

The Somerville News

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617-666-4010 / somervilleneews@aol.com

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Rally: MCAS exam is a failure

By Matthew McLaughlin

Hundreds of high school students gathered in the State House Wednesday to voice their concern over standardized testing. Speakers, including teachers and elected officials, demanded changes to a test they claim is holding children back.

Stanley Pollack, director of Teen Empowerment, a non-profit organization in the Greater Boston area, called the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System exam an "abysmal failure" and called on the state to make broad sweeping changes to the way the test is run.



"If you're having a meal and the meal is lousy, you don't go and tell the chef 'add less salt,'" he said. "You say 'this is terrible and change it.' Pretending everything is fine because a few test scores go up is a recipe for disaster."

State Rep. Denise Provost, D-Somerville, spoke at the rally and agreed that changes have to be made. She said state and federal standards such as the "No Child Left Behind" act do not support education and hinder teachers. She cited the Healy School, where her daughter attends, as a good school that could face problems because, by MCAS standards, they may not reach "adequate yearly progress." This can result in sanctions for the school including the state taking control.

"Despite the good efforts from many fine teachers, I see a lot of problems," Provost said. "It is not acceptable. There has to be a better way to help our children achieve their dreams."

Another major issue the demonstrators had with the MCAS was the requirement for students to pass the test in order to graduate. Many speakers believed that the MCAS should not be a make or break requirement for graduation. Greg Rego, 18, from Somerville, told the crowd that he failed the math section of the MCAS by two points.

"Eventually, having failed the MCAS and without the necessary credits to pass, I dropped out of school halfway through my senior year," Rego said. "I am just one of many people" affected by the test.

Several high school students from around the state spoke of the differences between school funding in cities as opposed to more suburban areas in the state. Diego Medina, a high school student from Roxbury, claimed his suburban counterparts have more resources to educate themselves.

"While many students get to bring home laptops, students in the city can't even bring home textbooks," he said. "Why is that?"

Pollack said a major reason for the discrepancies in education funding is that education budgets are tied directly

to property taxes. That policy ensures that the poorer the community, the more likely it is that the education system will be bad, he said. "It is not just about the MCAS," he said. "Somerville has a better education system than Boston. But it does not have a better system than Arlington."

Speakers also charged that teachers must "teach to the test" and students spend countless hours in test preparation in order to pass. This cuts into time for classes like gym, the arts and other important classes, Pollack said.

"In Somerville, like in any other city, the MCAS narrows the curriculum," he said. "The idea of driving education towards the test is a bad idea."

Posted at 06:00 AM in [News](#) | [Permalink](#)

Comments

Funny how people hate being held accountable! If you test students and they fail who is held accountable?

Posted by: The truth | [May 31, 2008 at 10:06 AM](#)

Pollack says that education are tied directly to property taxes. That policy ensures that the poorer the community, the more likely it is that the education system will be bad. Somerville has a better education system than Boston. But it does not have a better system than Arlington.

Boston has an enormous corporate tax base and high value residential real estate. The city of Boston also receives state and federal grants for their school system. The town of Lexington, long considered one of the best school systems in the state, spends less than half per student than Boston does, yet it has a much better program. That has nothing to do with money.

If we take what Pollack says at face value then we say that Somerville is a more affluent city than Boston. I think very few will believe that.

It's not about the money spent in the system, it's about the interaction between the family and the school.

Please stop lying about the correlation between money spent and the quality of the school system.

Posted by: Not True | [May 31, 2008 at 11:47 AM](#)

"In Somerville, like in any other city, the MCAS narrows the curriculum," he said. "The idea of driving education towards the test is a bad idea."

There's a short circuit in the reasoning here.

The idea was to drive education toward the curriculum. The extent to which you have taught the curriculum is assessed by MCAS tests. If the speaker objects to the curriculum he should say so, but it doesn't have the rhetorical p'nash.

"The idea of driving education towards the curriculum is a bad idea," sounds kind of daft, but that's what he's really saying.

Posted by: Bob | [June 02, 2008 at 01:50 PM](#)

Being a former educator, I can say first-hand that most schools are teaching towards this test. By "towards this test," I mean the children are learning how to take the test and pass. They are not learning content, it is not paralleled with the standards and frameworks designed by the Department of Education, and it is not holding them accountable for anything. If you want a system like MCAS, it should be pass/fail and unpublished.

Posted by: [Courtney O'Keefe](#) | [June 03, 2008 at 03:21 PM](#)

To Not True: I partially agree with you. It's not all about money, but money is correlated. Homogenous suburbs that have a large population of highly educated people generally have a larger population of people that are involved in their children's education. Those areas generally have more money.

Also, they don't have to spend as much per student on average to get many of the luxuries, because they have the education more streamlined. Areas that have to cater to students of many levels (special ed all the way up to honors) have to spend much more per student on average. In other words, you spend less if you have fewer levels of education (fewer teachers, books,

facilities, etc).

Boston is a bad example of an affluent area. For one, most of the affluent people in Boston do not have children. Second, there is still a large population of people with modest/low income.

Posted by: somebody | [June 03, 2008 at 03:22 PM](#)

Courtney, what difference does it make if a child's education is geared towards passing the MCAS? They are still having a hard time passing the MCAS. Some students are having a hard time with simple basic math.

Why is it that only cities and towns whose children have a hard time with the MCAS are the only ones to complain.

Perhaps the real problem with the MCAS is with the educators themselves, crying about a simple test. Or is it the lack of parental involvement? The majority of cities and towns whose children cannot pass the MCAS have the highest rate of children with IEPs' and other learning disabilities. They also have the highest rate of Parents with the "Who cares what my child learns, I am not a teacher that is your job" attitude.

Children with high MCAS test scores can go to college and receive a free education courtesy of our State Universities.

Posted by: William Hurst | [June 04, 2008 at 08:32 AM](#)

"Why is it that only cities and towns whose children have a hard time with the MCAS are the only ones to complain."

Are you kidding us?

Posted by: Kate | [June 04, 2008 at 09:09 AM](#)

I'm sorry Kate, I do not "kid around" I must have been misinformed. Perhaps you can share with us the names of school systems with high MCAS test scores that are complaining? My opinion of this matter is based on the information given to me by a High School teacher. If my nephew is lying to me, then I apologise for misleading you.

Posted by: William Hurst | [June 04, 2008 at 10:17 AM](#)