

# **FINAL REPORT**

## **Analysis of Survey of Brookline Educators Regarding the Effect of MCAS on Teaching and Student Learning**

prepared by

Kevin Lang  
Professor of Economics  
Boston University

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I am grateful to Robert Costrell, Phil Katz and Carol Schraft for their comments on an earlier draft of this report. Needless to say, they do not necessarily agree with everything contained in it.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In spring 2002, the Brookline Public Schools, in collaboration with the Brookline Educators Association, distributed a questionnaire on the effect of MCAS on teaching and learning in the Brookline Schools. One hundred eighty-six questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 27%.

The results support the hypothesis that when educators do not feel a lot of pressure to respond to MCAS, they respond in ways that they believe benefit student learning. A majority of respondents who report no source of a lot of pressure to respond to MCAS also view the effect of the time they devote explicitly to preparing students for MCAS as positive. Since most educators in Brookline do not report a lot of pressure to respond to MCAS, they tend to view its effects on student learning as positive or mixed. Nevertheless, there is a minority of educators that feels a lot of pressure from a number of sources to respond to MCAS, and among this group as many believe that MCAS detracts from student learning as believe that it contributes to it.

There is also considerable concern among special education professionals about the effect of MCAS on student learning. The results suggest that this group of educators is more likely to feel that the effect of MCAS on their students is negative than that it is positive.

The major findings of the survey are:

- The majority of Brookline educators devote little time to material intended to help students to do well on the MCAS and which they would not otherwise cover. Over half report spending less than 5% of their time on such material. Time spent on such material over the course of the year is not closely related to whether the educator teaches an MCAS subject in a test year although teachers do devote more time to material aimed explicitly at the test in the two months preceding its administration.
- More than three out of ten believe that the effect of the time they spend on material that they would not cover were it not for MCAS is entirely or mostly positive while less than one in ten believes that it is mostly or entirely negative. The proportion who believe that the effect on student learning is positive in the two months prior to the exam falls to about two out of ten but the proportion reporting that it is negative is essentially unchanged.
- Among those reporting an effect, there is some tendency for those who devote less time to material aimed explicitly at MCAS to view the effect of the time they spend on such material as positive. Among those who report an effect, over half of respondents who spend less than 5% of their time on material intended to help their students on the MCAS and which they would not otherwise cover, believe that the effect is positive while less than one in ten believes that it is negative. In contrast, only three out ten of those who devote more than 10% of their time to such material report that the effect is positive while two of ten report that it is negative.

- Over half of respondents say that, in response to MCAS, they have changed how they teach writing at least a little and almost half report at least a little change in how they teach reading comprehension. About four in ten have changed how they teach math as have about three in ten how they teach science and two in ten how they teach social studies.
- Among those reporting changing how they teach, the proportion who believe that the change had a positive effect on student learning ranged from 42% to 56%. In no case did the proportion who believed the effect was negative exceed 12%. Those who reported smaller changes were more likely to believe that the effect was positive than were those who reported more significant changes in how they teach the skill.
- For each of the following teaching styles and subject, over one-fifth of respondents say that they changed their teaching in response to MCAS and that the effect was positive – being more likely to emphasize correct writing conventions, including more writing assignments, teaching test-taking skills, teaching more vocabulary, paying more attention to the state curriculum frameworks, helping individual students more, doing more problem-solving in math.
- Over one-fifth of respondents say that they changed their teaching in response to MCAS and that the effect was negative in the following two ways – omitting topics they would like to teach, teaching at a faster pace.
- Of the sixteen dimensions covered in the survey, 32% of respondents reported at least one change that affected student learning positively and no change that affected learning negatively. Only 5% reported only negative changes but no positive changes. The remainder were split between those reporting both positive and negative changes (35%) or no clearly positive or negative changes (28%).
- A majority (56%) of those reporting no source of a lot of pressure to respond to MCAS view the effect of time spent on material devoted to improving their students' performance on MCAS as having a positive effect on their students' learning; 39% of those reporting one or two such sources report the effect of MCAS as positive, as do only 28% of those reporting more than two.
- Special education professionals are less inclined than are other educators to find that the effect of MCAS on student learning is positive. They are less likely to find that the changes they have made in the teaching of writing are positive. They feel more external pressure to respond to MCAS.

The results of the study suggest that the challenge for the Brookline Public Schools is to maintain the right balance – to allow teachers and other educators to derive the benefits from MCAS while ensuring that the pressure to respond to MCAS does not become so intense as to produce responses that detract from, rather than add to, student learning. Up to this point, it appears to have been largely successful in striking this balance.

## I. Demographics

The survey was distributed to 683 teaching professionals in the Brookline Public Schools. Of these, 186 returned the survey, for a response rate of 27%. This response rate, while in line with common experience for self-administered questionnaires is nevertheless disappointing. There is no direct way of knowing whether the answers of those who failed to return the survey would have differed from those who completed and returned it.

The response rate was noticeably lower at the High School where 206 surveys were distributed and 30 returned for a response rate of 15%.<sup>1</sup> Almost one-third of teaching professionals who are not at the High School and who were surveyed completed and returned the questionnaire. Thus the survey under-represents the High School. This should be kept in mind when interpreting the results. Nevertheless, at least among those who responded to the survey, there is no clear tendency for respondents at the High School to give different answers from those of respondents elsewhere in the system, with the obvious exception of questions directly related to differences in responsibilities such as whether they try to make the content of their instruction consistent with the Brookline High School graduation requirements.

### Grade levels worked with

The survey asked respondents to circle the grade levels with which they worked. We recorded the lowest and highest grade level recorded by each respondent. Table 1 describes the grade levels with which the respondents work. It is read in the following way. Rows represent the lowest grade level with which the respondent works while columns represent the highest grade with which he or she works. Thus eight respondents work only with pre-kindergarten students; one works with students in pre-K through 1<sup>st</sup> grade, one with pre-K through 4<sup>th</sup> grade and one with pre-K through 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Respondents who reported working with a single grade or only with the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades or only high school students are marked in bold.

The survey clearly underrepresents teaching professionals focused on the high school. Of the 179 respondents who provided information about the grades with which they work, only thirty reported responsibilities only at the high school. Of the seven who did not provide a grade level, two provided their names and work at elementary schools. Of the remaining five, four responded to a question about the BHS course syllabi as not applicable. Thus at most, one-sixth of the respondents were high school based in contrast with roughly one-third of the staff to whom the survey was distributed.

Staff working primarily with students in pre-K through second grade also appear to be slightly under-represented, presumably because they are less directly affected by the MCAS.

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<sup>1</sup>In these figures, one respondent whose high school status is ambiguous is treated as not at the High School. Reclassifying this individual would not alter the substance of the paragraph.

**TABLE 1**  
**LOWEST AND HIGHEST GRADES SERVED BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS**

Lowest Grade	Highest Grade												Total
	Pre-K	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	HS	
Pre-K	8	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	11
K	0	7	0	1	2	1	2	0	0	12	0	0	25
1	0	0	12	5	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	20
2	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
3	0	0	0	0	12	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	16
4	0	0	0	0	0	13	0	1	0	2	0	0	16
5	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	1	0	0	0	0	16
6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	3	0	0	15
7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	22	0	0	23
8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30	30
NA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Total	8	7	13	11	15	17	18	15	1	43	1	30	186

Type of position

Fully 70% (130) of the respondents describe themselves as classroom teachers. A further 11% (20) respond that they are special education staff while 13% (24) say they are specialists and 2% (4) that they are support staff. The remaining respondents (8) did not answer the question.

Table 2 shows the relation between teaching at a single grade level and the type of position held by the respondent. Most of those who describe themselves as classroom teachers also work with a single grade level and vice versa.

<b>Type of position</b>	<b>All teaching in one grade, or 7/8 or High School</b>		
	no	yes	Total
Classroom Teacher	9	119	128
Special Education	11	9	20
Specialist	17	6	23
Support staff	3	1	4
No answer	0	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>179</b>

### Subjects Taught

When asked which subjects they teach, approximately one-third (33%) of respondents indicate that they teach “all” subjects. These respondents are all Pre-K through sixth grade classroom teachers. We coded subject taught into three – teaches at least one MCAS subject,<sup>2</sup> teaches a non-MCAS subject and no MCAS subjects,<sup>3</sup> and mandated programs.<sup>4</sup> These categories are not mutually exclusive since four respondents indicated that they taught both special education and regular education in either an MCAS or non-MCAS subject. Moreover, some of the non-MCAS subjects such as “guidance” or “nurse” do not fit into standard categories of teaching.

Three-fifths (61%) teach an MCAS tested subject. One-eighth (12%) teach a subject that is not tested directly while one-sixth teach in a mandated program which may or may not cover MCAS-related material. One in seven did not respond to the question asking what subject they teach.

Table 3 shows the relation between the subjects taught and the highest grade at which the respondent works. Of the 186 respondents, 114 teach an MCAS subjects, and, of these, 92 teach at the third grade or higher, the grades in which the MCAS is offered. In addition, 31 work in a mandated program (which may or may not cover MCAS-related material). Of these, 24 teach at least some students in the third grade or higher. Note that some teachers fall into more than one category.

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<sup>2</sup>English language arts, math, science, social studies, reading, writing.

<sup>3</sup>Art, computers/instructional technology, foreign language, gifted and talented, health/nurse, music, physical education, pre-school.

<sup>4</sup>ESL/bilingual, special education and associated services.

<b>TABLE 3</b>				
<b>TYPE OF SUBJECT TAUGHT BY HIGHEST GRADE TAUGHT</b>				
Highest Grade	MCAS Subject	Other Subject	Mandated	No Answer
No answer	0	2	0	5
Pre-K - 2	22	3	6	10
3 and up	92	18	25	7
Total	114	23	31	22

We would expect the largest effect of MCAS to be on those working in areas tested directly and in those years in which the MCAS subject test is administered. Somewhat fewer than half (86) of the

<b>TABLE 4</b>		
<b>DISTRIBUTION OF MCAS SUBJECTS TAUGHT</b>		
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Percent Teaching Subject</b>	<b>No. Teaching in MCAS Year</b>
Math	7.5	13
Science	6.5	10
English Language Arts	12.4	21
Social Studies	8.1	9
All	32.8	40
*Note: Individual subjects do not include those responding “all”		

respondents teach an MCAS subject and teach the grade level in which that subject is tested.<sup>5</sup> The first column of Table 4 shows the distribution of MCAS subjects taught among those who responded to the survey. The second column shows the number who taught that subject and who taught in an MCAS year. It reveals that almost half (40) of the respondents who teach an MCAS subject and MCAS year are elementary school teachers in grades 3 through 6 who cover “all” subjects.

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<sup>5</sup>The survey does not allow us to determine for all respondents whether they teach the subject in the year that it is tested. For example, a teacher who teaches both English/language arts and mathematics and teaches both the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades could teach ELA in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and math in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and thus teach neither subject in the MCAS year. However, this respondent would be coded as teaching an MCAS subject and in an MCAS year.

Years of experience

Table 5 gives the distribution of both total years as an educator and years in Brookline.

<b>TABLE 5</b>		
<b>EXPERIENCE OF RESPONDENTS</b>		
	<b>Years as Educator</b>	<b>Years in Brookline</b>
1	6	12
2	3	8
3	5	9
4	12	14
5	6	6
6-10	28	34
11-15	29	32
16-25	39	49
26+	50	12
No answer	8	10

These educators report more experience and more seniority within Brookline than we would expect on the basis of the current distribution of seniority and experience among Brookline educators. Of the current Brookline educators who were employed in Brookline at the time of the survey, almost 30% had three or fewer years of experience in Brookline. Yet only about one in six of respondents report this little seniority.

This difference reflects three factors. First, the Brookline Public Schools and the respondents may count “years in Brookline” differently so that experience within Brookline that does not count under the rules governing seniority may nevertheless be reported by respondents. Second, we are comparing responses to a survey collected last year using a school system database that excludes staff who have left the system since the time of the survey. Since the professional staff leaving the system are drawn disproportionately from the more senior educators, the current distribution underestimates the proportion of educators with high levels of seniority at the time of the survey. Finally, even taking into account the first two factors, it is likely that educators with more seniority are over-represented in the survey.

Similarly, about one in twelve reports three or fewer years as an educator while about 70% report ten or more years. In contrast among those educators who worked in Brookline at the time of the survey and who remain in the Brookline Public Schools, about one in six had three years or less experience as an educator and about half ten years or more. Again this difference can be attributed to greater attrition among the more senior educators, differences in how experience is defined and over-representation of more experienced educators.

### Concluding Remarks

In sum, the sample over-represents educators who are more experienced and have more seniority within the Brookline system and under-represents those working with the High School population. For the most part, the analysis does not indicate that educators with more experience or seniority or those working at Brookline High School respond differently to the principal questions about MCAS. However, since there are some indications that non-response is related to characteristics of the educators, we cannot rule out the possibility that it is also related to attitudes towards MCAS.

