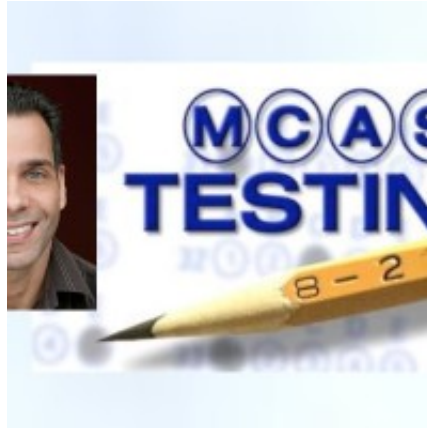


## Parent to officials: ‘if you know it’s wrong but remain silent, you’re complicit in educational malpractice’ BY VALERIE STRAUS



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Ricardo D. Rosa Ph.D.[/caption]

Here’s a letter from Massachusetts parent Ricardo D. Rosa to the New Bedford School Committee and Superintendent Pia Durkin about high-stakes standardized testing. Rosa explains why he wants to opt his children out of this month’s Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exams and all upcoming high-stakes test, including the Common Core-aligned tests being designed by a consortium of states called PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers).

Rosa is an assistant professor at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth who specializes in curriculum and instruction, language policies, Literacy and social studies education. In his letter, he refers to the 2013 Massachusetts Statement Against High-Stakes Testing, which was signed by more than 130 Massachusetts professors and researchers from some 20 schools — including Harvard, Tufts, Boston and Brandeis universities —urging state officials to stop overusing high-stakes standardized tests to assess students, teachers and schools.

To New Bedford's School Committee & the Superintendent of Schools:

I often hear that parental voices are needed in our educational system. Your response to this letter will determine whether or not you truly mean to include the voices of families in the reform of New Bedford's schools. Of course, by "include," I don't mean acting as tour guides in schools or serving on advisory boards where one's decision-making power is only symbolic.



Last year, on the day that MCAS was to be administered, my son was sick. He insisted that he wanted to attend school to take the test. He opened the test booklet and proceeded to answer test items when his teacher noticed that something was wrong. She sent him to the nurse, who called me. She stated: "he is clearly not well, but he opened the test booklet and risks having his test invalidated if he is sent home. We'll have him sit then send him back to the classroom to take the test. After the test we'll send him home." I was appalled. Ultimately, my son returned to take the MCAS, despite the early onset of the flu and my resistance. He felt compelled to test given the pressures. I don't mean to insinuate that nurses in our schools are incompetent. I think they perform quite well and would perform stellar if the system was adequately funded. What I do mean to say is that the regime of high-stakes testing in our schools is deeply disturbing and inhumane!

I write this letter to express my intent to opt my children out of high-stakes testing, whether the test is the MCAS, PARCC, or any other hip acronym that comes along in the shape of a high-stakes test designed to oppress, standardize, anaesthetize, and ultimately suffocate students. I publicize this letter because it's not only my children that concern me. My children usually do well. High scores on high-stakes tests do not prove that true learning is occurring. Countless educational research has concluded that the use of high-stakes testing narrows the curriculum and encourages test preparation as a substitute for engaged learning. High-stakes tests are also deviance-producing mechanisms. A number of school systems across the country have been exposed for cheating and unethical practices due to the pressures of high-stakes testing. They are, in short, becoming Enron.

Furthermore, our continuous focus on scoring well evades more important public dialogue about funding inequities and the root cause of educational disengagement – poverty. Allowing testing corporations to continue reaping billions of dollars in profit from public education only exacerbates the problem. Any administrator, school committee member, or school functionary still standing before students, teachers, and families touting the virtues of high-stakes testing should be ashamed. And, if you know that it's wrong but remain silent, you're complicit in educational malpractice.

Furthermore, subjecting English Language Learners to the MCAS and the PARCC after only

having been in the country for one year is immoral. Emergent bilingual students are 9 times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers. These tests are part of the problem. In addition, a high percentage of students with disabilities are not meeting graduation requirements as a result of these tests.

Countless educational researchers have concluded that measuring teacher effectiveness and school quality through high-stakes test scores is unreliable and unethical. Evaluating teachers in this manner does very little to improve the profession. Rather, it encourages great teachers to resign.

I strongly believe in accountability and high-expectations of all students, teachers and administrators. However, high-stakes tests are about securing low expectations. Portfolios, performance based, and other forms of authentic assessments are more educationally sound. Standardized tests also have their place, but they should not be in the form of high-stakes. I encourage readers to read the Massachusetts Statement Against High-Stakes Testing endorsed by countless professors in the state, myself included. As MCAS is imposed on our schools next week and the rest of the school year, I encourage parents to write letters opting students out and requesting an in-school alternative to high-stakes testing. If we're truly interested in ending bullying in schools, let's end the bullying of high stakes testing. If families really have a "choice," they must be allowed to exercise the choice to opt-out.

Join us for a forum and community dialogue on high-stakes testing and opting-out at 5:00 p.m. on April 9 – Whaling National Historical Park Museum – 33 Williams St. Join the S.E. MA and RI Coalition to Save Our Schools to continue the dialogue and organization to reclaim public education in the interest of all families.

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or visit [Facebook.com/SouthEastMARIOptOut](https://www.facebook.com/SouthEastMARIOptOut).

I look forward to a public response.

**Ricardo D. Rosa**

BY VALERIE STRAUS / The Washington Post

**April 9<sup>th</sup> 5 p.m.**

New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park  
33 William St.

**OPT OUT**



**PARCC**

**HIGH-STAKES  
TESTING**

**MCAS**

We invite families, teachers, school leaders, community organizers & activists, and elected officials to a **community dialogue on education.**

*This event is hosted in partnership with the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at UMass Dartmouth, the Arnold Dublin Labor Education Center, and the Greater SE Mass Labor Council, S.E. MA and RI Coalition to Save Our Schools, National Park Service, and 3rd Eye Unlimited.*

**For more information:**

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