessment has a positive impact on our teaching at all grade levels.

Pre-kindergarten through second grade teachers have begun setting the foundation for success in third grade — the first grade of mandated PARCC testing — with a focus on the skills that are essential for success on PARCC: analyzing, interpreting, and citing evidence. It's no coincidence that these are also skills essential for success in life.

In one of our classrooms, students read about plant life cycles. They use the texts to debate the most effective growing conditions for beans, and then run tests with controlled and experimental conditions. They end by writing about their findings, and critique one another's conclusions. This is the kind of next-generation instruction the PARCC assessment not only inspires, but demands. And our students reap the benefits.

In upper grade level writing, students are becoming responsible for synthesizing multiple texts in order to develop and defend original theses. This is a level of rigor in which many in our generation did not engage until college — but it is precisely what college professors in freshman writing courses will require.

Students in one of our ninth grade classrooms spend weeks preparing for the writing demands of PARCC by analyzing the age of Imperialism. They read primary source accounts of both Indians and British during the British occupation of India as well as analyzing poems, cartoons and other popular media of the day. Citing a minimum of six sources, they draw their own conclusions about greater impact of Imperialism by analyzing how Imperialism transformed both the colonizer and the colonized societies. This is deep work for 14- and 15-year-olds, and PARCC is pushing teachers to set up the kind of classrooms where it can happen.

The BESE vote next month is not just about what kind of assessment students in Massachusetts will take. Equally important, it is about how we, as teachers, will prepare our students to succeed in the next phase of their lives, It is about presenting clear and decisive expectations for what Massachusetts educators must prepare students to be able to do.

MCAS was never meant to assess college and career readiness. MCAS 2.0, “PARCC-Lite,” or whatever we call a proposed hybrid alternative, could take years to develop, with its potential content unclear. That’s time we don’t have, and ambiguity we don’t need.

The PARCC assessment is the only option that demands phenomenal teaching right now, and that is what students in Massachusetts deserve.

*Gwendolin Bandi, John J. Doran School, Fall River Public Schools*

*Jeff Cipriani, Orchard Gardens K-8, Boston Public Schools*

*Colleen Considine, Curtis Guild Elementary School, Boston Public Schools*

*Dan Hackett, Boston Latin Academy, Boston Public Schools*

*Amy Howland, Academy of the Pacific Rim, Hyde Park*

*Natalie Khalatov-Krimnus, Revere High School, Revere Public Schools*

*Carli Kusiolek, Salem Academy Charter School, Salem*

*Colleen Labbe, Lee Academy Pilot School, Boston Public Schools*

*Erin Lane, Garfield Middle School, Revere Public Schools*

*Wing Leung, Boston Latin School, Boston Public Schools*

*Bernadine Lormilus, Winthrop Elementary School, Boston Public Schools*

*Farida Mama, UP Academy Dorchester, Boston Public Schools*

*Colleen Mason, Lee Academy Pilot School, Boston Public Schools*

*Kalimah Rahim, New Mission High School, Boston Public Schools*

*Amanda Schreckengaust, Brookline High School, Brookline Public Schools*

*Aaron Stone, Boston Day and Evening Academy, Boston Public Schools*

*Brittany Vetter, Excel Academy Charter School, Chelsea*

# Defying the Odds Through Common Core and PARCC

*Huffington Post*

(7/06/2015)

By Brittany Vetter

On July 7, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will conclude the five public hearings it is hosting before deciding whether to replace MCAS with PARCC next fall. Fall is also when I will discuss the concept of defying the odds with my new class of sixth graders. We will share a tale of Chelsea and Newton, two cities that are just 15 miles apart. We will look at the average income in each city, high school graduation rates, and percentage of residents with a college degree. Invariably, my students are astounded by the disparities they see. When asked to consider causes, they talk about the quality of education and access to resources such as reading materials. They mention presence of a parent who can provide homework support and of family members who have gone to college. Even as sixth graders, they recognize that these are all interrelated and represent a cycle that can be hard to break.