It is worth noting that respondents were given the opportunity to answer the questionnaire anonymously. Only about one-quarter (49) chose to do so. The remainder chose to provide their names.

## **II. Competing Determinants of Course Content**

The first question on the survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they try to ensure that the content of their classes is consistent with each of four items mandating course content (Brookline learning expectations, Brookline High School course syllabi, the revised Brookline High School graduation requirements,<sup>6</sup> Massachusetts state frameworks) and with each of three tests that might be used to evaluate course content (MCAS, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, SAT II). The question asked separately about past-MCAS items and items likely to be on the MCAS. Table 6 shows the distribution of responses to these questions.

Almost all respondents who answer the question indicate that they try to ensure that the content of their classes is consistent with Brookline learning expectations. Over three-quarters respond that they try a lot and almost one-fifth try somewhat. Only two respondents, try only a little or not at all. Although the name “Brookline Learning Expectations” applies formally only to a set of documents developed for K-8 education, the responses are not greatly affected by the grade level and type of position. The distribution of responses among K-8 educators other than support staff is similar to the distribution for the sample as a whole.

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<sup>6</sup>The graduation requirements are primarily phrased in terms of Carnegie units (courses completed) and thus do not determine course content. However, part of the requirements is phrased in terms of competencies.

**TABLE 6**  
**FACTORS AFFECTING COURSE CONTENT**

	Not At All	A Little	Somewhat	A Lot	NA
Brookline Learning Expectations	0.5	0.5	17.7	76.9	4.3
(K-8 other than support, N=144)	0.7	0.7	16.7	78.5	3.5
BHS Course Syllabi	4.8	0.0	4.3	14.5	76.3
(BHS other than support, N=31)	0.0	0.0	9.7	83.9	6.5
BHS Graduation Requirements	7.5	0.5	5.4	7.0	79.6
(BHS other than support, N=31)	6.4	3.2	22.6	38.7	29.0
Massachusetts State Frameworks	10.2	9.1	36.0	37.6	7.0
Past MCAS Items	16.7	16.1	29.0	10.8	27.4
(MCAS subject, N=114)	15.8	19.3	35.1	11.4	18.4
(MCAS subject, test year, N=83)	12.0	24.1	45.8	13.2	4.8
(MCAS subject, BHS, N=20)	25.0	15.0	40.0	20.0	0.0
(3 <sup>rd</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> grades, 7 <sup>th</sup> math/ELA, N=36)	11.1	30.6	41.7	11.1	5.6
Items Likely to be on MCAS	13.4	15.0	34.4	11.8	25.3
(MCAS subject, N=114)	13.2	20.2	38.6	13.2	14.9
(MCAS subject, test year, N=83)	9.6	24.1	48.2	15.7	2.4
(MCAS subject, BHS, N=20)	15.0	25.0	30.0	25.0	5.0
(3 <sup>rd</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> grades, 7 <sup>th</sup> math/ELA, N=36)	5.6	36.1	44.4	13.9	0.0
Iowa Test of Basic Skills	26.3	9.1	17.7	5.4	41.4
(3 <sup>rd</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> grades, 7 <sup>th</sup> math/ELA, N=36)	30.6	19.4	36.1	11.1	2.8
SAT II (achievement exams)	14.0	1.1	5.4	4.3	75.3
(BHS, N=30)	10.0	6.7	26.7	26.7	30.0
(MCAS subject, BHS, N=20)	5.0	10.0	35.0	35.0	15.0

Most respondents answered that Brookline High School syllabi were not applicable to their classrooms. If we limit the sample to the respondents in classroom, specialist or special education roles at the High School, all reply that they try at least somewhat to ensure that their course content is consistent with the BHS syllabi. It is worth noting that some of the eighth-grade teachers also indicate that they try to ensure consistency with these syllabi.

Almost 80% of respondents who answered the question, said that they try either a lot or somewhat to ensure that their class content is consistent with the Massachusetts State Curriculum Frameworks. To examine differences among groups, we eliminate respondents who did not answer the question or who said it was not applicable. Perhaps surprisingly, conditional on answering the question, high school teachers who teach math or English language arts are no more likely than other respondents to indicate that they seek consistency with the frameworks. Given the absence of state curriculum frameworks in other areas, it is surprising that there is no statistically significant difference between teachers whose subject area is covered by MCAS and those area is not covered. Overall, math, ELA and science teachers responses are similar to those of other educators.

However, social studies teachers as a whole are less inclined to ensure that the content of their courses is consistent with the state curriculum frameworks. As shown in Table 7, one-third of those who teach social studies, compared with less than one-tenth of those not teaching social studies say that they do not try at all to ensure that their course content is consistent with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Similarly over 80% of those who do not teach social studies but only slightly over half of those who do say that they try at least somewhat to ensure consistency with the frameworks. A formal test of the hypothesis that the distribution of responses is the same for those who teach social studies and those who do not is rejected at the .05 level.<sup>7</sup>

<b>TABLE 7</b>			
<b>TRIES TO ENSURE COURSE CONTENT CONSISTENT WITH STATE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORKS (Social Studies versus Other)</b>			
Consistent with MA	<u>Teaches Social Studies</u>		All
	No	Yes	
Not at all	14 8.86	5 33.33	19 10.98
A little	15 9.49	2 13.33	17 9.83
Somewhat	63 39.87	4 26.67	67 38.73
A lot	66 41.77	4 26.67	70 40.46
Total	158 100.00	15 100.00	173 100.00

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<sup>7</sup> $\chi^2(3) = 9.07$  (significant at the .03 level).

While there is no difference in the responses of those who teach an MCAS subject and those who do not, there is a significant difference between those who teach an MCAS subject and a year in which that subject exam is administered and those who do not. Table 8 reveals that those respondents who teach an MCAS subject and a year in which that subject is tested<sup>8</sup> are **less** likely to respond that they try to align the content of their course with the Massachusetts frameworks. One-sixth respond that they do not try at all to achieve such an alignment. Only 70% of those teaching MCAS subjects and testing years compared with 86% of those who do not teach an MCAS subject or teach it in a year without a test say they try at least somewhat to align their course content with the state frameworks. A formal test of the hypothesis that there is no difference in the distributions of responses from the two groups is rejected at the .05 level.<sup>9</sup>

<b>TABLE 8</b>			
<b>TRIES TO ENSURE COURSE CONTENT CONSISTENT WITH STATE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORKS (MCAS Subject in Tested Year versus Other)</b>			
Consistent with Mass.	<u>MCAS Subject in Tested Yr.</u>		
	No	Yes	All
Not at all	6 6.45	13 16.25	19 10.98
A little	6 6.45	11 13.75	17 9.83
Somewhat	38 40.86	29 36.25	67 38.73
A lot	43 46.24	27 33.75	70 40.46
Total	93 100.00	80 100.00	173 100.00

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<sup>8</sup>Recall that for teachers teaching multiple subjects and multiple years, the questionnaire does not allow us to determine whether they teach each subject in a year in which the MCAS is administered.

<sup>9</sup> $\chi^2(3) = 7.98$  (significant at the .05 level).

The bottom section of Table 6 reports respondents answers to questions about the degree to which they attempt to align their course content with various tests. Of those who answer the question, 55% reply that they try somewhat or a lot to align their course content with past MCAS items while 62% give these responses about future MCAS items.

This distribution is, however, somewhat misleading because some of those who respond that they do not try at all to align with the MCAS do not teach courses for which there is an MCAS exam. However, if we limit ourselves to those who teach an MCAS tested subject, the fraction who give these responses changes very little. On the other hand, among educators who teach an MCAS subject and teach a year in which that subject is tested, the probability of responding at least somewhat is somewhat higher (62% for past items and 65% for future items) than for respondents as a whole, conditional on answering the question. These differences are statistically significant.<sup>10</sup>

In order to get a better sense of the degree to which MCAS influences the curriculum, we compare the responses of educators regarding the MCAS with two other exams – the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), administered by the Brookline Public Schools in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades, and the SAT II (achievement exams) required or encouraged of applicants by many colleges.

The ITBS, like the MCAS at the elementary level has no formal consequence and is intended to be used as a diagnostic tool. Unlike the MCAS, it is not criterion referenced. We would expect teachers to be less likely to ensure that their course content is aligned with the ITBS than with MCAS, and this is confirmed by the responses. Among teachers whose course content might be tested by the ITBS (3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers and 7<sup>th</sup> grade ELA and math teachers), 31% respond that they do not try at all and 19% that they try only a little to align their course content with the ITBS. The corresponding percentages with respect to the MCAS for this same group of teachers are 6% and 36%. Still the fact that almost half of the relevant set of teachers attempt at least somewhat to align course content with the ITBS places the somewhat higher figure for those who teach an MCAS subject in an MCAS year in perspective.

Except for those students who are at risk of failing the ELA or math sections of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS, the SAT II exams have greater consequences for students since the latter exams affect college entrance. We might therefore expect that high school teachers would make greater efforts to prepare students for the SAT II exams. On the other hand, many of the SAT II exams are heavily fact driven and might therefore be viewed as less consistent with their overall educational objectives. We might therefore expect that they would be less inclined to prepare students for these exams.

In fact, over three-quarter of those BHS educators who answer the question reply that they try at least somewhat to align the content of their courses with the SAT II exams. Even those BHS educators who teach an MCAS subject are more likely to respond that they align their course content with the SAT II than that they align it with the MCAS.

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<sup>10</sup>For past items  $\chi^2(3) = 12.9$  (significant at the .005 level). For future items  $\chi^2(3) = 9.57$  (significant at the .03 level).

### III. Time Spent on MCAS

The survey asked respondents “Over the course of the year, what proportion of the time in your classroom is devoted to material intended to help students do better on the MCAS and that you would not cover if there were no MCAS exam? The response categories were 0-5%, 6-10%, 11-15%, 16-20% and over 20%. The way the question was formulated was designed to distinguish between material the teacher would normally cover and which might be helpful on the MCAS and material intended explicitly to help students perform well on the test.

As shown in Table 9, the majority (53%) of respondents said that they spend less than 5% of class time on material intended as a response to the MCAS. On the other hand, over one-quarter devote at least 11% of class time (the equivalent of more than one half day per week) to such material.

Of course, many educators do not teach subjects covered by the MCAS. The second row of Table 9 limits the sample to those who explicitly list themselves as teaching an MCAS subject. This group actually reports somewhat less time spent explicitly on MCAS material than the sample as a whole. This somewhat surprising result is due, at least in part, to the greater time spent on MCAS-oriented material by SPED, ESL and bilingual teachers who do not necessarily list themselves as teaching specific subjects covered by the MCAS (see last row of Table 9).

Even among those who teach an MCAS subject, many do not teach in a year in which that material is tested. The third row of Table 9 further limits the sample to those teaching an MCAS subject and teaching in a year when the test is administered. The responses from this group are similar to those for all those teaching an MCAS subject.<sup>11</sup>

We might expect that the pressure to “teach to the test” would be greatest among high school math and English teachers. This sample is small, but it does not reveal any such tendency. On the contrary, this group may, if anything, spend the least time on MCAS material of any of the sub-groups studied in Table 9 although the difference falls well short of significance at conventional levels.<sup>12</sup>

The table also breaks down the responses separately for math, ELA, social studies and science teachers. Since each sub-sample is small, the information for each is imprecise. Given this degree of imprecision, there are no strong differences among the subject areas.

Finally, as noted above, teachers in mandated programs constitute the sub-group that reports the

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<sup>11</sup>The  $\chi^2$  test statistic of the null hypothesis that the distribution of responses (conditional on answering) is the same is 5.88 with four degrees of freedom, well below conventional levels of significance.

<sup>12</sup> $\chi^2(4)=4.38$ .

greatest tendency to devote time to material aimed primarily at preparing students for the MCAS. Of those who answer the question, about 40% say that they spend less than 5% of classroom time on such material. In contrast, almost half of those answering say that they spend at least 11% of classroom time on material they would not cover if it were not for the MCAS. However, these differences do not rise to standard levels of statistical significance.

