

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Statement  
Regarding Citizens' Petition at Acton Special Town Meeting  
Planned for November 10, 2015  
*DRAFT version dated October 23, 2015*

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee has been asked to comment on the Citizens' Petition being brought to the town of Acton as a non-binding resolution at a Special Town Meeting planned for November 10<sup>th</sup>.

While the Committee appreciates the interest, concern and involvement of parents and community members in support of this petition, we are unfortunately unable to support this petition as written for a number of very specific and valid reasons. We do realize that although it must seem ironic, given our committee's stance against PARCC as it has evolved, we still must oppose this Citizens' Petition as written.

First, we as a board and district have very specific concerns about the accuracy of numerous claims within this petition<sup>i</sup>. In addition, we disagree with the petitioners' view of the financial impact of this petition<sup>ii</sup>. Those concerns are specifically detailed following this statement.

Secondly, we are concerned about the process and approach being employed by the proponents. As a committee we have spent a great deal of time in recent years on the subject of standardized testing and have taken the time on numerous occasions to make our position known to our legislators and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). Those are activities we feel have been thoughtfully considered by members of both communities and were designed to influence those in a position to affect real change. When we advocate for change, we make a deliberate effort to speak as one region. In this case, when we as a regional district are asked to accept a non-binding resolution recommended by constituents from only one of our towns, we believe there is a perceived loss of cohesion in the message any action may send.

The BESE is set to vote on the choice of MCAS or PARCC on November 17<sup>th</sup>; in preparation for that vote, we as Committee members attended public forums, met with legislators and wrote letters summarizing a great deal of thought and discussion. While the results of this Special Town Meeting vote may make it to those decision-makers in advance of November 17<sup>th</sup>, we feel that the petition as written is off message from that particular vote.

Lastly, as a regional district shared with our neighboring town of Boxborough, we find ourselves in the uncomfortable position of having been asked to take direction from members of only one of our towns that would impact all of our students. We have been told by one of the petitioners that there have been no similar efforts made in the town of Boxborough.

1. Para 1: Common Core (CC) and PARCC are lumped together here but we as a district and committee have separated those issues and feel differently about each.
2. Para 1: We are currently using 2006 Science/Technology/Engineering (STE) Frameworks that are not part of Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The new MA STE framework draft is due for public comment this fall, and these frameworks are based on the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), which are not part of the CCSS. We are currently using the 2003 History and Social Science Framework, also not part of CCSS. CCSS refer to just ELA and Math.
3. Para 3: We have been using CCSS since 2011, the same year the petition cites our district as being consistently highly rated.
4. Para 4: CCSS were adopted in a public process, for which the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) released draft standards for public comment in May 2010.
5. Para 5: We control our curriculum on the local level, and we follow federal law and state regulations regarding testing.
6. #2: We are not yet using PARCC and the state will vote Nov. 17 to choose PARCC or MCAS. The standards the District uses and how they are referenced incorrectly has been mentioned.
7. #3 MCAS testing already exceeds this number of testing days; for example, 10<sup>th</sup> grade ELA is 2 days for 3 sessions of reading and one of writing, 10<sup>th</sup> grade math is two days for two different sessions, and STE is 2 days for 2 different sessions. 7 days total. In addition, item three refers to standardized testing where in actuality the petitioners likely mean high-stakes standardized testing. As written, this limits the vast majority of testing that happens in schools. A “standardized test” is any test where students answer the same questions and it is scored in a standard way to compare results.
8. #4 It is unclear what is meant by “the use of any state or federal educational programs” and testing is governed by federal law and state regulations not the School Committee (SC). It is the SC job to develop the budget, develop policy and oversee the Superintendent.
9. #5 We as a district receive a great deal of money from various grants such as Title III for ELL students, Title I for improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged, and other Entitlement grants. Those provide money to directly serve our students. This is funding that we cannot do without.
10. Summary: The Common Core State Standards effort was led by the National Governors’ Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, all of whom are state leaders.
11. The last statement in the second summary paragraph does not include standards or assessment...and to be clear, the terms standards and curriculum are not synonymous. Curriculum is defined as a combination of knowing the standards, knowing the available materials, knowing your

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students, knowing the assessment practices and having a deep knowledge of instructional practices. Curriculum is not something you could buy off the shelf or have foisted upon you. We control our curriculum locally here at Acton-Boxborough.

<sup>ii</sup> Lastly, the authors of the petition were at a recent Acton Finance Committee meeting, speaking to the financial impact of their petition. The petitioners cited four reasons to support their position:

1. Too much technology
2. Privacy concerns
3. Loss of local control
4. Expense

Regarding these points:

1. We have taken a very slow organic approach to technology overall in our district, both to manage the costs and maximize impact.
2. We believe concerns about privacy and security of student test data would be best addressed with the BESE and DESE.
3. As previously explained, we have control over what matters...our curriculum.
4. We currently are well prepared to implement a standardized computerized assessment should we need to, and would not need to purchase additional hardware for such purposes.