

I am here to support regarding CC & PARCC testing
Councillor Kelley's Policy Order Resolution
09 74

My name is Joseph Farjoun, I am a parent of three children. My eldest is a first-grader at Cambridgeport. I am a mathematician by training with more than 10 years of teaching experience.

While I support a universal base-level of education across the nation, I am here to ask you to stop or defund PARCC.

Universal assessment tests are an integral and important element of maintaining a high level of public education. However, the current version of assessments is an ineffective patchwork of tests. They are put in place with the good intentions of increasing the quality of education and closing the achievement gap, but as these goals remains unmet, the tests linger and multiply under a flawed philosophy that more testing must be better.

PARCC will not be any better. Weighing the cow does not fatten it.

On Friday I took the PARCC 3rd grade ELA and Math sample tests. I found the exams to be too long, and presented in a confusing and distracting interface. Both the questions and the answers provided were poorly written and age-inappropriate.

How long is too long?

It took me over an hour to get through the 13 section ELA test with its 22 questions and two essays. The 39 section Math test, with its 60 questions, took me an additional 25 minutes. How long do you think this test would take a third grader?

What is wrong with the interface?

With decades of experience using computers, I managed to navigate the interface (though not without difficulty). But what about 8 year olds? Do we want to require that all third graders spend weeks learning how to navigate software and master typing skills so that they can write two essays? Yes, the computer is an important tool, but how much of the **third grade curriculum** are we going to sacrifice so that kids can be tested?

It is absurd to take away even a single minute from the teaching of reading, writing and math solely for mastering a computer interface that aims to test proficiency in these very subjects!

What about the content of the exams?

The Math problems were acceptable. Their **quantity** was not: 60 questions that often require copying to a sheet of paper, solving, and then switching back to the computer to key in the answer is a lot to ask of a third grader.

The simple questions were repetitive and the more involved ones were erroneous.

While the ELA reading passages were acceptable, the essay questions were too convoluted and in the multiple-choice questions the "correct" answers seemed arbitrary in many cases.

Overall, the tests are not fully thought-out, their efficacy and relevance unclear. Their stakes however, are huge, for our students, for our teachers and for our schools.