<b>TABLE 9</b>						
<b>TIME SPENT PRIMARILY FOR MCAS</b>						
	0-5%	6-10%	11-15%	16-20%	over 20%	No Answer
All (N=186)	52.7	12.9	10.2	10.8	4.8	8.6
MCAS subject (N=114)	56.1	15.8	8.8	11.4	4.4	3.5
Test Year (N=83)	53.0	18.1	12.0	12.0	3.6	1.2
High Stakes (N=11)	54.6	36.4	0.0	9.1	0.0	0.0
Math (N=14)	57.1	28.6	7.1	7.1	0.0	0.0
ELA (N=23)	52.2	17.4	13.0	13.0	4.4	0.0
Social Studies (N=15)	60.0	0.0	6.7	20.0	13.3	0.0
Science (N=12)	50.0	8.3	8.3	16.7	8.3	8.3
“All” (N=61)	57.4	14.8	9.8	11.5	1.6	4.9
Mandated (N=31)	35.5	12.9	22.6	12.9	6.4	9.7

The survey also asked respondents about the amount of time they devote in the two months prior to the test to material that they would not otherwise cover. Table 10 summarizes the responses to this question. Overall, respondents do indicate that they spend more time on material oriented towards the MCAS than they do during the rest of the year. The fraction devoting at least 11% of their time to such material is approximately four-tenths of those who answer the question and is even somewhat higher among those teaching an MCAS subject and in an MCAS year. Of the eleven respondents teaching math or English at Brookline High School, five say that in the two months leading up to the MCAS exam, they devote less than 5% of classroom time to material they would not otherwise teach. Two each respond that they spend 6-10%, 11-15% and 16-20% of their time on such material. Given the small sample of high school math and ELA teachers, it is not surprising that

the difference between these teachers and others who teach an MCAS subject and in an MCAS test year falls well short of statistical significance at conventional levels.<sup>13</sup>

Overall, the answers to these questions suggest that most teachers spend very little time on material that they would not otherwise cover. However, there is a noticeable minority of teachers who spend substantial amounts of time (11% or more) on such material. The next section addresses whether teachers feel that the time they spend on MCAS material is positive or negative.

<b>TABLE 10</b>						
<b>TIME SPENT PRIMARILY FOR MCAS DURING TWO MONTHS BEFORE MCAS</b>						
	0-5%	6-10%	11-15%	16-20%	over 20%	No Answer
All (N=186)	42.5	14.0	11.3	14.0	6.4	11.8
Test Year (N=83)	31.3	21.7	15.7	16.9	10.8	3.6
High Stakes (N=11)	45.4	18.2	18.2	18.2	0.0	0.0

#### **IV. The Overall Effect of Time Spent on MCAS on Learning and Teaching**

After asking respondents how much time they spent on material they would not cover were it not for the MCAS, the survey went on to ask how the time spent on such material affects student learning and the teaching/learning process. In each case respondents could answer that the effect is entirely positive, mostly positive, mixed, mostly negative or entirely negative or has no effect.

As can be seen in Table 11, respondents are more likely to view time spent explicitly on MCAS as positive than as negative. Fully 30% say that the effect on student learning over the course of the year is mostly or entirely positive compared with less than 10% who view it as mostly or entirely negative. About one-quarter (27%) say this effect is mixed while the remainder either report no effect or do not answer the question. Individual respondents tend to give very similar answers to the questions about student learning and the teaching/learning process. Therefore these questions will not be analyzed separately. Any patterns that apply to one question can be assumed to apply to the other as well.

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<sup>13</sup> $\chi^2(4)=2.93$ .

<b>TABLE 11</b>				
<b>EFFECT OF TIME SPENT PREPARING FOR MCAS ON STUDENT LEARNING AND TEACHING</b>				
	Over Course of Year		Two Months Before Test	
	Student Learning	Teaching/ Learning	Student Learning	Teaching/ Learning
Entirely positive	9.1	7.5	6.4	5.9
Mostly positive	21.0	17.7	13.4	10.2
Mixed	26.9	29.6	30.6	30.6
Mostly negative	8.1	7.0	8.6	11.3
Entirely negative	0.5	1.6	0.5	1.1
No effect	28.0	28.0	29.0	29.6
No answer	6.4	8.6	11.3	11.3

Respondents are somewhat less positive about the effect of MCAS during the two months prior to the exam, particularly with respect to the teaching/learning process. They are only slightly more likely (16%) to respond that the effect of material devoted to MCAS over this period is mostly or entirely positive than that it is mostly or entirely negative (12%).

Nevertheless, the answers to the questions about the year and the two months leading up to the exam are very similar. Of the 186 respondents, 146 give identical responses regarding the effect on student learning over the two periods. A further ten answered the first question and not the second while six reported no effect over the shorter period but gave a different answer for the longer period. Because more respondents answered the question about the longer period (presumably because some do not teach a subject being tested in the grade they teach), the remainder of this section focuses on the longer period.

Table 12 shows respondents' assessments of the effect that the time they spend on material they would not otherwise cover has on student learning. The first row repeats the first column of Table 11. The second row limits the sample to those who say they teach an MCAS subject. This group is less likely to respond that there is no effect or not to respond. However conditional on answering that there is an effect, they do not differ noticeably from the sample as a whole. The same is true for those who teach an MCAS subject and teach in a year in which that subject is tested.

Of the eleven math and ELA teachers at the high school who returned the survey, one reports that the effect on learning is entirely positive and three that it is mostly positive. A further three report that the effect is mixed while two find it mostly negative and two report no effect.

Table 12 also reports the distribution of responses by subject area taught. However, conditional on responding that there is an effect, none of the differences is statistically significant at conventional levels. Similarly, among those who respond that there is an effect of MCAS on student learning, there is no statistically significant difference between those teaching special education/bilingual/ESL and those who do not, in their assessment of the impact of MCAS on student learning.

	Entirely Positive	Mostly Positive	Mixed	Mostly Negative	Entirely Negative	No Effect	No Answer
All (N=186)	9.1	21.0	26.9	8.1	0.5	28.0	6.4
MCAS subject (N=114)	10.5	21.0	33.3	8.8	0.9	22.8	2.6
Test Year (N=83)	10.8	24.1	39.8	9.6	1.2	14.5	0.0
High Stakes (N=11)	9.1	27.3	27.3	18.2	0.0	18.2	0.0
Math (N=14)	7.1	21.4	50.0	21.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
ELA (N=23)	8.7	34.8	26.1	13.0	0.0	17.4	0.0
Social Studies (N=15)	33.3	20.0	13.3	13.3	0.0	20.0	0.0
Science (N=12)	0.0	25.0	8.3	8.3	8.3	50.0	0.0
“All” (N=61)	8.2	16.4	42.6	4.9	0.0	23.0	4.9
Mandated (N=31)	6.4	29.0	22.6	16.1	0.0	19.4	6.4

We have already seen that there is considerable variation in how much time educators devote to material that they would not cover in the absence of the MCAS. Table 13 addresses the question of

whether those educators who have responded most to the MCAS find a more positive or negative impact of the tests on student learning. The results in the table are limited to those who answered the question about how much time they devote to material explicitly in response to MCAS.

The most obvious result in the table is that those educators who devote little or no time on such material are less likely than others to report any effect, positive or negative, of the test. Beyond this, there is a weak negative relation between time spent on MCAS material and how positive respondents are about the effect of the test on student learning. The group devoting 0-5% of its time to material intended to respond to the test is most likely to view the effect on student learning as entirely positive and the groups devoting 10% or less of their time are least likely to report that the effect is negative even among those reporting an effect.<sup>14</sup>

<b>TABLE 13</b>							
<b>RELATION BETWEEN TIME SPENT ORIENTED TOWARDS MCAS AND ASSESSMENT OF EFFECT ON STUDENT LEARNING OVER THE YEAR</b>							
Time Spent on MCAS Material	Entirely Positive	Mostly Positive	Mixed	Mostly Negative	Entirely Negative	No Effect	No Answer
0-5% (N=98)	12.2	17.4	16.3	4.1	0.0	48.0	2.0
6-10% (N=24)	8.3	33.3	45.8	8.3	0.0	4.2	0.0
11-15% (N=19)	0.0	21.0	52.6	26.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
16-20% (N=20)	10.0	35.0	45.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
More than 20% (N=9)	0.0	33.3	44.4	11.1	11.1	0.0	0.0

### **V. Effect on Individual Skill Areas**

Respondents were asked to assess how much the MCAS test has changed the way they teach each of reading comprehension, writing, math, science and social studies. Table 14 reports the results.

The largest effect is on writing. Over four out of ten respondents (42%) said that they changed the way they teach writing either somewhat or a lot. This is over half of those who answered the

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<sup>14</sup>The hypothesis of a relation between time spent on the test and reporting a negative effect can be tested formally. The sample was divided between those reporting 5% or less time spent on material solely for the test and those reporting more time. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of the (one-tailed) hypothesis that those who spend more time on such material report more negative results rejects the null of no difference at the .052 level.

question. Among those who teach English, reading, writing or “all” subjects, almost six in ten (57%) report that MCAS has changed the way they teach writing at least somewhat.

Many respondents also reported changes in the way they teach reading and math. Three out of ten (30%) said they changed the way they teach reading at least somewhat and one-fourth (25%) that they changed the way they teach math at least somewhat. When the samples are limited to those who teach English, reading, writing or “all” subjects (for reading) and those who teach math or “all” subjects (for math), these proportions rise to 37% and 39%.

<b>TABLE 14</b>					
<b>EFFECT OF MCAS ON INDIVIDUAL SKILL AREAS</b>					
	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>No answer</b>
<b>Reading Comprehension</b>	23.7	18.8	23.7	5.9	28.0
<b>Reading ELA/All only N=84</b>	22.6	27.4	28.6	8.3	13.1
<b>Writing</b>	15.0	17.2	26.3	16.1	25.3
<b>Writing ELA/All only N=84</b>	11.9	19.0	34.5	22.6	11.9
<b>Math</b>	17.2	16.7	19.9	5.4	40.9
<b>Math Math/All only N=75</b>	16.0	29.3	33.3	5.3	16.0
<b>Science</b>	24.2	9.7	8.6	4.3	53.2
<b>Science Science/All only N=73</b>	37.0	17.8	16.4	6.8	21.9
<b>Social Studies</b>	20.4	12.9	12.4	3.2	51.1
<b>Social Studies Soc.Stud./All only N=76</b>	32.9	22.4	17.1	6.6	21.0

Respondents are less likely to report effects on the way they teach social studies and science. In part this reflects the fact that many educators implicitly teach reading, writing and math even when these are not their formal subject of instruction. However, even among those who respond that they teach science or “all” subjects less than one-quarter (23%) report that have changed the way they teach science somewhat or a lot. The corresponding proportion for social studies among those who teach social studies or “all” subjects is 24%.

Respondents were also invited to indicate other areas in which their teaching was affected. Fifteen indicated that their teaching of some other skill area was affected at least somewhat. Of these, five mentioned test-taking or reading/following directions, three cited grammar or vocabulary, and two listed study skills. Individual educators listed not teaching extra mini-units, shifting the timing of projects and spending more time calming students down. Two did not say to what other skill they were referring.

Table 15 addresses the question of whether educators believe that the changes they have made were positive or negative. For each skill, we exclude respondents who either did not adjust the way they teach that skill or did not answer whether they changed the way they teach that skill. Thus, for example, the row for reading comprehension is limited to the ninety respondents who said that they have changed the way they teach reading comprehension a little, somewhat or a lot.

<b>TABLE 15</b>							
<b>EFFECT ON STUDENT LEARNING OF CHANGE IN TEACHING OF INDIVIDUAL SKILLS</b>							
	Entirely Positive	Mostly Positive	Mixed	Mostly Negative	Entirely Negative	No Effect	No Answer
Reading Comprehension (N=90)	8.9	46.7	34.4	4.4	0.0	4.4	1.1
Writing (N=111)	17.1	38.7	31.5	5.4	0.0	5.4	1.8
Math (N=78)	3.8	38.5	46.2	5.1	2.6	2.6	1.3
Science (N=42)	2.4	42.9	33.3	9.5	2.4	7.1	2.4
Social Studies (N=53)	7.6	37.7	41.5	5.7	0.0	7.6	0.0

We saw earlier that respondents were most likely to report a change in the way that they teach writing. Of those who report such a change, one in six (17%) view this change as entirely positive and a further four in ten (39%) view it as mostly positive. In contrast, only six of the 111 respondents who report a change view it as negative and none as entirely negative.

Just under half of respondents report that the MCAS changes the way that they teach reading comprehension. Of these, over half (56%) say that the change is positive. Only 4% view the change as negative.

About 40% of respondents say that they have changed the way they teach math. Three of these believe that the change is entirely positive while two believe that it is entirely negative. However, most believe that the change is either mostly positive (38%) or mixed (46%).

The numbers reporting changes in the way they teach science or social studies are smaller than for the other skills. Still science was the skill area where the changes were most commonly viewed as negative. About one-eighth (12%) of those reporting a change viewed it negatively. Nevertheless, about one-half of those reporting an effect said that the effect was mostly or entirely positive. Relative to science, the effect on social studies is perceived as both less benign and less negative. Only 6% of those reporting a change in the way they teach social studies view it as negative but the percentage viewing it as positive (45%) is also low relative to some of the skills examined.

Thirteen respondents who said their teaching of a specific skill other than those listed was changed at least somewhat in response to the MCAS also responded to the question whether the change was positive or negative. Of the three whose teaching of test-taking skills was changed, one found the change entirely positive, one mostly positive and one mixed. The same distribution holds for the three whose teaching of grammar or vocabulary was changed. One respondent reported the change in teaching of study skills was mostly positive while another reported that it was mostly negative. The one respondent who reported spending more time calming students down viewed this change as mostly negative.

