



Pioneer Institute Statement on MBAE PARCC/MCAS Study

The Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE) continues its advocacy for Common Core and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), a federally funded testing consortium, with the release of a study concluding that Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) performance is not an indicator of preparedness for higher education success.

The MBAE report conveniently and selectively excludes several facts:

- Between 2005 and 2013, under the previous Massachusetts standards and MCAS, the commonwealth's students scored number one in the country in every academic subject and every grade tested on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).
- In 2007 and 2013, Massachusetts eighth graders scored among the top-performing "countries" in the world on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).
- In 2013, Massachusetts participated in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) that assessed workforce readiness and problem-solving skills among 15 year olds – students at the end of compulsory education. In math, science and reading, Massachusetts significantly outperformed its peers and the national average. In math, Massachusetts was in the same performance bracket as Finland, Austria, Canada and Germany. In reading, the commonwealth trailed only Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai.
- A 2008 Massachusetts Board of Higher Education report, [*Massachusetts School-to-College Report*](#), made clear the very strong correlation between MCAS performance and both college success and the avoidance of remediation in higher education in Massachusetts. Ironically, the study was partially funded by the National Governors Association, a major partner in the development of Common Core and an advocate for PARCC.
- Since 2008, state education officials and/or MBAE have advocated for and/or made state policy changes that have redefined K-12 academic expectations downward and away from more academically focused readiness for higher education:
 - Common Core requires approximately 60 percent less classic literature, poetry and drama. It also delays the study of algebra I (from 8th grade to early 10th grade), includes an experimental approach to geometry and ends with "lite" algebra II offerings. The Core contains no pathway to pre-calculus, calculus and trigonometry.

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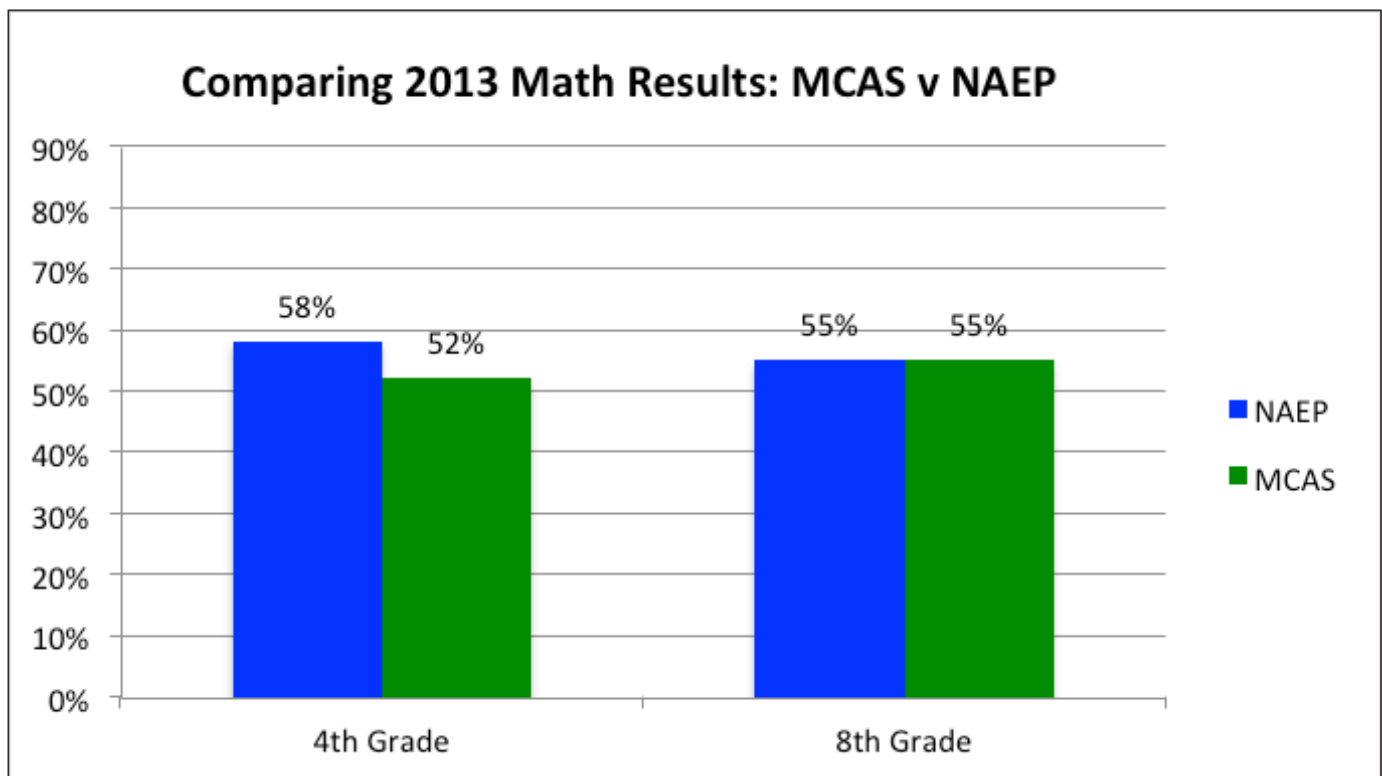
- College readiness was further damaged in 2009 when the Commissioner and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education first postponed and then cancelled the requirement that students pass a U.S. history MCAS to graduate from Bay State high schools.
- Over the last eight years, the commonwealth has been unwilling to increase pass/fail cut scores to make MCAS more academically demanding. The MCAS passing score (220) stands at the very bottom of the state's "Needs Improvement" category; students at this level have a partial understanding of tested subjects and therefore will likely need to take remedial college courses. Pioneer has long advocated for a gradual increase in the cut score.
- MCAS remediation funding has been slashed from over \$30 million in the late 1990s, to \$9.1 million.