We will then look at some of the Excel Academy's eighth grade MCAS scores. Eighth graders at Excel schools, which are located in East Boston and Chelsea, have earned scores higher than those of students in Newton. Our students have consistently proven that it's possible for kids in low-income neighborhoods to achieve at high levels.

I then stress to my sixth graders that they will have to work extra-hard to achieve beyond what others might expect of them. I emphasize that our only option is to defy the odds and gain access to opportunities that will help change the system from within.

Holding our schools and teachers accountable for such trajectory-changing results says that we not only believe in their possibility but in fact demand it for all of our students regardless of the neighborhood in which they live.

This year, Excel Academy schools opted to administer the PARCC assessments. When the English department first examined some of the PARCC items, I was unsure if my students would be able to reach the required level. The multiple choice questions were highly nuanced, and the essay questions had multiple layers that went beyond what was required from students in previous years. As a team of teachers, we set out to give it our best shot. We revised our unit assessments to include questions that mirrored PARCC's emphasis on supporting multiple choice answers with evidence, and we engaged in discussions about how to build our students' ability to write in a variety of genres. Initially, test averages were lower overall. But as students collaboratively corrected their missed questions and became familiar with the new level of expectations, they rose to the occasion, and their test scores began to improve.

What's more, PARCC's alignment with Common Core has upped the rigor of my course. In the process, I discovered that Jose had a real gift for writing engaging dialogue, while Estefania could effectively integrate information from multiple sources. All of my students can now analyze how an author's choices led to a specific purpose in her writing and compare the choices of two different authors. The PARCC's emphasis on textual evidence led to much richer student discussions in my classroom, pushing me to recognize the level of thinking of which my sixth graders are truly capable. At end of the school year, my students surpassed my expectations.

This is not to say that PARCC is perfect. The consortium needs to continue to solicit teacher feedback on the wording of questions and to determine how to score the assessment in a way that will measure students' growth over time. This year we took the Performance Based Assessment in March and the End of Year Assessment in May. I'm excited that the consortium has decided to condense the two testing windows in response to concerns over testing time. This signals to me that PARCC is open to the feedback that teachers are providing and will continue to refine the assessment to meet the needs of students, teachers, schools, and communities.

Every teacher would agree that standardized tests are imperfect measures of the complex output that is students' growth as learners and people. However, without the data that is provided by these assessments, we would have no method for seeing how our students stack up and where to revise our approach. It's my job as a teacher to lead my students in the academic growth that will open up a life of options. I believe in my students. I believe in my fellow teachers. And I believe that PARCC is a step in the right direction for measuring whether we are delivering on the promise of helping our students to defy the odds.

*Brittany Vetter is a sixth grade English teacher at Excel Academy in Chelsea and a Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellow.*

“PARCC's alignment with Common Core has upped the rigor of my course. - Brittany Vetter”

# The Argument: Should the state put a three-year moratorium on high stakes testing?

An excerpt from article in *The Boston Globe*  
(7/23/2015)

By Heather McCarthy

**NO**

*Heather McCarthy, Chelsea public schools teacher*

A proposed bill, [H.340](#), currently up for review by the Massachusetts Legislature, includes a three-year moratorium on the [PARCC](#) tests and accountability associated with testing. If the bill passes, it would eliminate the use of state test data for three years, leaving little room for accountability, and allowing students to graduate from high school without a qualifying exit test. I think that would be a mistake for Massachusetts children.

As a third-grade teacher, I have analyzed the [Common Core State Standards](#) and implemented them in my classroom. I've adapted resources and co-planned with colleagues to ensure that my students are achieving the thinking and skills that the standards address. The standards are just starting to take hold in our state. Shouldn't we have some data to show us how well they are working?

Last year, I taught a third-grader named Connor who had been found eligible for Special Education Services the year before. All year, we worked hard on improving his reading comprehension and building his foundational math skills. At the end of the year, Connor achieved Proficient on the Math MCAS, a huge success for both of us. The data showed that Connor had mastered the skills measured by MCAS, despite any disabilities he may have.