One striking pattern in the data is that among those who altered their teaching of a skill, those who say they changed the way they teach a little are more likely to find the change positive. For each skill, Table 16 shows the proportion of respondents, broken down by the extent of the reported change, who view the change as mostly or entirely positive. The sample is limited to those who respond to the question regarding whether the change was positive or negative. The last column shows the probability that the difference in distribution of responses occurred due to random sampling.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>The reported p-value is the value associated with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic of whether the distribution of responses to the question about the extent to which respondents changed their teaching of skills is the same for those who report a positive effect as for those who do not against an alternative hypothesis that those reporting a positive effect also tend to report less of a change in their teaching. Smaller values represent greater statistical significance with values below .05 conventionally viewed as statistically significant.

For each of the five skills, the proportion of respondents who believe the change affected student learning positively is highest among those who report that they changed the way they teach the skill a little. There is no clear pattern between those who changed somewhat and those who changed a lot. The pattern is statistically significant at the .05 level or lower for reading and social studies.

<b>TABLE 16</b>				
<b>PERCENTAGE REPORTING POSITIVE EFFECT OF CHANGED TEACHING</b>				
<b>(by degree to which respondent changed teaching)</b>				
	A Little	Somewhat	A Lot	P-value
Reading (N=89)	74.3	41.9	54.6	.03
Writing (N=109)	62.5	50.0	62.1	.78
Math (N=78)	51.6	37.8	33.3	.46
Science (N=42)	58.8	37.5	37.5	.41
Soc. Stud. (N=53)	66.7	21.7	50.0	.02

## **VI. Effect on Teaching Style and Topics**

The survey also asked about the effect of MCAS on sixteen areas that can be loosely categorized as relating to teaching style and course content. In each case, respondents were first asked whether MCAS has affected the way they teach. They were then asked whether the effect of this change, if any, on student learning was entirely or mostly positive, mixed, entirely or mostly negative or had no effect. Table 17 gives the distribution of responses to the first set of questions (extent of effect) while Table 18 gives the distribution of response to the second set (whether the effect is positive or negative).

One issue regarding course content is whether the effect of the MCAS has been to deter teachers from focusing on Brookline’s Learning Expectations (K-8) and syllabi (BHS). In fact, four out of ten respondents (41%) say that MCAS has caused them to pay at least somewhat more attention to the Learning Expectations and/or syllabi. Over half (58%) say that it has had this effect at least a little.

The responses regarding the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks are quite similar. Somewhat fewer (38%) say that as a result of MCAS they are paying at least somewhat more attention to the frameworks. Somewhat more (60%) say that they have increased the attention they pay to the frameworks at least a little.

Relatively few respondents view either of these changes negatively. Two respondents view the fact that they are paying more attention to the learning expectations or syllabi as negative while five view their increased attention to the curriculum frameworks as negative. In contrast a majority (54%) of those who are paying more attention to the learning expectations or syllabi say that this change is positive while almost four in ten (39%) are positive in their assessment of the effect of their increased attention to the curriculum frameworks.

**TABLE 17**  
**EFFECT OF MCAS ON TEACHING STYLE AND SUBJECTS**

	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>No answer</b>
Attention to Learning Expectations/BHS syllabi	21.5	16.7	23.7	17.7	20.4
Attention to MA Curriculum Frameworks	23.1	22.6	24.7	12.9	16.7
Teach test-taking skills	15.6	21.5	19.9	18.8	24.2
Include more writing assignments	23.1	16.1	26.9	9.7	24.2
Emphasize correct writing conventions	18.8	19.4	18.8	17.2	25.8
Teach more vocabulary	33.9	12.4	14.0	10.2	29.6
More mathematical computation	20.4	10.2	16.7	7.0	45.7
More problem-solving in math	23.7	8.6	12.4	9.7	45.7
Use questions from previous MCAS	24.7	15.6	18.3	10.8	30.6
Omit topics would like to teach	29.0	13.4	17.7	11.3	28.5
Teach at faster pace	32.8	8.6	24.2	12.4	22.0
More whole class instruction	36.0	10.2	17.7	7.0	29.0
More group work in ELA	37.1	7.0	12.4	5.4	38.2
Less group work in mathematics	35.5	8.1	5.4	2.7	48.4
Help individual students more	41.9	11.8	11.3	8.1	26.9
Refer more students to special education	51.6	5.4	4.3	1.1	37.6

**TABLE 18****EFFECT ON STUDENT LEARNING OF CHANGE  
IN TEACHING STYLE AND SUBJECTS**

	Positive			Negative		No effect	No answer
	Entirely	Mostly	Mixed	Mostly	Entirely		
Learning Expectations/BHS syllabi (N=108)	13.0	40.7	24.1	1.8	0.0	15.7	4.6
MA Curriculum Frameworks (N=112)	3.6	35.7	34.8	2.7	1.8	17.0	4.5
Teach test-taking skills (N=112)	3.6	46.4	27.7	5.4	4.5	8.0	4.5
Include more writing assignments (N=98)	11.2	49.0	24.5	3.1	0.0	7.1	5.1
Emphasize correct writing conventions (N=103)	12.6	50.5	21.4	1.9	1.9	9.7	1.9
Teach more vocabulary (N=68)	16.2	57.4	19.1	1.5	1.5	1.5	5.9
More mathematical computation (N=63)	9.5	39.7	33.3	9.5	3.2	4.8	0.0
More problem-solving in math (N=57)	8.8	57.9	21.0	0.0	1.8	8.8	1.8
Use questions from previous MCAS (N=83)	2.4	39.8	33.7	9.6	6.0	7.2	1.2
Omit topics would like to teach (N=79)	0.0	2.5	20.2	43.0	16.5	13.9	3.8
Teach at faster pace (N=84)	0.0	6.0	40.5	38.1	10.7	3.6	1.2
More whole class instruction (N=65)	1.5	15.4	60.0	7.7	4.6	7.7	3.1
More group work in ELA (N=46)	6.5	39.1	37.0	0.0	0.0	13.0	4.4
Less group work in mathematics (N=30)	0.0	3.3	53.3	20.0	6.7	13.3	3.3
Help individual students more (N=58)	15.5	51.7	22.4	3.4	1.7	5.2	0.0
Refer more students to special ed. (N=20)	15.0	15.0	35.0	10.0	5.0	10.0	10.0

Along with the learning expectations, syllabi and curriculum frameworks, the content area in which the largest changes are reported is test-taking skills. Almost four in ten (39%) of the educators surveyed say that they are teaching at least somewhat more test-taking skills and 60% are doing this at least a little. Perhaps surprisingly, teaching test-taking skills is not viewed negatively by most of those who have increased their pedagogy in this area in response to MCAS. In fact, of those who have altered their instruction, half respond that the effect has been mostly or entirely positive. In contrast, only 10% view it as mostly or entirely negative.

Many of those surveyed indicate that MCAS has changed their course content with respect to writing and vocabulary. Majorities of respondents report that they emphasize correct writing conventions (55%) and include writing assignments (53%) at least a little more as a result of MCAS. In fact, one in six (17%) say that they emphasize correcting writing conventions a lot more. Over one-third (36%) say that they teach at least a little more vocabulary.

Clear majorities of those who have changed their course content in these ways believe that the changes are positive. Almost three-quarters (74%) of those teaching more vocabulary say that the change is mostly or entirely positive. In contrast only two individuals view it as mostly or entirely negative. Fully 63% of those placing more emphasis on correct writing conventions say this change is positive while 4% perceive it as negative. Similarly, 60% say that their increased use of writing assignments is positive while three individuals view it as somewhat negative.

The question on mathematical computation elicited less evidence of a change in course content. Still one-third of respondents (34%) replied that they were teaching at least a little more mathematical computation. Among those who had changed their course content in this way, the change is viewed as positive by almost half (49%) and negative by one in eight (12%).

Almost as many respondents (31%) reported doing more problem-solving in math as reported doing more computation. Of these, two-thirds view the change as positive. Only one respondent who changed course content perceived the change as negative.

The survey also asked two more general questions about course content. The first asked whether respondents were using questions from previous MCAS exams. Over four in ten (44%) of those surveyed say that they use previous MCAS questions at least a little. Of these, a plurality (42%) view the change as positive while 16% view it as negative.

The second general question asked respondents if, as a result of MCAS, they were omitting topics they would like to teach. One in nine (11%) say this happens a lot while almost one-third say they do this a little or somewhat. Not surprisingly, most of those cutting out topics they would like to teach report that this change is entirely (16%) or mostly (43%) negative. Only two individuals cutting out topics believe that this change is positive.

In terms of teaching style, the most common effect is on teaching pace. Almost half (45%) of respondents say that they teach at a faster pace as a result of MCAS. Of these, roughly half (49%) view the change as mostly or entirely negative. None perceives the change as entirely positive and only 6% say that it is mostly positive.

Just over one-third of respondents (35%) report that they are using whole class instruction at least a little more as a result of MCAS. Most of these (60%) view the change as having a mixed effect on student learning. The proportion who report the change as positive (17%) is slightly higher than the proportion who report it as negative (12%) but given the size of this sample, this difference should not be accorded much importance.

In a further effort to get at the question of teaching style, respondents were asked about their use of group work in mathematics and English Language Arts. One-quarter (25%) report doing more group work in ELA while one-sixth (16%) say they are doing less group work in mathematics. The use of more group work in ELA is generally viewed as positive (46%) or neutral (37%) with no respondents reporting it as negative. In contrast, the use of less group work in mathematics is generally reported as neutral (53%) with somewhat more respondents (8) reporting a negative effect than reporting a positive effect (1).

The difference between the responses regarding increased group instruction and reduced group instruction suggests a hypothesis. Teachers tend to adopt changes in teaching practices in response to the MCAS when they expect those changes to be positive or at least neutral with respect to student learning. We will return to this point shortly.

Three out of ten (31%) of the educators surveyed say that, as a result of MCAS, they provide students with more individual help. Two-thirds (67%) of these say that the change is positive while three individuals report that it is negative.

Finally, twenty respondents report referring more students to special education. Of these, half report doing it a little more and two report doing it a lot. These two view the change as negative. In contrast, those who have increased referrals to special education a little or somewhat tend to view the change as positive or mixed with only one viewing it as mostly negative.

Table 19 presents these results somewhat differently. For each of the items, it reports the number of respondents who both changed the way they teach and who reported a positive (column 1) or negative (column 2) change. Thus 58 of the 186 respondents, or roughly 30%, reported that they pay more attention to Brookline's Learning Expectations as a result of the MCAS and view this change as positive. In contrast, two respondents both made this change and report that it affected student learning negatively. Similarly, the MCAS has encouraged 44 respondents to pay more attention to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks in ways that they find positive compared with only 5 who viewed their increased attention to the frameworks as negative.

Perhaps the most common objection to the MCAS is that it will increase emphasis on test-taking skills. Only about 6% (11) of respondents have both increased their instruction of test-taking skills and regard this change as negative. In contrast, about 30% (56) have made this change and report that this change has improved student learning.

<b>TABLE 19</b>		
<b>MADE CHANGE IN TEACHING STYLE/SUBJECTS WITH POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE EFFECT ON STUDENT LEARNING</b>		
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>
Learning Expectations/BHS syllabi	58	2
MA Curriculum Frameworks	44	5
Teach test-taking skills	56	11
Include more writing assignments	59	3
Emphasize correct writing conventions	65	4
Teach more vocabulary	50	1
More mathematical computation	31	8
More problem-solving in math	38	1
Use questions from previous MCAS	35	13
Omit topics would like to teach	2	47
Teach at faster pace	5	41
More whole class instruction	11	8
More group work in ELA	21	0
Less group work in mathematics	1	8
Help individual students more	39	3
Refer more students to special ed.	6	3

Note: Figures are numbers of respondents out of a total of 186 respondents.

The most commonly reported positive change is emphasizing correct writing conventions, almost one-third (65) of respondents report both placing more emphasis on correct writing conventions and that this change has a positive effect on students learning. Consistent with the emphasis on writing,

59 respondents say that they are including more writing assignments and that this affects student learning positively while 50 indicate they teach more vocabulary and that this is good. Only a few respondents who have made these changes view them as detracting from student learning.

The number of educators who say that they have made positive changes in the way they teach math is somewhat smaller than for writing. Nevertheless, 38 and 31 report positive effects on learning from teaching more problem-solving in math and more computation. Only one respondent who has increased instruction of math problem-solving says that the effect is negative. Somewhat more (8) view their increased instruction of math computation as negative.

Almost 20% (36) of respondents report that they use past MCAS items and that this change is positive while about one-third (13) of that number report the same change but that it is negative.

About one-quarter (47) of the educators surveyed report that as a result of MCAS they are omitting topics they would like to teach and this detracts from student learning. In contrast, only two are omitting topics they would like to teach and believe this benefits student learning.

Similarly, near one-quarter (45) believe that they have increased the pace of teaching to the detriment of student learning. Relatively few (5) believe that their increased pace has a positive effect on student learning.

