

Response to State of Rhode Island Bill H6285

Janet D. Johnson and Brittany A. Richer

Rhode Island College

6-11-15

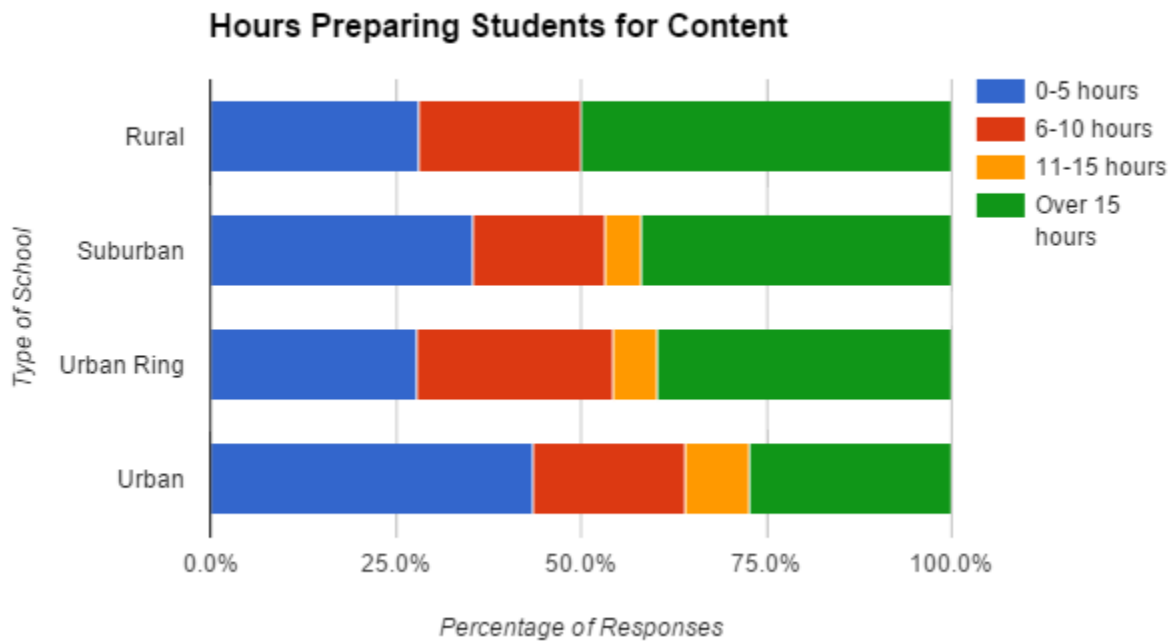
Dr. Janet D. Johnson is an associate professor of secondary education and co-director of the URI/RIC Ph.D. Program in Education. She can be reached at jjohnson@ric.edu.

Brittany A. Richer is a sixth grade teacher at the Lawn School and graduate student in the Advanced Studies in Teaching and Learning program at Rhode Island College. She can be reached at bricher13@gmail.com.

We applaud the changes to standardized testing outlined in Bill H6285, and assume that the emphasis on local input means that RI is leaving the PARCC Consortium. Incorporating local school district input to ensure that test content is appropriate and meaningful is important. In a survey taken by 298 Rhode Island teachers, they reported many of the concerns this bill addresses. However, there are some aspects of the bill that require clarification.

Issues of Time

One of the main problems with the PARCC tests, as documented by our teacher survey and acknowledged by the PARCC Consortium itself, was that it took too much time away from teaching, both in the preparation and administration of the test (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, 2015). On average, 40% of RI teachers reported spending over 15 hours preparing students for the content of the test.



Furthermore, schedule changes were harmful to students. One teacher explained, “Disruption to teaching is huge because schedules were changed on a daily basis even when not testing; [it was] hard for kids to adapt to these changes.” There is no stipulation in the bill that indicates how many days that testing may take. We might look to Minnesota, whose legislature has stipulated that testing take no more than 2% of time over the school year, or 19 hours for elementary students and 20 hours for secondary students (http://neatoday.org/2015/05/26/educators-and-parents-demand-less-testing-and-lawmakers-listen/?utm_source=150610neatodayexpress&utm_medium=email&utm_content=testing_campaign&utm_campaign=neatodayexpress).