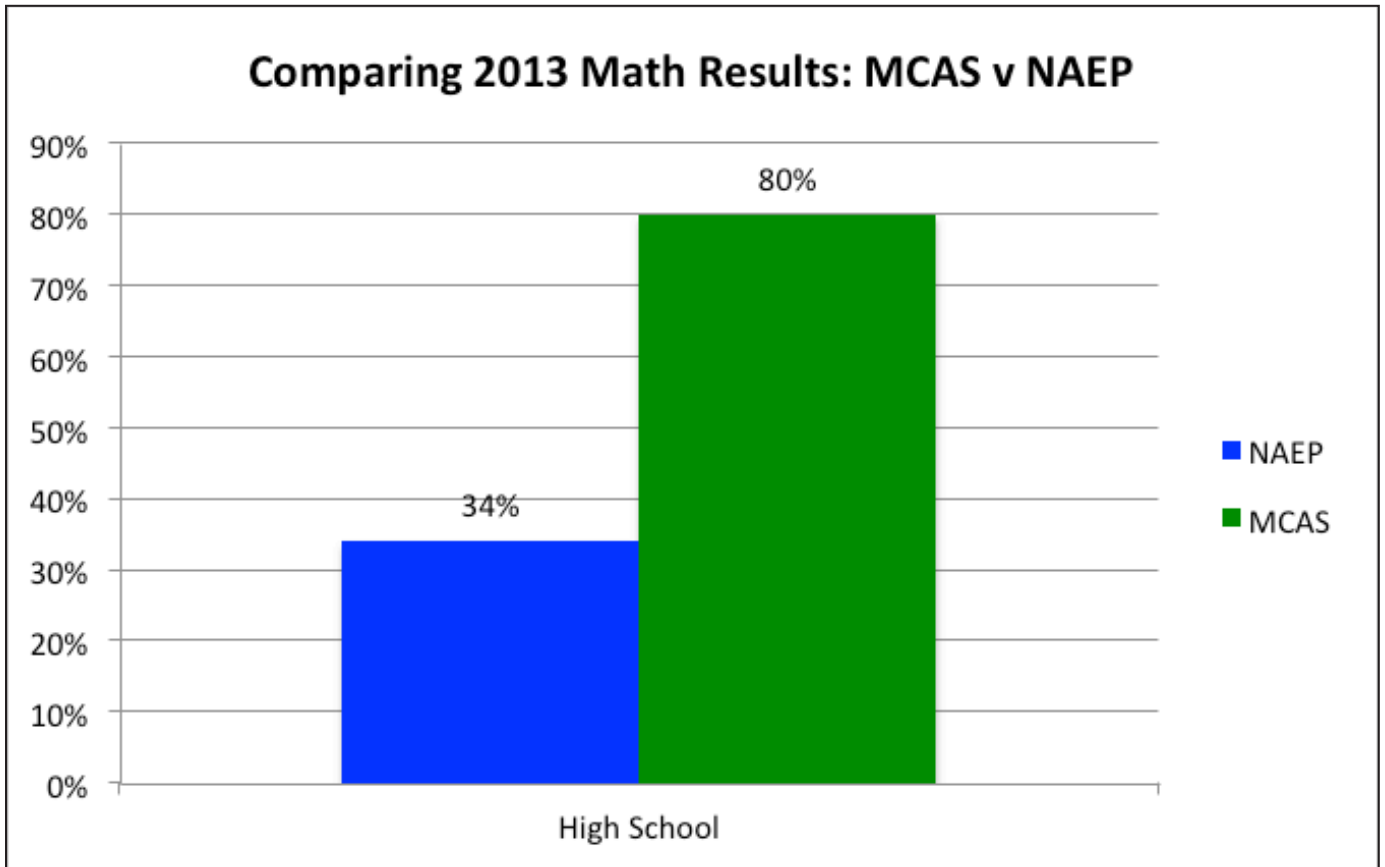
Pioneer believes that the MCAS serves Massachusetts well, even as it clearly can be improved. For the