This year, my school administered the PARCC test. I know that PARCC is assessing the standards I taught. I am excited to see student data each year so that I can work with every child in my classroom just like I did with Connor. Data helps me figure this out and make sure that all of the students I teach are receiving the education they deserve.

As an elementary teacher in an urban, high-poverty school, I am called upon to be a teacher, nurse, therapist, coach, dean, mom, and dad throughout nearly every minute of every school day. And every day, I hold each and every one of my students accountable for putting effort into their learning. Shouldn't I also be held accountable, along with districts and schools? I hope that we do not disrupt the momentum on college and career-ready standards by putting a moratorium on tests that can hold us all accountable for delivering high quality education. Our students deserve it.

# PARCC and special education students

*The Salem News*

(10/4/2015)

By Carli Kusiolek

As a middle school special education teacher, I had gotten used to watching my students struggle through days of MCAS testing each spring. They would become frustrated and often leave testing sessions looking exhausted. I was bracing myself for the same experience with PARCC. In fact, what I observed in my classes last spring couldn't have been more different.

This sea change has a great deal to do with how accommodating PARCC is for students with special needs. Take my student Marco, for example. Marco has severe attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and struggles with sustaining his attention on a daily basis. Because of this, he completes his assessments individually. In the spring of 2014, I watched Marco begin his ELA MCAS assessment by loudly insisting that "MCAS people HAAAATE ME" (he had clearly been discouraged by the length of the test that he had just flipped through). He then slid back into his chair and angrily poked holes into his booklet cover.

This past spring, Marco began his normal routine of flipping through the pages of the ELA PARCC assessment to determine how much work he was going to have to complete. This was almost always followed by a loud sigh and either "You gotta be kiddin' me" or "I'm not doin' this." Marco would then proceed to slam his pencil down on his test in frustration before getting to work. This time, however, he did something unexpected: he recounted the numbers, nodded several times and said "aaaaight -- only eight." He then picked up his pencil and began reading the first passage. There was no hole punching and no proclamation of hatred towards the test's creators. Once finished, Marco actually said that the test was "not mad boring like last year." The test was better because he only had one writing item instead of four, and because it was so much shorter.

All of my students had a similar attitude toward PARCC. When asked to compare their experience with the ELA PARCC vs. ELA MCAS on a class survey, they noted that they preferred the PARCC assessment. Many of my students said that they did not feel as stressed with PARCC as they were with MCAS because they had fewer items to complete and sufficient time to complete these items. One student said that "PARCC is better (than the MCAS) because it has better passage stories and it's not that long." When asked specifically about the timed nature of the PARCC versus the untimed MCAS assessment, one student responded, "I had time to double check (my work) and went back in the passage to check my answer ... because that's what I do during tests like that." Several other non-special education students also said that they liked being able to take breaks, something they were not able to do with the MCAS.

Breaks are just one of PARCC's many accessibility features available to all students and not just students with disabilities or English language learners. Others include the use of headphones or noise buffers; a human reader or signer for the mathematics assessments; various writing tools, and specifically for the computer-



based assessment, usage of a pop-up glossary and spell check.

In addition to offering ample accommodations for special education students and English language learners, PARCC gives schools the option of providing “administrative considerations” for any student whom this might benefit. Many of these considerations, such as testing in a small group, individually, in a separate setting or at a specific time of day, in addition to the ability to take frequent breaks while testing, have only been available on the MCAS exam to students with disabilities. They are now available to all learners.

With its accessibility features, administrative considerations, and accommodations for students with disabilities and English language learners, PARCC goes a long way toward ensuring that all students have the ability to participate in, access, and demonstrate their knowledge on next generation assessments.

Without a doubt, PARCC is a change for all of us in Massachusetts. I for one, am on board with a change that amounts to shortened testing sessions, fewer items for students to complete, and accessibility features for all.