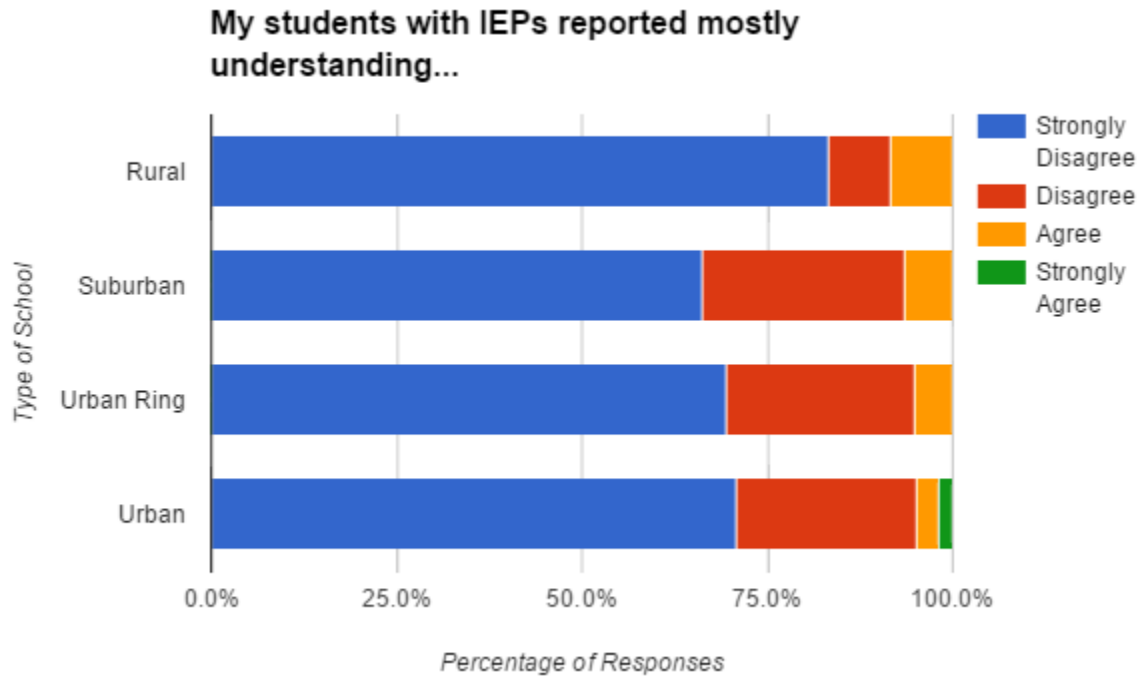
Please clarify if there will be recommendations for limitations on how much time will be taken for preparation and administration of the test.

