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Good Evening, Mr. Mayor, Council Members,

Thank you for having me here. I've come this evening in support of Policy Order number 9, which urges the Council to urge the State Legislature to not allow the implementation of PARCC to go forward before we take it under deep consideration, including legislative reviews and hearings. As you probably know, PARCC is the online test that has been designed to replace the standardized test we now use in MA – the MCAS. PARCC assesses students' proficiency of the new Common Core standards.

Resolution asks

There are many reservations I have about Cambridge implementing Common Core and PARCC. The concern I'll speak about for a couple minutes is how Common Core standards and PARCC relate to the persistent achievement gap we have in Cambridge Public Schools.

The question I haven't heard answered by the School Committee or any district personnel is how Common Core (new standards) and a brand new standardized test (PARCC) will close the achievement gap. We've had the Massachusetts Frameworks – arguably some of the most rigorous educational standards in the country – along with the MCAS – the

standardized test that assesses those standards – for years; yet, the achievement gap is still a persistent problem. This isn't really surprising since there doesn't actually seem to be any evidence that there's a correlation between high standards and student achievement. Instead, research consistently shows that poverty is much a bigger factor.

The first is from former CPS parent Mindy Kornhaber, formerly a doctoral student of Howard Gardner and currently an educator professor at Penn State, who writes: "There is no evidence that higher standards will improve equity. States with and without high standards have enormous gaps in student achievement, much of that attributable to a child poverty rate of 22 percent."

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/23/opinion/the-debate-over-the-common-core.html

As an elementary school teacher in a school with 100% free and reduced lunch (Cape Verdean/Hispanic ELLs/African-Americans) in Boston, my list of what I need as a teacher to close the achievement gap in 4th grade ELA does not include new standards and a new standardized test. Teachers already know about their students who are not performing. Those tests ~~are~~ have

been a way to show the problem, not solve the problem

~~indicators -- not teaching tools~~. Teachers will tell you (in my experience) to start to close the achievement gap in reading that they need hundreds of high-quality books in their classroom libraries, adults the children can read to and form bonds with, creative projects and arts that will keep them engaged in school, teachers with the time to write letters back and forth about reading, field trips to the library, weekend book clubs, field trips to museums and other places to broaden horizons, mentors, etc. I would be surprised to hear any teacher of low-performing (on standardized tests) students say that one of the first things they need is new standards and a new test.

But the question that's been asked of me, and I don't know the answer to, is whether Common Core and PARCC are being implemented in Cambridge as a way to close the achievement gap? I don't know? Are they? If so, why do we think new standards and a new test will close the gap when years of the MCAS and ~~arguably some of the mo~~st rigorous educational standards ~~in the country~~ have not done that? Where is the evidence that it will work? And if Common Core and PARCC aren't part of the plan to close the achievement gap, then why are we spending so much money implementing them when there are still the root problems of the achievement gap to be tackled?

With these questions still unanswered, I urge the Council to pass order 9 so that we may have time to make sure we are making the right decisions

Erica Pastor