*Carli Kusiolek is a middle school special education teacher at Salem Academy Charter School.*

*This sea of change has a great deal to do with how accommodating PARCC is for students with special needs. - Carli Kusiolek*

# PARCC will work

*CommonWealth Magazine*

(3/24/2015)

By Karen Levin

At the City on a Hill Charter School in Roxbury, where I teach high school math, 91 percent of students are designated as high needs. Before my students returned for the 2014-2015 school year, my colleagues and I sat down to complete the recently-released Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) exam in our subject areas. I took the 35-question algebra I test on my MacBook Air. I was allotted 50 minutes for this exercise. As I worked diligently through the problems, I thought to myself that there is no way my students can do well on this test. Yet.

This month, students in Massachusetts schools began taking the PARCC exam, a new, Common Core-aligned assessment that might replace MCAS. The Common Core standards detail what students in grades K-12 should know by the end of each grade. The standards do not dictate *how* a teacher chooses to teach. Instead, they ensure that teachers in different states teach the same concepts in the same year. The Common Core standards emphasize the concepts and skills students need to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century against peers in the United States and abroad.

The computer-based PARCC exam aligns with the Common Core standards. It was clear to me from looking at early sample PARCC questions that they are more challenging than MCAS. PARCC questions are not the simple multiple-choice questions that are part of a paper and pencil exam like MCAS. For example, a student might have to “drag and drop” her answer choices into a table to show that she gets exponential functions. These more challenging questions require students to exhibit a deeper understanding of concepts. While this may lead to low test scores for students, a little failure might be just the right catalyst to raise our expectations of ourselves as teachers and our students as learners.

To illustrate, let me share a story of a boy I’ll call Rondo. A quiet, respectful 9<sup>th</sup> grader with a big smile he would not share in my math class, Rondo came to my school in September 2013. Math is Rondo’s weakest subject so he wanted to fly below the radar and hope that everything would work out for the best. For the first half of the year he struggled to find common denominators and couldn’t seem to remember his math facts to add, subtract, multiply, or divide correctly. He averaged 30 percent on every test or quiz from September through December despite doing his homework every night. Rondo was failing my tests and my class. But failing is learning. I began to tell Rondo, “you can do this,” and encouraged him to stay after school and take advantage of retaking his tests and quizzes.

Rondo worked with a math special education teacher and studied hard for tests and quizzes. By midterms, he had earned a 60 percent. By final exams, his growth was staggering — up to an 86 percent. His success continues in my class today. Rondo earned an 88 percent on his algebra I midterm in January, which was 15

percent above the class average. I am now greeted daily by his beautiful smile.

I raised the expectations for Rondo and he rose to the challenge. He is not unique. The idea of raising expectations works in all walks of life. Earlier this month, Gov. Charlie Baker directed the state’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to conduct a series of hearings on PARCC and the Common Core. My message to Gov. Baker and the board is this: Like my work with Rondo, raising expectations will work with the PARCC assessment.

I realize there are many challenges that the PARCC exams pose. Since PARCC is a computer-based test, there are questions that require the use of an equation editor tool. Considering that some of my students do not have a computer at home, using an equation editor will not be easy. That is okay with me. I look at it as an opportunity to broaden my teaching repertoire and help students learn more about how technology can help them in every subject.

The biggest challenge I foresee is the fear from teachers and administrators that low PARCC scores in the first few years will result in widespread state designation of schools as Level 5, or failing, and mass firings of teachers. I do not believe this is the case. The state has already demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that schools that choose PARRC will not be penalized under its one-year “hold harmless” policy — and it is widely recognized that test scores will reflect growing pains in the first few years.

The Common Core standards and PARCC are raising the expectations for both students and teachers. I believe wholeheartedly that my students and I will rise to meet this challenge. And if we don’t, failing is learning.

The adoption of the Common Core State Standards in Massachusetts was a good idea. Finding the test that accurately assesses the standards is both nerve-wracking and essential. As a teacher, I am willing and eager to do what is best for my students. Raise the bar and we will rise to the challenge.