In terms of teaching technique, 21 report positive effects from increased use of group work in ELA and only 1 from reduced use of group work in mathematics. None reports a negative change from group work in ELA while 8 say that they have reduced group work in mathematics to the detriment of student learning.

About 20% of those surveyed say that they are helping individual students more and that this has a positive effect on student learning. Three have made the same change but view it negatively.

Table 20 attempts to summarize these results by examining the number of respondents who made only positive changes, only negative changes, both or neither. Note that respondents who report no positive or negative changes may still have made changes but reported all of them as having mixed or no effects. Nine respondents say that there were no positive changes but that there were negative changes, including two who report that they made all sixteen possible changes and that they were negative. In contrast, 59 respondents say they made at least some positive changes and no negative changes. The remaining 65 respondents made a mixture of positive and negative changes.

<b>TABLE 20</b>		
<b>PROPORTION OF SAMPLE REPORTING CHANGES WITH POSITIVE AND/OR NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON STUDENT LEARNING</b>		
	<b>Some Positive Effects</b>	
<b>Some Negative Effects</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Yes</b>	34.9	4.8
<b>No</b>	31.7	28.5

Finally, in contrast with the pattern observed for changes in teaching skills, there is no apparent relation between the degree to which teachers have changed their teaching style or subjects and whether they view the change as positive or negative. With one possible exception, of those who changed their teaching at least a little, the proportion reporting that the change is positive is unrelated to whether they changed a little, somewhat or a lot. The one possible exception is among those doing more problem-solving in mathematics. It appears that those who are doing a lot more problem-solving in mathematics are more inclined to view this change as positive than those who are doing somewhat more problem-solving who, in turn, are more likely to view the change as positive than those who have added just a little more problem-solving. This conclusion must be treated with caution for two reasons. First, whether the difference attains statistical significance at conventional levels depends on the choice of statistical test. Second, even if we choose the test generating more significant results, we must recognize that if we examine sixteen different skills, the likelihood of attaining statistical significance in at least one case is quite high.

**VII. Sources of Pressure to Respond to MCAS**

The survey asked whether respondents feel compelled to alter their instruction in response to MCAS from each of eleven possible sources. Table 21 summarizes the answers to these questions. They are ranked from highest to lowest proportion of respondents feeling compelled “somewhat” or “a lot” to alter their instruction in response to MCAS.

Between three and four out of ten respondents answer “somewhat” or “a lot” when asked about pressure from their colleagues/school culture (38%), themselves (35%), their principal or headmaster (35%), curriculum coordinators (33%) and the State Department of Education or Board of Education (33%).

At the other extreme only about one in twelve (9%) feel this level of pressure from the union or association and only about one in six (16%) do so from students. Between two and three out of ten of those surveyed respond somewhat or a lot with respect to parents (27%) and the media (24%) while fewer than two in ten give these responses with respect to the Superintendent (19%) and School Committee (19%).

<b>TABLE 21</b>					
<b>SOURCES OF PRESSURE TO RESPOND TO MCAS</b>					
	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>No answer</b>
Colleagues/school culture	21.0	23.7	27.4	10.2	17.7
Yourself	20.4	28.5	25.3	9.7	16.1
Principal/headmaster	26.9	18.8	22.0	12.9	19.4
Curriculum coordinators	22.6	24.2	23.7	9.7	19.9
State Dept/Board of Education	26.9	14.5	12.9	20.4	25.3
Parents	28.0	23.1	16.1	11.3	21.5
Media	40.9	11.8	10.2	14.0	23.1
Superintendent	35.5	14.5	12.4	6.4	31.2
School Committee	38.7	12.4	11.8	7.0	30.1
Students	49.5	12.9	8.1	8.1	21.5
Union/association	60.8	8.6	7.0	1.6	22.0

There is a clear relation between respondents' reports of whether the time they devote explicitly to MCAS preparation is positive or negative and how much pressure to respond to MCAS they report. Table 22 shows the relation between the reported effect on student learning and the number of sources from which the respondent feels a lot of pressure to respond to MCAS. The vast majority

<b>TABLE 22</b>				
<b>RELATION BETWEEN REPORTED EFFECT OF MCAS ON STUDENT LEARNING AND NUMBER OF SOURCES OF A LOT OF PRESSURE TO RESPOND TO MCAS</b>				
<b>Number of Sources</b>	<b>Entirely Positive</b>	<b>Mostly Positive</b>	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>Mostly or Entirely Negative</b>
<b>No Source</b>	76.5	66.7	56.0	18.8
<b>1-2 Sources</b>	11.8	17.9	18.0	31.2
<b>3 or More Sources</b>	11.8	15.4	26.0	50.0

of those who find the effect on student learning to be at least mixed report no source of a lot of pressure to respond to MCAS. In contrast only three of the sixteen respondents who report that the effect is negative report no such source and half report three or more sources.

Put differently, a clear majority (56%) of those who report no source of a lot pressure to respond view the effect of MCAS on their students' learning as positive; 39% of those reporting one or two such sources report the effect of MCAS as positive, as do only 28% of those reporting more than two.

## VIII. Open-Ended Responses

At the end of the survey, respondents were given the opportunity to “comment in greater detail on any question in this survey or to make additional comments about the effect of MCAS on teaching, learning and student achievement.” The full set of responses is included in Appendix II.<sup>16</sup>

Sixty-three of those surveyed chose to add a comment.<sup>17</sup> Ten of the comments are about the survey, generally about the fact that the survey does not really apply to the respondent – “This was difficult to complete because I do not teach sophomores so I don't feel directly affected by MCAS.”

Twelve can be described as lacking a clear evaluative component -- “Although MCAS is never mentioned in the K context, I do notice that we are subtly encouraged to do more around literacy by virtue of our faculty mtg emphases.”

Of the remaining forty-one comments, twenty-four are largely or entirely negative, seven are largely or entirely positive, and seven are mixed. Recall that when asked whether over the course of the year the effect of MCAS on student learning is positive or negative, those surveyed were far more likely to respond that it was positive than that the effect was negative.

Part of the explanation is that those who view the effect on student learning as negative are more likely than other respondents to include a comment. Eight of the sixteen respondents who view the effect on student learning as mostly or entirely negative also included a written comment. As can be seen in Table 23, seven of these were evaluative and six of these seven were negative. In contrast only twenty-one of the fifty-six respondents who regarded the effect of MCAS on student learning as positive included a comment. However, six of these written comments were negative. In addition, nine of the ten evaluative comments by respondents who view its effect on student learning as mixed are negative, and there are six negative comments from respondents who did not answer the overall evaluative question.

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<sup>16</sup>Spelling and grammar errors may be due to errors in transcription. I have not attempted to correct such errors in the appendix.

<sup>17</sup>Some respondents included parenthetical notes to individual questions. These are not included in the appendix.

**TABLE 23  
RELATION BETWEEN OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES  
AND OVERALL EVALUATION OF MCAS**

<b>Open-Ended Response</b>	<b>Effect of Time Spent Preparing on Student Learning During Year</b>			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>No Answer</b>
<b>Positive</b>	7	0	0	0
<b>Mixed</b>	5	1	1	0
<b>Negative</b>	6	9	6	6
<b>NA/Other</b>	38	40	9	58

In some ways the negative comments from MCAS supporters are particularly interesting since they represent criticisms of MCAS from those who generally view it favorably:

“I do not support this high stakes test. However, until such time as the stakes are lowered, I will support, to the best of my ability, students who have to take the test. In the Eng/LA area, I have not found the test to be out of line with what I teach anyway, so I’ve never felt like I teach to the test. Rather I am aware of the inherent political pressures, especially within the community, and I try to strike a reasonable balance between THE TEST and other more critical, albeit less quantifiable goals of public education. I wish the state would do the same. The TIME assigned to the MCAS testing process is grossly out of proportion to its actual worth as an assessment tool.”

“The drawbacks that I feel as a first grade teacher include the pressure to have kids at grade level running counter to the difficulty getting academic support for the most needy students – i.e. it takes too long to get students with serious learning disabilities evaluated and receiving appropriate services. This directly impacts what can be achieved in the classroom when you’re just one teacher working solo to meet the diverse needs in first grade. Another serious drawback is the amount of time that the Learning Center staff has to devote to administering the test resulting several weeks of teaching time is lost for children in all grades.”

“The MCAS does not - has not altered my instructional style or pace. The learning expectations reflect mass frameworks and so I make sure each expectation is addressed. The only difference is that I don’t teach “extra” mini-units (that tie in nicely with our units) because of time constraints.”

“One thing I find extremely frustrating is to spend time on practice tests (i.e. examples from last years MCAS) with kids who really struggle. I have a handful of students who are

working below grade level. To work on difficult reading passages with them, full of tough vocabulary and sentence structure does them no good at all. They can't access it. I would rather spend the time doing guided reading!!!”

“When I first came to Brookline from NH, I was told not to pay attention to the MCAS test. I have administered it and reviewed results. Our current curriculum and Learning Expectations are not consistent with MCAS questions. I do think testing can be valuable when fair. I also believe my instructional time has been cut due to the amount of time the MCAS takes.”

“The biggest problem(s) that I have are not in preparation but in administration: the entire building gets very tense and crabby. The space is lacking – crowded and over heated for hours of work. Kids “check out” of grade 8 once high school schedules are made and the MCAS over. It has become an unpleasant anniversary.”

The themes in these comments are repeated in the comments made by other respondents who express concern about the effect of MCAS on special education students, both those taking exams and those losing contact time with special education teachers whose time is taken up by the administration of the MCAS exam. Implicitly or explicitly, some of these educators believe that some of their students cannot reach the standard set by MCAS and that it is harmful to concentrate on helping such students respond to MCAS. In fact, of the nine teachers who report a mixed effect of MCAS on student learning but include a negative comment three are special education teachers.

Shortage of time and the effect of MCAS on the atmosphere in the schools are also mentioned by more than one respondent.

## **IX. Special Education Professionals**

In part because the open-ended responses suggest a different attitude towards MCAS among those who work most directly with special education students, and, in part, because much of the public comment about the negative effect of MCAS on students focuses on special education students, it is worth verifying whether special education professionals respond differently from other educators to other questions on the survey. For the most part, responses did not differ significantly between those involved and those not involved in special education. Of course, the sample of special education professionals is small (25), so that to some extent the absence of differences may reflect the limited power of the statistical tests. Nevertheless, there are some questions for which the difference rises to the level of statistical significance, and we focus on these.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Because of the small size of the special education sample, tests of statistical significance should be treated as suggestive. All of the differences reported in this section are significant using a standard  $\chi^2$  test for contingency tables. However, the accuracy of this test is suspect in small samples.

While special education teachers were not significantly more likely than other educators to include more writing assignments in response to MCAS, they are significantly less likely to view the change as positive. Of the thirteen special education teachers who reported using more writing assignments, only five viewed this change as positive in contrast with two-thirds of other teachers who had made such a change. In fact, of the three teachers who reported including more writing assignments and viewed the change as negative, two were special education teachers. Similarly, special education teachers were no more likely to alter the way they teach writing, but those who did were much less positive about the change. While almost 60% of regular education teachers who changed the way they teach writing found the change positive and only 2% found it negative, almost as many special education teachers found the change negative (25%) as found it positive (38%). Given that only fourteen special education teachers both report changing the way they teach writing and provide an assessment of its impact on learning, this difference should not be viewed as statistically significant, but it is consistent with the responses to the questions about using more writing assignments.

The other area where there is a clear difference between those who are involved in special education and those who are not is in their views about using questions from previous MCAS tests. Of those who report using previous MCAS items, only two out of twelve special education teachers report that this change has a positive effect on student learning. This contrasts with nearly half of other respondents reporting a change.

A final area of interesting difference concerns the source of pressure to respond to MCAS. Among those who answered the question, less than 40% of regular education teachers reported themselves as being “somewhat” or “a lot” a source of pressure to respond to MCAS. In contrast over 60% of special education teachers give these responses.

While their responses regarding the effect on student learning of time spent on MCAS material do not differ significantly from those of other educators, the responses of those involved in special education reveal less of a tendency to be positive. Of the eighteen special education teachers who answered the question, six reported that the effect on student learning was positive, five that it was negative and seven that it was mixed. This suggests that those involved in special education are evenly split over whether MCAS is a positive or a negative for their students. However, this interpretation must be tempered by the comments made by three of the seven “neutral” special education teachers:

Things I've noticed – an increase in worried and upset parents and kids; - increase pace in all curriculum areas; - much of material too abstract in grade 8 for much of my population; - less focus on teaching to mastery and more on speed to cover topics; - grade separates into 2 tiers – “I can” and “I can't”.

I have never agreed with effect of standards – based education on special education students. The focus has shifted from student-centered to curriculum centered and special education students often do not receive the learning strategies/basic skills they need in favor of the

“curriculum cram”. In addition, the MCAS requires entirely too much time to administer.