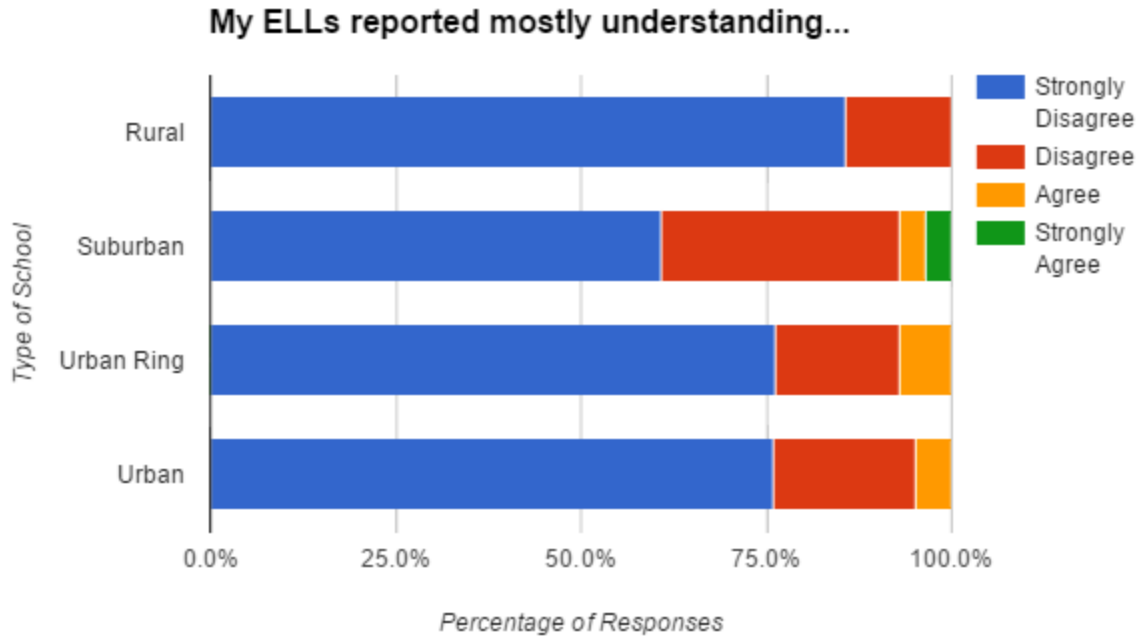
Issues of Appropriateness

The PARCC test, according to the teacher survey and other research, was inappropriate for many students with IEPs (Individualized Educational Plans) and English Language Learners (ELLs). New York teacher Bobson Wong writes, “...while I can improve the skills of struggling children, whose skills are often years behind, these gains don’t usually result in significant gains on standardized tests” (Strauss, 2015). One RI teacher explained how the PARCC test negatively impacted students’ emotional and academic gains, writing, “This test does nothing but lower their self-esteem with learning and show them that they should not bother to see regular curriculum as valuable; they instead see daily learning as a way to prepare for testing that they cannot or will not find success.”

On average, 94% of RI teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that their students with IEPs reported mostly understanding the PARCC test. Additionally, 95% of

teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that their ELL students reported mostly understanding the PARCC test.





Please clarify how this bill will require the new tests to accommodate the diverse backgrounds and skills of RI students.

Issues of Standardized Tests as High Stakes Evaluations for Teachers and Students

This bill does not indicate whether standardized tests will be used to evaluate teachers. Value-added models of teacher evaluation are unstable, disregard the effects of the differences in students assigned to teachers, and cannot be disentangled from the many influences on student progress (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011).

It is also not clear whether the chosen test for 11th and 12th graders (SAT/ACT/PSAT) will be used as a graduation requirement after the graduating class of 2017. Research demonstrates that standardized tests, as currently constructed, favor white, middle class students in form and content (Reville, 2013). High-stakes testing increases the achievement gap instead of lessening it (The National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2014).

Please clarify if these tests will be used to evaluate teachers, and if they will be used as graduation requirements for students.

Issues of Usefulness

A recent study shows that high school grades are a much better predictor of undergraduate performance than standardized test scores (Hiss, 2014). Replacing PARCC with an assessment developed by local educators is one possibility, but not the only one. The problems with standardized testing, as outlined in this bill, remain, including:

1. Inequities based on school funding (if school districts want to develop alternative assessments, they have to pay for it);
2. Unfairness of tests based on inequities in student demographics, including race and social class (The National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2014);
3. Unfairness for students in special education (Kruger and McIvor, 2013); and English Language Learners;
4. Time taken away from non-tested areas of the curriculum, including social studies and the arts (Koretz, 2005); and
5. Standardized testing has not been proven to improve student achievement or demonstrated that students are better prepared to enter the workforce (Reville, 2013).

Improving Student Learning

Standardized tests do not accurately measure growth for all students, and thus their use and impact must be necessarily limited. Assessments should be designed to help ALL students improve learning; help teachers teach better; be integrated with classroom curriculum and instruction; use a variety of measures; and allow flexibility in the curriculum (Au and Tempel, 2012). As one teacher wrote in the survey, “Let’s be creative and work harder to create

assessments that are fair and valid for students of all economic backgrounds.” Peterson and Neill (2012) document several possibilities, some of which are already in place in RI schools, including portfolio-based assessments, proficiency exit standards, exhibitions, parent conferences, and school report cards.

Perhaps we need to question whether the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), as measured by standardized tests (PARCC or not), actually assess what we believe our students need to know to become informed, active citizens, be academically prepared for post K-12 settings, and gain the communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills that Rhode Island employers have asked for (Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, 2012). Experienced teachers use educational research and findings from their own practice to support student engagement and learning in these areas, which is a great place to begin.

Again, we applaud the motivation behind Bill H6285 and hope that it will spark dialogue among all stakeholders about the most effective and engaging ways to support all learners.

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