

Secretary Peyser, Commissioner Chester, Chairman Sagan, members of the board, I'm honored to be here today. I have only three minutes in which I will try to make three points.

First, I think we all might wish that [these analyses](#) had revealed some inherent, quantifiable feature of MCAS and PARCC, like a reliability coefficient or a correlation, that would clearly indicate one's superiority over the other, and make this decision easier. I can't say I'm surprised that we haven't found such a magic number to compare. Modern test design has been honed to a template, and purely technical differences between big tests are surprisingly few. They all have reliabilities of 0.9. They all correlate with FGPA around 0.3. They all adhere to the [consensus standards of Educational and Psychological Testing](#). The differences that matter are more subtle, in the messaging, in the materials, and in the stakeholder response.

Second, I'd like to distinguish between problems with a test and problems with a proficiency standard. In [Dana's report](#), on pages 28 and 31, I provide an analysis that shows that Grade 10 MCAS scores predict college remediation consistently well from 2004 to 2013. Correlations are stable and moderate in both mathematics and English Language Arts. But I also show that proficiency in 2013 doesn't mean what it used to in 2004. In fact, when it comes to predicting remediation, a student now has to score halfway to advanced to be at the same level as a just-proficient student in 2004. My second point is that this seems like a problem, and it is, but it indicates a problem with a standard, not necessarily a problem with a test. It is like trying to predict test scores from family income now, versus in 1980. Family income is a good predictor now, and it was a good predictor then, but since income has risen due to inflation, the same income now, predicts lower test scores than it used to. What we would do is adjust for inflation, and that's what we could do with MCAS, too. We could raise its cut scores to be commensurate with PARCC and remediation cutoffs from previous years.

My final point is that you are not choosing a test but a signaling system. You should choose the signaling system that promises the clearest signals, to students, teachers, parents, administrators, and the public. The two questions that most of us have about tests are, "Should I be worried," and "If so, what can I do?" We should choose a testing system that can signal us to worry, sure, but also to respond effectively. We should answer this second question, "what can students, parents, and teachers do," clearly, with score reports, curriculum guides, growth models, and interim feedback that inspires future success. Remember, if we predict a 10th grader will need remediation in college, we don't want to be correct! We want to do something about it. This is counterintuitive but important. Choose the test that can not only warn us that we're off track, but that causes us to get back on track.

To recap, first, we have not yet found a simple quantitative number that argues clearly for the MCAS over PARCC or vice versa. Second, MCAS Grade 10 standards appear to have drifted, but we can adjust standards without adjusting the test. Third, you are choosing a signaling system, and I hope that we choose one that only fails people when it can provide useful feedback that leads ultimately to their success.