MCAS totally disrupt the flow of a Learning Center. Children who should be receiving services are denied their rightful time slots because of testing. It is sinful!

It is clear that there are significant concerns about MCAS among the special education community and that even areas such as writing where the impact of MCAS is widely regarded as positive in regular education generate concern among those providing special education services.

## **X. An Anecdote Is Worth 1000 Tables**

While the survey helps us to understand the distribution of opinions among Brookline educators, it also, to a limited extent, allows us to examine individuals more thoroughly. This section describes five respondents, two who are largely favorable to MCAS, two “MCAS moderates” and an unreconciled opponent of the tests.

### Two MCAS Supporters

The first MCAS supporter is an elementary classroom teacher of a grade in which students take multiple MCAS tests. She has worked in Brookline for four years. She tries somewhat to make the content of her classes consistent with Brookline Learning Expectations and tries a lot to make it consistent with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. She also tries somewhat to make the content consistent with both past MCAS items and those likely to be on the MCAS and pays only a little attention to the ITBS which is not administered to the grade she teaches.

Both over the course of the year and in the two months leading up to the test, she devotes less than 5% of her time to material intended to help her students do better on the MCAS and that she would not cover if there were no MCAS exam. To the extent that she does make adjustments, she views them as entirely positive both for student learning and the teaching/learning process.

In terms of skill areas, the biggest effect of MCAS has been on the way she teaches writing although it has had a little effect on the way she teaches reading, math and social studies. She views all of these changes as entirely positive.

In terms of teaching style and content, she is teaching at a somewhat faster pace, uses questions from previous MCAS tests and does more problem-solving activities in mathematics. She views the effect of the faster pace as mixed but the other two changes as mostly positive. She has made smaller adjustments in a number of other ways and views these as positive with the exception of teaching test-taking skills which she regards as having a mixed effect on student learning.

She writes “I feel that the preparations I make for the MCAS are well integrated into the curriculum and are activities that I would give despite the MCAS.”

The second MCAS supporter is a very experienced reading and writing specialist in grades one through five who tries a lot to ensure the consistency of her course content with the Brookline Learning Expectations, past and future MCAS items and the ITBS but not at all with the Massachusetts State Curriculum Frameworks.

Like the other supporter, she devotes little time to material she would not cover otherwise, and reports that the changes she has made are entirely positive. In terms of skill area, the test has had a small effect on how she teaches reading comprehension which she views as mostly positive. Aside from this, she reports as the only change in her teaching that she prepares students somewhat with test-taking skills, a change that she also views as entirely positive. She feels no more than a little pressure from any source to respond to MCAS.

She writes “I like the focus the MCAS brings to my reading/writing program. Many of the skills tested are, and have been, the foundation of my program. I do not find it hard to incorporate practice for these tests into what I do because a lot of it I do already. I taught grade 4 last year and found the practice we did quite beneficial.”

#### The MCAS Moderates

The first example is of a middle-school teacher of social studies and English who tries somewhat to align his course content with the Brookline Learning Expectations and with past and future MCAS items. He also devotes little time to material he would not cover except in response to the MCAS and finds the changes to be mostly but not entirely positive.

MCAS has had a large effect on the way he teaches writing and a small effect on his teaching of reading and social studies all of which he describes as mostly positive. He has somewhat increased the pace at which he teaches and does some preparing of his students with test-taking skills. He also reports a little of leaving out topics he would like to teach and more emphasis on correct writing conventions. He views the effect on student learning of the loss of these topics and the faster pace as mixed while the other two changes are mostly beneficial.

His ambivalent attitude towards the MCAS is summarized in his concluding comments – “The need to put a grade on a report card every ten weeks has had a far greater negative impact on my teaching and students’ learning than the MCAS has. MCAS has made me a more effective and systematic teacher of writing. Sadly, time for creative writing has eroded.”

One observes even more ambivalence in our second example, an elementary school teacher with thirty years of experience as an educator. He tries a lot to ensure that his course content is consistent with the Brookline Learning Expectations and somewhat to ensure that they are consistent with the Massachusetts State Curriculum Frameworks and past and future MCAS items. In the course of the year, he devotes 6-10% of his time to material intended to help his students do better on the MCAS and that he would not otherwise cover. This rises to 16-20% in the two months preceding the exam.

He regards the effects of these changes on student learning as largely positive and on the teaching/learning process as mixed over the course of the year and the effects on both as mixed over the two months leading up to the exam.

In response to MCAS, he has changed somewhat how he teaches all skills covered in the questionnaire and most of the aspects of teaching style and subject covered with the exception that he has not increased the pace of his teaching, reduced his use of group work in mathematics or referred more students to special education. He reports that he has changed his instruction a lot in the following ways – omitting topics he would like to teach, doing more problem-solving activities in mathematics, preparing students with test-taking skills and emphasizing correct writing conventions. With the exceptions of omitting certain topics and teaching more vocabulary which he regards as having a mixed effect on student learning, he views these changes as mostly positive.

Yet his lengthy statement at the end of the questionnaire reveals his ambivalence. “Over the years I would have to categorize myself as a creative teacher who tends to work in more integrated ways. I believe in process and accumulated knowledge. With MCAS I have had to be more cognizant and forward about how specific skills are met by curriculum; this is mostly a good thing. It does, however, make me feel more constricted example: I have always taught poetry and yet, now I feel more compelled to teach essay writing. Essay writing is an important skill, but so is poetry. It can be argued that both can be taught – yes, but in truth the MCAS process - preparation and the actual giving of the test cuts into the amount of teaching time in the late spring. For the last several years – some long term projects in social studies have been cut short because the energy level, the kids changes – afternoon, testing days are less productive and the weeks following have been less. I am in favor of fair tests – yet, there have been more instances where there has not been curriculum alignment and I am caught with the dilemma of teaching to the test, which is quite easy to do, but is in conflict with my personal beliefs. If the tests become indicators of a teacher’s success and tied to bonuses or other perks, then I will either “compete” or I’ll leave the profession early. If I choose to “compete” then I will no longer be the creative teacher I have been and have taken pride in being. I will no longer take risks and try new things. Where will the poets come from? I am in favor of assessment, of course. I would like to see a broader range of assessment possibilities. I know that MCAS can give great focus to kids, schools for skills acquisition in places where there has been little success and I know that for several decades kids were short-changed in some skills areas, but this is about balance. If things continue to move in a conservative direction, then my retirement will come just about the right time.”

### The MCAS Opponent

This sub-section is limited to one opponent because only one respondent views the effect of MCAS on student learning as entirely negative over the course of the year. Yet, this respondent is instructive, especially since he is a prize-winning middle-school science teacher. He reports that he tries somewhat to ensure the consistency of his course content with the Massachusetts State Curriculum Frameworks and a lot with past and future MCAS items but not at all with the Brookline Learning Expectations. He devotes over 20% of his time to material that he would not cover if it

were not for the MCAS and regards the effect on both student learning and the teaching/learning process as entirely negative. MCAS has affected how he teaches science a lot and entirely negatively. He responds “a lot” to the questions about teaching at a faster pace, doing less group work in mathematics, using questions from previous MCAS tests, preparing students with test-taking skills, emphasizing correct writing conventions, doing more whole class instruction, teaching more mathematical computation, teaching more vocabulary and referring more students to special education. He views all such changes as entirely negative. The pressure to make such changes is entirely external and comes from his principal, parents and the State’s Department and Board of Education.

He writes, “The MCAS has completely changed how I teach. I used to teach science skills through inquiry based on student’s own questions. This is now entirely impossible. The MCAS requires traditional instruction based on vocabulary. Completely gone from my class are science experiments with any depth because the MCAS questions can come from a wide range of science topics, I am forced to cover, cover, cover. We no longer do science we learn about science.”

## **XI. Conclusions**

The majority of Brookline’s educators report spending less than five percent of their time on material intended to help students do well on the MCAS and which they would not otherwise have covered. Even in the two months leading up to MCAS, the median respondent who teaches an MCAS subject and in a test year reports spending 6-10% of time on such material. A majority believes that MCAS has had no effect on student learning or that the effects are mixed with neither negative nor positive effects predominating. Those who report an effect are more inclined to believe that the time they spend on this material has a positive effect on student learning than that it has a negative effect.

Nevertheless, there is a minority of respondents that has a quite different view of MCAS. Just under one in ten view the effect of the time they spend preparing students for MCAS as detracting from student learning. Of these, over half spend more than 10% of time on material they would not cover in the absence of MCAS.

Similarly approximately two-thirds of respondents report at least one positive effect of MCAS on their course content or teaching and, of these, over half report only positive effects, while fewer than five percent report only negative effects. The remainder report no positive or negative effects, either because they report no effects or any effects they report are mixed.

What distinguishes the vast majority of educators who view MCAS as improving student learning or at least being neutral from the minority that believe the effort they put into helping students do well on MCAS detracts from learning? The answer is undoubtedly particular to each individual and his or her experience. Nevertheless, the survey points to some influential factors.

First, those involved in special education are more inclined to view MCAS as hurting learning. Five of the sixteen respondents who view the effect of their time spent on MCAS as mainly detracting from student learning are special education teachers. As a whole, those involved in special education take a less sanguine view of some of the effects of MCAS than do their colleagues in regular education. In particular, they appear to be less convinced that the increased emphasis on writing benefits their students.

Those who find MCAS benefits student learning are much less likely to report a source of a lot of pressure to respond to MCAS than are those who believe that it detracts from learning. We cannot determine whether unhappiness with the effect of MCAS on student learning leads to more reported pressure or whether more felt pressure results in more MCAS-related instruction in ways that the educator finds detracts from student learning. However, the latter hypothesis is plausible.

Moreover, it is consistent with the finding that respondents who report changing the way they teach a skill a little are more likely to find the change positive than those who report changing it a lot. When there is little or no pressure on teachers to respond to MCAS, they respond by adopting the changes that they believe will benefit their students. Educators who feel little pressure to respond are able to glean benefits from MCAS. When the pressure to respond is too great, teachers sometimes respond by making adjustments even though they do not believe the changes benefit learning.

This hypothesis is consistent with the greater opposition to MCAS among special education teachers. Most Brookline students will pass the MCAS. Passing MCAS is a major hurdle only for a relatively small minority of regular education students in Brookline. Thus math and ELA teachers at the High School pay no more attention to MCAS than do other Brookline teachers. In contrast, for many special education students, MCAS is a significant hurdle, a fact that puts considerable pressure on special education professionals to prepare their students in ways that they often do not believe benefits them.

If this hypothesis is correct, then the challenge for the Brookline Public Schools is to maintain the right balance – to allow teachers and other educators to derive the benefits from MCAS while ensuring that the pressure to respond to MCAS does not become so intense as to produce responses that detract from rather than add to student learning. The fact that most Brookline educators believe that the changes they have made in response to MCAS have benefitted student learning indicates that, for the most part, the system has so far struck the right balance.

## **APPENDIX I (Questionnaire)**

**Note: Formatting has been revised**

# **Brookline MCAS Survey**

**The following is a survey created by the Superintendent's office and the Brookline Educators Association. It is designed to help us understand in what ways, if any the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test affects the education of our students.**

**Please take a few minutes to complete this survey. Your participation is very important. When completed return it to your school secretary (at the High School, there will be a box for completed surveys in the mailroom) by Friday, February 15. We will share the results with the school community in the spring.**

**Thank you for your assistance with this effort.**

**Sincerely,**

**Richard Silverman  
Superintendent  
Association**

**Philip Katz  
President, Brookline Educators**

1. To what extent do you try to make sure that the content of your classes is consistent with (circle one for each)

	Not At All	A Little	Somewhat	A Lot	N/A	
a. Brookline Learning Expectations	1	2	3	4	9	(1)
b. BHS Course Syllabi	1	2	3	4	9	(2)
c. Revised BHS Graduation Requirements	1	2	3	4	9	(3)
d. MA State Frameworks	1	2	3	4	9	(4)
e. Past MCAS items	1	2	3	4	9	(5)
f. Items likely to be on the MCAS	1	2	3	4	9	(6)
g. Iowa Test of Basic Skills	1	2	3	4	9	(7)
f. SAT II (achievement exams)	1	2	3	4	9	(8)

2a. Over the course of the year, what proportion of the time in your classroom is devoted to material intended to help students do better on the MCAS and that you would not cover if there were no MCAS exam?

(circle one)	0-5%	6-10%	11-15%	16-20%	over 20%	
	1	2	3	4	5	(9)

2b. Over the course of the year, how does this affect... (circle one for each)

	entirely positive	mostly positive	mixed	mostly negative	entirely negative	no effect	
i. your students' learning	1	2	3	4	5	9	(10)
ii. the teaching/learning process	1	2	3	4	5	9	(11)

3a. Over the course of the two months leading up to the MCAS test, what proportion of the time in your classroom is devoted to material intended to help students do better on the MCAS and that you would not cover if there were no MCAS exam?