*Karen Levin is the lead math teacher at City on a Hill Charter School in Roxbury. She currently teaches 9th grade pre-algebra and 9th grade algebra. She is a Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellowship alum.*

*“That is okay with me. I look at PARCC as an opportunity to broaden my teaching repertoire and help students learn more about how technology can help them in every subject. - Karen Levin”*

# Heeding Student Voices on PARCC

*Huffington Post*  
(7/07/2015)

By Bernadine Lormilus

Last month, over 200 people packed a State House hearing to testify on several bills that would put a moratorium on the use of standardized tests as graduation requirements and for school accountability, as well as to prevent the adoption of the Common Core-aligned PARCC assessment. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will conclude the public hearings on July 7, before deciding whether to replace MCAS with PARCC next fall.

As a teacher in a high-needs school, I am always focused on providing my students with the tools they need to be ready for college and career. My fifth grade student Nia, who wants to be a surgeon, says that "my teacher pushes me to boundaries that I've never been able to cross before." The other students in my class have dreams of becoming movie directors, artists, athletes or teachers. The work that I do with my students each day using the Common Core State Standards has helped them develop strong critical and analytical thinking skills. As a result, my students have become more confident about achieving their long-term goals.

With the PARCC assessment a major topic of conversation in education, I wanted to know what my students thought about it. I asked my fifth graders to write about the impact of testing on their learning, with a particular focus on the PARCC assessment. Eyshila, whose parents emigrated from Brazil, wrote, "I strongly believe that PARCC should be the only test because it makes our brains think and we need that." Sophie wrote, "When we did the PARCC, the text was very complex and made your mind think WOW. I think the people who made it really wanted us to think." And Terrell said that he favors the PARCC because "it is timed and that challenges students more."

As I read through the comments, I realized anew the importance of listening to the group with the highest stake in education: my students. As a teacher, I find PARCC to be a better assessment; my students agreed. Perhaps it is time that all adults -- educators, parents, policy makers -- listen and do what our children are suggesting. We must have a reliable and rigorous tool to measure how students are performing academically across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This tool would be used to hold teachers accountable for the content they teach. And if we want educators to be successful at implementing this tool, school districts must take the time to provide meaningful professional development to teachers around the Common Core State Standards and the PARCC assessment.

Although most of my students were in favor of the PARCC, there were others who opposed it or, indeed, any form of testing. Myaliyah, for example, did not find tests meaningful to her learning. She wrote, "The test I have been taking is way too much. If we are taking more tests than learning, how do you expect us to pass if we are not learning as much?" Research has shown that students in urban public school districts are often over-tested and struggle the most with high-stakes tests due to challenges with disabilities and/or language barriers. It is the responsibility of the state of Massachusetts Department of Education to provide these school

districts with more time and resources to meet their students' needs. If we truly care about providing equitable access to public education for all children in the Commonwealth, we need to find better ways to invest in all public school children.

The students in my classroom hail from countries such as Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Barbados, Nigeria and America. Out of 21 students, 24 percent are of Latino descent and 76 percent are of African descent. Providing all these children with equitable educational opportunities and resources is a civil rights issue. If we are going to use the PARCC assessment, let's use it as a tool that measures which students or districts need the most support and provide them with resources wherever necessary. In addition, the data from the PARCC assessment should be available immediately so that teachers and school leaders can analyze it and use it to impact student teaching and learning.

The future of our children is in our hands. It is urgent that all educational stakeholders in the state of Massachusetts put their differences aside and put our students at the forefront.

*Bernadine Lormilus teaches fifth grade at the Channing Elementary School in Hyde Park, Massachusetts. She is a member of the NAACP and a Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellow.*

“  
*As a teacher, I find PARCC to be a better assessment;  
my students agreed. - Bernadine Lormilus*  
”

# PARCC assessment a step forward

## The new Common Core-aligned exam tests the right things

*CommonWealth Magazine*

(11/17/2014)

By Jeffrey Cipriani

This summer my school's principal and teacher leadership team prioritized projects for the year. At the end of the discussion, we put preparing staff for the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment, a test aligned to the new Common Core State Standards, at the top of the list. PARCC is of immediate concern to students and teachers in districts that have voluntarily adopted it in lieu of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, or MCAS, the state's 17-year old assessment that tested our old standards. Boston Public Schools, where I teach, has chosen to use PARCC.