fourth and eighth grades, the MCAS aligns very well with the Nation's Report Card (NAEP); its results therefore have been confirmed by a widely used national reference, in addition to the stellar results of Massachusetts students on the TIMSS and PISA tests. It is worth noting that the MCAS is almost unique in providing such a level of comparison with other major tests.

The Institute is, however, concerned by the 10th grade MCAS results, which do not align with NAEP results. It is worth exploring whether the high school graduation requirement has been watered down, given the chart on the next page.

We believe that state officials must pay particular attention to ensuring that the rigor of the MCAS high school assessments is maintained. Moreover, an analysis should be undertaken by the state to understand when the weakening of the tenth grade assessment occurred.





Note: The 2013 MCAS was given to 10th grade students. The 2013 NAEP was given to 12th grade students.

Pioneer is not alone in doubting the wisdom of this effort. As [Diane Ravitch](#) noted:

The [MBAE report] is a surprising conclusion, since MCAS has been in use for two decades and PARCC is not only untried but very controversial. When Arne Duncan handed out \$360 million to create two consortia to develop tests for the Common Core, PARCC enlisted 24 states and DC. Now, only 11 states and DC are sticking with PARCC.

Even more surprising are the reports about a lack of well-prepared workers. Massachusetts is by far the most successful state in the nation, as judged by NAEP test scores. Maybe test scores don't translate into the skills, behaviors, and habits that employers seek. But how do these business people know that PARCC will be better?

This study continues a deeply troubling pattern of conflicts of interest marking the commonwealth's

consideration of Common Core and PARCC. MBAE has accepted several hundred thousand dollars from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has invested more than \$200 million in development of, and advocacy for, Common Core. MBAE's 2010 report advocating for the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to adopt the Common Core standards was funded by Gates and authored by another recipient of Gates funding. This most recent MBAE report was co-authored by Scott Marion, who serves as a technical advisor to PARCC and the United States Department of Education, which funded PARCC. Massachusetts Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Mitchell Chester, who will advise the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on whether to adopt the PARCC tests, also chairs PARCC's governing board.

But this report is consistent with the recent work from MBAE. In addition to the 2010 report, MBAE used

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Gates funding to hire Sir Michael Barber, Pearson's Senior Education Advisor, to author a recent report so bereft of intellectual integrity that it lifted a whole "case study" from *The Boston Globe* without attribution.

Finally, it is worth noting that the recommendations of the report fly in the face of actions taken in states around the country. When PARCC was still in the design phase, and was the beneficiary of federal incentives for adoption, it boasted 24 participating states. As states have become more familiar with the product, only 12 states are left participating in PARCC.



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