(circle one)	0-5%	6-10%	11-15%	16-20%	over 20%	
	1	2	3	4	5	(12)

3b. Over the course of the two months leading up to the MCAS test, how does this affect... (circle one for each)

	entirely positive	mostly positive	mixed	mostly negative	entirely negative	no effect	
i. your students' learning	1	2	3	4	5	9	(13)
ii. the teaching/learning process	1	2	3	4	5	9	(14)

4. How much has the MCAS test has changed the way you teach each of the following skill areas? (circle one for each area)

	Not At All	A Little	Somewhat	A Lot	N/A	
a. Reading Comprehension	1	2	3	4	9	(15)
b. Writing	1	2	3	4	9	(16)
c. Math	1	2	3	4	9	(17)
d. Science	1	2	3	4	9	(18)
e. Social Studies	1	2	3	4	9	(19)
f. Other (specify) _____	1	2	3	4	9	(20)

5. For each skill area indicated in 4, please indicate how the changes affect student learning (circle one for each area)

	entirely positive	mostly positive	mixed	mostly negative	entirely negative	no effect	
a. Reading Comprehension	1	2	3	4	5	9	(21)
b. Writing	1	2	3	4	5	9	(22)
c. Math	1	2	3	4	5	9	(23)
c. Science	1	2	3	4	5	9	(24)
c. Social Studies	1	2	3	4	5	9	(25)
d. Other (specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5	9	(26)

6a. For each of the following, please indicate whether MCAS has affected the way you teach. (circle one for each statement)

	Not At All	A Little	Some-what	A Lot	N/A	
a. I pay more attention to Brookline's Learning Expectations/BHS Course Syllabi	1	2	3	4	9	(27)
b. I pay more attention to the MA Curriculum Frameworks	1	2	3	4	9	(28)
c. I teach at a faster pace	1	2	3	4	9	(29)
d. I do less group work in mathematics	1	2	3	4	9	(30)
e. I include more writing assignments	1	2	3	4	9	(31)
f. I am more likely to help individual students	1	2	3	4	9	(32)
g. I use questions from previous MCAS tests	1	2	3	4	9	(33)
h. I do more group work in language arts	1	2	3	4	9	(34)
i. I omit certain subjects/topics that I would like to teach	1	2	3	4	9	(35)
j. I do more problem-solving activities in mathematics	1	2	3	4	9	(36)
k. I prepare students with test-taking skills	1	2	3	4	9	(37)
l. I am more likely to emphasize correct writing conventions	1	2	3	4	9	(38)
m. I do more whole class instruction	1	2	3	4	9	(39)
n. I teach more mathematical computation	1	2	3	4	9	(40)
o. I teach more vocabulary	1	2	3	4	9	(41)
p. I refer students more to Special Education	1	2	3	4	9	(42)

6b. For each of the items in question 6a, how has it affected student learning? (circle one for each statement)

	entirely positive	mostly positive	mixed	mostly negative	entirely negative	no effect	
a. (Learning Expectations/ Course Syllabi)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(43)
b. (State Curriculum Frameworks)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(44)
c. (faster pace)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(45)
d. (less group work in math)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(46)
e. (more writing assignments)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(47)
f. (more help individual students)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(48)
g. (previous MCAS tests)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(49)
h. (more group work in language arts)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(50)
i. (omit subjects/topics)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(51)
j. (more problem-solving in mathematics)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(52)
k. (test-taking skills)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(53)
l. (correct writing conventions)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(54)
m. (more whole class instruction)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(55)
n. (more mathematical computation)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(56)
o. (more vocabulary)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(57)
p. (refer students to Special Education)	1	2	3	4	5	9	(58)

**7. Do you feel compelled to alter your instruction in response to MCAS by the following?  
(circle one for each source)**

	Not At All	A Little	Somewhat	A Lot	N/A	
a. Yourself	1	2	3	4	9	(59)
b. Your colleagues/school culture	1	2	3	4	9	(60)
c. Your principal or headmaster	1	2	3	4	9	(61)
d. Your curriculum coordinator(s)	1	2	3	4	9	(62)
e. The Superintendent	1	2	3	4	9	(63)
f. The School Committee	1	2	3	4	9	(64)
g. State Dept/Board of Education	1	2	3	4	9	(65)
h. Parents	1	2	3	4	9	(66)
i. Students	1	2	3	4	9	(67)
j. The media (news, TV, radio)	1	2	3	4	9	(68)
k. The union/association	1	2	3	4	9	(69)

**Demographic Information (answering any or all of these questions is optional)**

These questions are designed to help us understand how MCAS affects different subject areas and grades. We are not trying to conduct research about certain schools or scrutinize staff members.

In what grade level or range do you work? preK K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9-12 (70-73)

In what subject area do you work? \_\_\_\_\_ (74-75)

Which description below fits your primary position?  
(76)

- Classroom Teacher 1
- Special Education Staff 2
- Specialist 3
- Support Staff 4

For how many years have you been an educator? \_\_\_\_\_ (77-78)

For how many years have you worked in Brookline Public Schools? \_\_\_\_\_ (79-80)

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_ (81-85)

Please use the remaining space or the back of this page to comment in greater detail to any question in this survey or to make additional comments about the effect of MCAS on teaching, learning and student achievement. (Please include any anecdotes or examples when possible.)

**Thank you for completing this survey.**

## APPENDIX II

### ANSWERS TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTION AT END OF SURVEY

Note that the following represents a reasonable effort to transcribe the comments written on the survey. Spelling and grammar errors may reflect difficulties with hand-writing.

The responses are coded as follows:

1,2 Positive comments about MCAS

3 Mixed

4,5 Negative comment

7 Comment about survey

8 Non-evaluative comment about MCAS

5 001 In general, I find MCAS (and IOWA) prep to interfere with classroom instruction, community building and curriculum planning. It is the only reason I would consider moving back to teaching 1<sup>st</sup> grade.

4 004 I do not support this high stakes test. However, until such time as the stakes are lowered, I will support, to the best of my ability, students who have to take the test. In the Eng/LA area, I have not found the test to be out of line with what I teach anyway, so I've never felt like I teach to the test. Rather I am aware of the inherent political pressures, especially within the community, and I try to strike a reasonable balance between THE TEST and other more critical, albeit less quantifiable goals of public education. I wish the state would do the same. The TIME assigned to the MCAS testing process is grossly out of proportion to its actual worth as an assessment tool.

5 007 There is no MCAS test in foreign language. I wish this survey had places to comment in general about MCAS. I know it has had a hugely negative effect on the stress level on the students for whom I am the administrator. I am strongly opposed to MCAS testing, particularly their high stakes nature. It takes 17+ hours of good learning out of their life and hundreds of hours out of those of us who set up and proctor them.

1 008 MCAS has helped close the "gaps" that we veteran teachers sometimes leave in our lessons because of our personal preference for favorite topics.

7 011 This was difficult to complete because I do not teach sophomores so I don't feel directly effected by MCAS.

7 015 It is difficult to answer questions relating science to MCAS. Last year, the test was cancelled at the last minute, and this year I stick more to the syllabus from the department.

7 017 We only take the reading portion of the MCAS.

7 022 I teach AP U.S. and expect my students to ace the exam and prepare them to do so. I also teach World History which is not examined to freshmen who are not subject to the exam. U.S. history is examined, but by 10<sup>th</sup> graders who take it as 11<sup>th</sup> graders – so thankfully MCAS is not my problem.

3 033 The need to put a grade on a report card every ten weeks has had a far greater negative impact on my teaching and students' learning than the MCAS has. MCAS has made me a more effective and systematic teacher of writing. Sadly, time for creative writing has eroded.

5 036 I find that the MCAS covers so many topics and details that it forces me to cover much more content much less deeply. There is less time for the actually doing of science. Original labs take much more time than reading a section review and answering content questions. I am very disappointed at the massive amount of content that I am now expected to “cover.” I find I am having the students do fewer original labs and projects because there is simply not enough time. This is NOT good science education.

3 037 I don't think MCAS is Satan personified as some folks would like us to believe, nor do I think it will alter the basic fact that most of our kids do well in school, go on to fine colleges, lead happy successful lives, not because of school per se, but because they are growing up with parents who have invested heavily in the life of the mind. I pity the teachers and students in places like Brockton, Boston, and Holyoke, whose families are often working 2 jobs just to make ends meet. I don't intend for this to be a jeremiad on the inequities of our society, however, there is a large and widening gulf between the Brooklines, Newtons, and Wellesleys of this nation versus the Lawrences and Lowells. The MCAS won't hurt us. Directly, anyway. The worst thing we'll do is focus on skills at the expense of some fun, creative unit. That's not so awful when you consider how enriched our kids' lives are outside of the classroom: religious and music classes, summer homes on the Cape, dance recitals and hockey tournaments, vacations from the Grand Canyon to the Grand Caymans, yada, yada. The indirect result of MCAS will be that our property values will remain exorbitantly high and our neighbors will be increasingly segregated from us. That's obviously a detriment to them and in a way, to the ideals of ONE NATION, INDIVISIBLE. So what is MCAS for?! If it's intention is to help us bolster basic skills and create a common core of basic skills, fine. If it's unintended result is to berate teachers, students and communities, it's heinous. Can it be both? I think, sadly yes.

3 043 With regard to #6a- question I- I feel strongly that less time is spent in depth studies of certain units such as Facing History because of the time spent doing the MCAS exam. My answers to #7 may sound contradictory to the previous comment. However the fact that school staff has no choice but to prepare students for the MCAS, takes time from a deeper study of a content area topic.

8 044 In general, Brooklines course syllabus for biology aligns with state framework and skills and knowledge required by MCAS. This is why I've not changed much in my ways of teaching or feel pressured by anyone to change.

5 047 As a special education teacher I'm not teaching MCAS subjects but I do need to work with my students around the skills and information they need to pass MCAS or I need to develop portfolios for MCAS AH. I find that neither provides an accurate reflection of what my students have learned or the progress they have made. The impact on my students is generally negative – they have a tremendous amount of anxiety about the test and their scores and generally perform poorly because of this.

8 051 Much of the survey does not seem to pertain to preschool, in terms of preparing kids for MCAS. However, the indirect effects have been significant, in that our curriculum is much more becoming aligned with Mass. Curric. Frameworks, particularly in light of the fact that the DOE has new developed frameworks for preschool.

5 052 The MCAS has completely changed how I teach. I used to teach science skills through inquiry based on student's own questions. This is now entirely impossible. The MCAS requires traditional instruction based on vocabulary. Completely gone from my class are science experiments with any depth because the MCAS questions can come from a wide range of science topics, I am forced to cover, cover, cover. We no longer do science we learn about science.

7 053 It is very hard to fill this out as a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher. MCAS starts in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I continue to teach children according to MA frameworks.

1 055 I like the focus the MCAS brings to my reading/writing program. Many of the skills tested are, and have been, the foundation of my program. I do not find it hard to incorporate practice for these tests into what I do because a lot of it I do already. I taught grade 4 last year and found the practice we did quite beneficial.

7 061 Much of survey does not directly relate to preschool. New DOE guidelines and frameworks are more relevant and ultimately relate to or tie in with expectations of students who will later take the MCAS.

8 062 Although MCAS is never mentioned in the K context, I do notice that we are subtly encouraged to do more around literacy by virtue of our faculty mtg emphases.

1 063 I feel that the preparations I make for the MCAS are well integrated into the curriculum and are activities that I would give despite the MCAS.

8 064 I could not answer most questions because I do not provide direct teaching to students who take the MCAS. However, I have enormous responsibility for organizing the SPED component of the tests, i.e., scribes, accommodations and modifications, test sites, alternative assessments and scheduling. When the results are returned, I am responsible for data interpretation, sharing information with teacher and parents and writing an "Action Plan" for any students who do poorly. All of the above is extremely time consuming (but interesting).

5 066 Things I've noticed – an increase in worried and upset parents and kids; - increase pace in all curriculum areas; - much of material too abstract in grade 8 for much of my population; - less focus on teaching to mastery and more on speed to cover topics; - grade separates into 2 tiers – "I can" and "I can't".

5 077 I have never agreed with effect of standards – based education on special education students. The focus has shifted from student-centered to curriculum centered and special education students often do not receive the learning strategies/basic skills they need in favor of the “curriculum cram”. In addition, the MCAS requires entirely too much time to administer.

8 078 I found it difficult to answer questions 6A and B because many of the practices described are already in my instructional practice and it has nothing to do with MCAS. I try to be the best teacher I can be for my students and if they perform better on standardized tests, then that’s great – but it is NOT a motivator for me. For example, I do a lot of group work.

5 080 The drawbacks that I feel as a first grade teacher include the pressure to have kids at grade level running counter to the difficulty getting academic support for the most needy students – i.e. it takes too long to get students with serious learning disabilities evaluated and receiving appropriate services. This directly impacts what can be achieved in the classroom when your just one teacher working solo to meet the diverse needs in first grade. Another serious drawback is the amount of time that the Learning Center staff has to devote to administering the test resulting several weeks of teaching time is lost for children in all grades.

