

LH Remarks for 11/19 School Committee Meeting – MCAS vs. PARCC Decision

- Here to address the recent decision of the BOE to support Commissioner Chester's recommendation to develop a new state test, currently being called "MCAS 2.0"
- Noteworthy that the vote on the BESE was 8-3 with the board members representing parents, teachers, and students all voting against the initiative.
- Believe that advocacy on the part of many constituents, succeeded in turning away the movement to tie MASS testing to the multi-state consortium. I think that was a significant victory.
- I applaud the fact that we have managed to maintain control of our state test – feel like Mass. educators and administrators will have more success influencing the content of the test, with state control.
- I support an amendment that passed 7-4 to continue the "hold harmless" clause for results based on the new test until 2018 (means first year of hybrid test in 2017 will also be "hold harmless"). Amendment was put forth by former Lesley U. President, Margaret McKenna, who supports the hybrid test, but feels like the rush to offer it in a year and a half does not leave proper time for test development, beta testing, and setting standards.
- Another statistic I want to mention is one I saw in the Globe West section last weekend. There it was reported that at the joint MASS/MASC conference, delegates took a non-binding vote in favor of the statewide moratorium on high-stakes, standardized testing until a better assessment system can be developed. Vote was 63-52 in favor of the ban. This is a conversation I hope to be able to come back to in the future.
- Tonight, the issue that will be taken up later in the agenda is what Arlington should do about our Spring 2016 test.
- Choices
 - Stick with MCAS for a final year
 - Try out PARCC paper and pencil – hold harmless
 - Try out PARCC computer-based – hold harmless
- As the people who will be responsible for preparing students and to take the test, I feel like it is critical for teacher input to be considered in this decision.
- Commend and appreciate the outreach from Asst. Supt. Laura Chesson, with whom I have had several long conversations about how to approach this decision. Laura also sponsored a teacher conversation on the topic on Wed. afternoon.
- After a lengthy conversation with Laura last week, and after spending a lot of time on the DESE website, I put together a document for teachers that explained the decision before us, and listed the major factors that I felt were important to weigh in making a decision.
- Teachers were encouraged to review the information, and fill out a survey about what they would recommend for the district.

- In all, 58 teachers participated in the survey.
 - 38/66% - stick with MCAS
 - 15/26% - try PARCC paper and pencil with hold harmless
 - 5/9% - try PARCC computer-based with hold harmless
- **Disaggregated Data**
 - Half of Gr. 3, 4, and 5 teachers responded – 41 teachers overall
 - **Gr. 3** – 18% PARCC paper and pencil; 82% stick with MCAS; 0% PARCC computer-based
 - **Gr. 4** – 8% PARCC computer-based; 46% PARCC paper and pencil; 46% stick with MCAS
 - **Gr. 5** – 9% PARCC computer-based; 27% PARCC paper and pencil; 55% stick with MCAS
 - **Gr. 3-5 SPED** – 1 PARCC paper and pencil; 2 stick with MCAS
 - **Middle School** – 12 teachers overall
 - 67% stick with MCAS; 25% PARCC computer-based; 8% PARCC paper and pencil
- Teachers were also asked to state their main reasons for their decision. Factors included both pro-MCAS and pro-PARCC choices. The factors teachers selected most often, in order of popularity, were:
 - **Technology** – not enough IT support to feel like we could pull off a computer-based test
 - **Stress** of one more thing – want to stick with MCAS
 - **Technology** – current infrastructure too weak to support a computer-based test
 - **Timed Test:** Concerns students would have a problem with the fact that PARCC is a timed test
 - **Technology** – challenge of coordinating 2,600 students to take a computer-based test
 - **Hold harmless** clause for PARCC 2016 would be worth taking advantage of
- Significant that Technology related issues were 3 of the top 6 factors listed. This is not a knock on our hard working IT staff, rather an acknowledgement of the daily challenges presented by the growing pains of increasing technology options for students and teachers. If we are really going to be ready to fully integrate technology into teaching and learning, AND prepare for a district-wide online assessment, we will have to make a much larger investment in our IT department.

- Unlike a year and a half ago, I do not come with a single recommendation.
- I can see merits of both sticking with what we know, and trying out the PARCC format under the hold harmless clause.
- I urge you to read through the comments and preferences stated by teachers, and to consider their concerns.
- If the decision is made to try out PARCC this spring, I have two very specific requests that I believe will be critical to the success of the endeavor:
 - 1. That the School Committee and the administration publicly embrace a PARCC trial as an opportunity to try out a new testing platform – with the sole focus on learning more about the way that PARCC approaches assessing the Common Core standards.
 - No time should be diverted from the important work the district is doing on aligning curriculum and continuing our efforts to support teacher with professional development on instructional practices and Common Core units of study.
 - At the elementary level, there are currently new units of study being rolled out in science, reading, writing, and math. This work is critical to supporting our efforts to improve the educational experience for students and our alignment to the CC. Time should not be diverted to study a new, and still evolving testing system in the few short months that remain before the spring administration.
 - If the decision is to go with PARCC, I hope all parties make it very clear to parents, teachers, and the community, that the accountability system for students, teachers, schools and the district will be **turned off**. It would be an experiment that would better inform our work going forward. The goal would be to plan to spend time in the 2016-2017 school year attempting to process and learn from the experience.
 - 2. If PARCC is the direction the district decides to go in, I think the message from teachers is strong and clear – there is major apprehension around the district's capacity to carry out a full district on-line administration. I think this could be a disaster for all involved. Thoughtful decisions should be made about the realistic capacity we have to try out the online version in a limited number of settings. With the current timeline, we have four years to get to 100% online administration. The district should consider ramping up thoughtfully, in stages over time.
- Many of us have very mixed feelings about some of the features of the current PARCC test, but I know we will have the chance to discuss this concern more fully another day.
- Now that we have the certainty of a four year plan before us, I urge the School Committee and the administration to consider the feedback from teachers, and to make a thoughtful decision that clearly articulates the reasons for the decision, the goals for the decision, and contains a clear plan to communicate the rationale and goals to teachers and the community at large.