The assessment has ignited plenty of debate. Many teachers worry about its computerized format, its difficulty, and its high-stakes nature; performance on PARCC may soon replace MCAS as a gatekeeper for high school graduation. Concerns like these led the Massachusetts Association of School Committees to pass a resolution this month calling for re-examination of not only the state's commitment to the test, but also to the Common Core, the standards on which the test is based and which are new learning expectations that are more rigorous than the old Massachusetts standards. The Massachusetts Board of Education chose to pilot PARCC first; next fall, it will choose whether to formally adopt it or go back to MCAS.

Flip-flopping on PARCC would be a step backward. The exam is designed to be more challenging than MCAS for good reason. It incorporates questions based on technology, includes higher expectations in writing, and requires more open-ended test items, because competence with tasks like these is crucial for success in college and career. Replacing the test or the standards would also negate the work my school has been doing. My experience teaching Common Core leads me to believe that the standards will prepare students for success in life and on a test like PARCC.

Last year I led the second grade team at my school in improving reading instruction using the Common Core. We crafted 10 units of study, including a four-week course on something we knew would provoke a passionate reaction – bugs. One standard I chose to focus on in my class was determining unfamiliar word meaning using clues from books' pictures, something not required for second graders in the old Massachusetts standards.

A student of mine who struggled with reading but loved insects squealed with joy and disgust one day when she analyzed a picture of a praying mantis eating another and inferred the definition of the word cannibal. "Yuck! Cannibals are gross!" she wrote on a sticky note. She then made it her personal reading quest to discover every example of insect cannibalism available in the classroom library.

It is no secret in education that what gets tested is what gets taught. This is the kind of skill that makes young readers feel confident with text and gets them hooked on nonfiction, but without PARCC testing it, teachers may not think to teach it.

The new assessment will also press students to respond to texts in writing. To do so, students will read two texts on the same topic, and then compose an essay in which they lay out their thinking on the subject matter using information from the texts. This task is much more challenging than previous MCAS test prompts required, because MCAS did not require students to compare texts. With preparation, even our youngest learners are ready for this.

Halfway through a reading unit dedicated to animal research, a righteous seven-year-old in my class approached me asking who the senators of Massachusetts are. I answered and asked why she wanted to know. She explained she had read a book about otters and a book about oil spills and wanted to encourage Elizabeth Warren to do more to protect oceans by writing a persuasive letter.

She wrote the letter unassisted.

Not only is this the kind of writing that PARCC values, it is the kind of writing that has real-world value.

Another reason to embrace the new assessment is that PARCC promises to report data before the academic year finishes. I applaud this because, as an elementary school teacher, I need to know quickly where my students stand in their development as readers, writers, and mathematicians in order to help them. MCAS finalizes data the summer after testing, making reports feel more like an autopsy of a school's performance than a timely diagnosis of teaching and learning designed to help schools improve. My classroom experience illustrates the importance of timely test scores.

The same student who discovered her love for entomology consistently showed below-proficient reading skills on bi-weekly exams. Through data analysis, I noticed she had a specific challenge with literature. I tapped into her love for insects and related narrative structure to a life cycle. Characters, I explained, are like caterpillars. They move through a pattern the same way insects change from one stage to another.

"Got it," she said. "Larva, chrysalis, butterfly. Character, problem, solution."

With timely test data, teachers can see and address student needs, and schools can diagnose bigger trends and problems.

Adjustment is never easy in teaching. Students, especially young ones, depend on routines, and changing routines can be challenging. If I am apprehensive at all for PARCC, it is only because I fear we will reject it before we give it a chance to take root. What does not worry me is whether students will be ready for the test. With good instruction, I know they can be.