5 081 Since I am not a teacher, this survey has not applied to my non-teaching role. However, as Team Chairperson MCAS testing has effected my thinking around removing a special needs student from an academic subject, other than foreign language, because the subject matter would be overwhelming for that child and because he/she may need additional Learning Center Support. Sometimes this may mean that the student does not receive the level of remediation he/she needs. MCAS affects high school recommendations as well. In the past, some special needs students would be recommended for additional vocational-type classes, and they would not take science or social studies as freshman. Other special needs students whose first language was Spanish, for example, may have taken Spanish at the high school instead of social studies or science. There then was space in the schedule to take Learning Skills and an elective that supported their strengths. Since MCAS, removing a 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grader from a major subject other than foreign language does not seem to be an option. In high school, the addition of MCAS may mean special needs students’ having no more than two periods per week to take an elective during the semester when the student has to take physical education. The high school has attempted to accommodate the students by offering a small number of electives before the normal school hours, and by allowing students to take 3 out of the 4 periods during which the elective is offered. As 9<sup>th</sup> graders some special needs students and their parents must choose between postponing foreign language another year or not taking any elective.

3 083 For the most part, I don’t get too excited about the MCAS. I take valuable time though to teach the vocabulary required for 3<sup>rd</sup> graders to understand the questions. For example, they must know verb, pronoun, adjective, etc. I also discuss how to take the test. These are only aspects that I think are a waste of time. I have given much thought to what is important to teach as I only have the children for a brief amount of time. The MCAS have also changed my teaching in that I am more direct, explicit, and do more modeling of what I want. But mostly, my teaching is influenced by Brookline’s expectations and current research in practices. I’m teaching the kids to become independent readers and writers, not just good test-takers./

4 084 The MCAS does not - has not altered my instructional style or pace. The learning expectations reflect mass frameworks and so I make sure each expectation is addressed. The only difference is that I don't teach "extra" mini-units (that tie in nicely with our units) because of time constraints.

5 091 I have seen students stressed and negatively affected by MCAS. Our curriculum is SERIOUSLY disrupted and comprised to teach to the test. The diversion of resources is scandalous.

7 097 ESL and French are not currently tested on the MCAS. The English that I teach prepares students for future testing but at the ESL II level, they don't take the MCAS. My sophomore French students are generally pretty tired during MCAS administration.

5 101 If there is a test students and communities are measured by, one teaches to it. We are impeded by the questions most important to teaching by this one fact. Many of us are opposed to the MCAS because of its "high stakes" consequences. There is another dimension we are not addressing, namely the extent to which broad survey courses in which coverage is the paramount goal crowd out any other goals or assessment strategies.

1 102 I have always felt that explicit instruction is essential to kids learning. Since the MCAS I feel that I am more conscience of my own explicit teaching and perhaps expect more from my kids with regard to their written work. I also put more emphasis (and teach kids how) to read and follow directions independently. (ex., answering all parts of a question and writing about all that you know). This, I believe, is one of the biggest challenges for the kids.

1 103 We are doing a lot more open response questions, stressing writing conventions and teaching test taking techniques. Maybe it is time to think about reducing the IOWA tests which take 2 complete weeks and focusing on the MCAS instead.

5 104 My general sense is that the curriculum has become broader, more superficial in the sense that there are more things to cover in less depth. The children in all grades seem more stressed. Is our curriculum age/stage appropriate.....

5 107 MCAS is not needed in Brookline. Without MCAS, we still prepare our students well. MCAS only serves to point out the less advantaged students. We are working hard to reach all students in Brookline. MCAS alienates several segments of the school population. As a high stakes test, it creates a feeling of anxiety among less confident/less mainstream students. This anxiety causes a plethora of failure. It does not meet the needs of all students. Thus, it goes against Brookline's mission.

5 113 I think there is an indirect effect on Kindergarten as MCAS adds to general pressure to rush children into more academic and structured learning at ever earlier ages.

8 114 Despite the fact that Early Childhood is not directly affected by MCAS, we are a part and support of BPS. I have children who will take the MCAS, and understand the methodology of "preparing" all children to take this test – I don't agree with MCAS.

8 116 7: compelled is a “loaded word.” I do this because I genuinely want to.\ 4 – 6: Does not take into account a teacher’s normal rate of growth, maturity, change brought about by experience, changing needs of students, understanding of need of society, industry, citizenship. Changes in my style have as much to do with literacy initiative and my own desire to meet that challenge and my pride in wanting to continue to deliver a good product for my students, their parents, and my profession.

5 124 MCAS totally disrupt the flow of a Learning Center. Children who should be receiving services are denied their rightful time slots because of testing. It is sinful!

1 126 Despite all the antagonism towards the MCAS, I actually believe that it holds students to a higher level of expectations. While I don’t think it should be the only measure of student achievement – progress, I believe we should use it to help us detect weaknesses in the schools and teach better in those areas, rather than thinking of it as “teaching to the test.”

8 131 I apologize that my answers are not more thorough, but I have no previous experience to compare these questions to. All during my pre-teaching days, the effects of MCAS came up again and again, but I lack prior experience. I have no knowledge of altering the curriculum to address MCAS, but it is certainly talked about in school. I often use a 1 – 4 scoring which parallels the MCAS scoring rubric.

5 133 There is a subtle trickle-down pressure even at grade K, which is 100% negative.

7 140 I felt you should have had questions asking how specialists are affected: modifying test; taking students NOT taking MCAS, scheduling, preparing ESLer’s to take test if its 1<sup>st</sup> time. Most of these questions really didn’t deal with specialists’ roles, jobs, teaching situations.

5 141 Biggest impact is on stress levels: kids chewing on their clothes more, kids not being proud of their accomplishments, kids not being able to have more “fun” and “free” time in the day, the rush-rush-rush all day long, from one subject to the other, from one topic to the next, from beginning to mastery in record times. Kids now, in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, are expected to read more difficult pieces, with longer text and more complex ideas than previously, and for many, this is unrealistic. For the average, above average kid, the all around good student whose parents have always enriched their lives, the MCAS and other tests don’t really matter – they will do well no matter what. For the below average or just slower to blossom child who is developmentally still at an ok rate but by comparison, doing poorly; that child suffers the most. He/she never catches up no matter what we do, because the expectation is unrealistic given his/her development. This snowball effect starts in kdg and MCAS only makes it worse because now the child is branded on a failure. We need to slow down and tone down some expectations; however, the bright kids do well with the “pre-nure” and faster pace of teaching.

5 146 I miss the opportunities to expand and have worthwhile activities because of time constraints due to MCAS/standardized testing; no longer do I have time to write, produce, direct class plays, for example (I’ve done 10 of them prior to feeling the pressures of MCAS).

3 148 As a former fourth grade teacher, and right after MCAS began, I felt a lot of pressure to do test prep. I feel that the time used for this diminished my teaching of certain subjects (ex: science) by taking up too much time. I also felt that my teaching of writing was compromised by too much “test prep.” I still worry that we are on the road to producing formulaic writers, although I’m a big believer in mechanics and structure in this discipline. As a L.A. specialist, I have the background, interest, and freedom to do “MCAS Prep” in more positive ways. (thanks for asking).

3. 152 Over the years I would have to categorize myself as a creative teacher who tends to work in more integrated ways. I believe in process and accumulated knowledge. With MCAS I have had to be more cognizant and forward about how specific skills are met by curriculum; this is mostly a good thing. It does, however, make me feel more constricted example: I have always taught poetry and yet, now I feel more compelled to teach essay writing. Essay writing is an important skill, but so is poetry. It can be argued that both can be taught – yes, but in truth the MCAS process - preparation and the actual giving of the test cuts into the amount of teaching time in the late spring. For the last several years – some long term projects in social studies have been cut short because the energy level, the kids changes – afternoon, testing days are less productive and the weeks following have been less. I am in favor of fair tests – yet, there have been more instances where there has not been curriculum alignment and I am caught with the dilemma of teaching to the test, which is quite easy to do, but is in conflict with my personal beliefs. If the tests become indicators of a teacher’s success and tied to bonuses or other perks, then I will either “compete” or I’ll leave the profession early. If I choose to “compete” then I will no longer be the creative teacher I have been and have taken pride in being. I will no longer take risks and try new things. Where will the poets come from? I am in favor of assessment, of course. I would like to see a broader range of assessment possibilities. I know that MCAS can give great focus to kids, schools for skills acquisition in places where there has been little success and I know that for several decades kids were short-changed in some skills areas, but this is about balance. If things continue to move in a conservative direction, then my retirement will come just about the right time.

5 153 MCAS testing and preparation adds one more conflict to the precious little time music teachers have with students. Testing dates fall at a particularly bad time making spring concerts difficult and sometimes impossible to schedule.

5 156 MCAS ⇒ pressure on school administration (no matter how they deny it) ⇒ pressure on teachers ⇒ pressure on children!

7 158 As a first grade teacher, this is difficult to assess as we are more removed from the discussions and decisions pertaining to MCAS.

8 159 It was difficult to answer many of these questions. Because most children are not reading in kindergarten, working on “comprehension” would not be appropriate. Although we are not devoting time to MCAS prep, there is without a doubt pressure to introduce skills at an earlier age. Much faculty time is devoted to MCAS scores and how children can “do better.”

8 163 In the first year of MCAS, certain art projects introduced in the spring were not completed because I lost several of my art classes to MCAS. In the following year, I rescheduled those special projects for the winter of the school year.

7 164 What is the purpose of this survey!?! I found the rationale on the cover page vague.

3 171 The MCAS take a lot of time, both in time to take the actual tests and in time to teach the kids how to write high scoring answers. Some examples of high scoring compositions are excellent. Some, however, are dull, long essays rather than interesting ones. I think the Brookline Learning Expectations and the Mass Frameworks cover what teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn. I think testing students to help teachers determine what to focus on in their teaching is a good idea – and should be done by teachers at natural times during the academic year.

5 173 One thing I find extremely frustrating is to spend time on practice tests (i.e. examples from last years MCAS) with kids who really struggle. I have a handful of students who are working below grade level. To work on difficult reading passages with them, full of tough vocabulary and sentence structure does them no good at all. They can't access it. I would rather spend the time doing guided reading!!!

5 174 When I first came to Brookline from NH, I was told not to pay attention to the MCAS test. I have administered it and reviewed results. Our current curriculum and Learning Expectations are not consistent with MCAS questions. I do think testing can be valuable when fair. I also believe my instructional time has been cut due to the amount of time the MCAS takes.

5 176 The biggest problem(s) that I have are not in preparation but in administration: the entire building gets very tense and crabby. The space is lacking – crowded and over heated for hours of work. Kids “check out” of grade 8 once high school schedules are made and the MCAS over. It has become an unpleasant anniversary.

5 177 The effect has been to emphasize formal structures, formulaic writing models and to de-emphasize originality, conjecture, imagination, creativity, experimentation and cross-cultural communication. We don't know the ultimate effect of this trend, but in the past it has corrected or even over corrected itself. Trends supported by law are much more difficult to refine or humanize. MCAS looks over its creator at this point like the lab creation in Mary Shelly's novel, a bold, brilliant idea now loose on the countryside as “Frankentest.” Could be worse though, there could be two.

5 179 The MCAS certainly seems to add to students' anxiety about testing. In 6<sup>th</sup> grade test anxiety tends to lesson students' ability to perform well on tests (at least this has been my observation in Brookline).

8 182 Russian speaking community supports MCAS and see it as a tool for better evaluation both students and teachers./

2 185 I think it's help us focus – made us communicate more. The focus on writing, open-ended questions is good. Also thinking and explaining in math. The biggest problem is there needs to be more choice in content areas. Choose 1 of the following 3 questions to answer. . .

8 186 This is my first year teaching sophomores. So far, I've thought very little about MCAS.

## APPENDIX III

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kevin Lang received his BA/MA in Politics, Philosophy and Economics from Oxford University, his MSc in economics from l'université de Montréal and his PhD in economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He spent six years at the Centre de recherches sur l'opinion publique in Montreal where he rose to the position of principal investigator and served as Executive Secretary of the World Association for Public Opinion Research. He was a founding member of the Canadian Association for Applied Social Research. After receiving his PhD, he became an assistant professor at the University of California, Irvine. He later moved to Boston University where he is now a Professor of Economics. Lang has held an Olin Fellowship at the National Bureau of Economic Research and a Sloan Faculty Research Fellowship. He is currently a Research Associate of the NBER and a member of the Advisory Board of the Canadian Employment Research Forum. He is co-editor of a monograph series, *Sociology and Economics: Controversy and Integration*, published by Aldine de Gruyter. Lang's research focuses on the economics of labor markets and of education. He has published widely in professional journals and edited (with Jonathan Leonard) *Unemployment and the Structure of Labor Markets*. Professor Lang currently serves as Vice-Chair of the Brookline School Committee and has served on the Committee since 1996.