*Jeffrey Cipriani is a second grade teacher at Orchard Gardens K-8 Pilot School in Boston Public Schools and a Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellow.*

# Howland: For Massachusetts, the answer is PARCC

*The MetroWest Daily News*  
(10/18/2015)  
By Amy Howland

As a teacher in a school that has piloted the PARCC exam for the past two years, I am convinced this new state-of-the-art computer-based assessment is what we need to ensure Massachusetts students are ready to tackle the real-world challenges of the 21st century – both in college and the workforce. The state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education should vote next month to adopt it statewide to replace the 17-year-old MCAS test.

I have heard the arguments of those who want Massachusetts to simply update the MCAS and, while that might seem like the path of least resistance, my experience in the classroom with both tests tells me it is the wrong answer for Massachusetts students. PARCC was specifically designed to test students on the K-12 curriculum standards adopted by the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. That in and of itself makes PARCC a better test, since it actually measures the skills we want our students to learn, skills that will serve them well in college and the workforce. How can we know if students are learning what the state has decided they should learn if we don't have a test that tests that base of knowledge and skills?

Further, PARCC is a better test because it encourages schools and districts to improve their technology – something that we need to do if students are to compete well in a global job market. My school's decision to voluntarily test-drive PARCC over the past two years contributed to improving school computer labs and technology within the classrooms.

Finally, I like PARCC because it is fairer for all students. Unlike MCAS (an outdated paper-and-pencil test), PARCC allows students who receive special education accommodations such as a test reader to use headphones during the test. This reduces the need for additional staff and – more importantly – allows these students to take the test with the rest of their classmates. At the Academy of the Pacific Rim, we were also able to make certain of these “accessibility features” available to all students, so those who were not (or not yet) on Individualized Education Programs or other special education plans could also benefit from items such as use of scrap paper, spellcheckers, having directions repeated, and teacher redirection. Under MCAS, these are not allowed for children who are not officially slated for special accommodations. Additionally, for students who were in special education pre-referral or evaluation situations at the time of testing, PARCC allowed us to assign other accessibility features, such as text-to-speech for math assessment.

PARCC is not perfect and, as with MCAS before it, some kinks will need to be worked out as we implement it. For example, schools will need time to prepare students for taking a timed online test so that they can make the most of the assessment. This may be especially important for students with disabilities, who



should be allowed to use graphic organizers prepared ahead of time (rather than just allowing them to use scratch paper during the test) in order to ensure they can complete the assessment in the allotted time. Adaptations such as this will help Massachusetts transition smoothly to the modern, computer-based test we need in order to get a truthful assessment of how our students are doing. Furthermore, state education officials need the information PARCC will yield in order to know which schools are not adequately preparing students for life beyond high school and hold them accountable. That's how we will close the achievement gap and ensure that every student – no matter where he or she lives and goes to school – will exit high school with a diploma that spells success.

*Amy Howland of Dedham is a teacher at the Academy of the Pacific Rim Charter Public School in Hyde Park.*



*As a teacher in a school that has piloted the PARCC exam for the past two years, I am convinced this new state-of-the-art computer-based assessment is what we need to ensure Massachusetts students are ready to tackle the real-world challenges of the 21st century – both in college and the workforce.- Amy Howland*



# In key ways, PARCC would be step up from MCAS

*The Boston Globe*  
(10/24/2015)  
By Wing Leung

I take issue with the article “New test unable to outdo MCAS” (Metro, Oct. 15): According to the Mathematica Policy Research study, which compares the PARCC and MCAS exams as measures of students’ college readiness, the better you perform on either of the exams, the better grades you are likely to receive in college.

However, PARCC, or the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, is significantly better at predicting students who will receive grades of B or higher in college math courses. Students who pass the PARCC are also less likely to need remedial math courses later. As a high school math teacher, I believe that these points are reason enough to adopt PARCC.

I agree with the former state education secretary, Paul Reville, that selecting the right assessment is “more important than anything else we do in signaling to teachers the kind of instruction that we want to see in classrooms.” I teach problem-solving and critical-thinking skills every day. I want to ensure that my students have accurate measures of the skills that matter.

Having taught and prepared 10th-graders for MCAS for more than a decade, I believe that PARCC is a more accurate measure of the necessary skills students need to be ready for college and beyond.

Wing Leung

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