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SECONDARY MATHEMATICS AND ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS
REGARDING THE IMPACT OF THE MASSACHUSETTS COMPREHENSIVE
ASSESSMENT SYSTEM ON CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION DECISION-
MAKING IN THEIR CLASSROOMS

A Dissertation Presented

by

PATRICIA A. DONOVAN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

September 2006

School of Education

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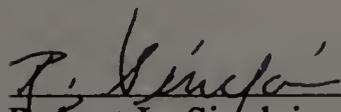
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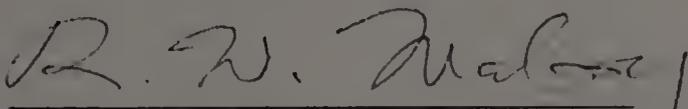
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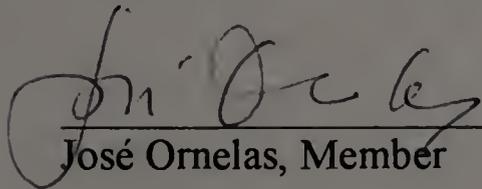
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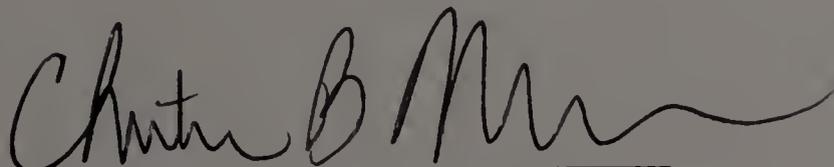
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DEDICATION

To all my teachers and students, who inspired me to consider deeply the implications of every act connected to teaching and learning.

To my family, who sparked in me a love of learning and the value of tenacity.

And forever, to my beloved husband, Tom, whose integrity, curiosity, and loving generosity have supported me throughout my life, and in particular on my doctoral journey, and who whose respect for autonomy tempered by consideration always of the Common Good provides an ideal for which to strive.

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Above all, I thank the Divine Spirit that guides me every step of the way.

ABSTRACT

SECONDARY MATHEMATICS AND ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF THE MASSACHUSETTS COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM ON CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION DECISION- MAKING IN THEIR CLASSROOMS

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This study illuminated teachers' perceptions of positive and negative impacts of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) on autonomy when making curriculum and instructional decisions and meeting individual differences in their classrooms. At issue was teachers' ability to exercise professional autonomy in ways conducive to optimizing educational opportunities for all children in an environment increasingly controlled by distant authorities.

Interview responses from sixty secondary math and English teachers at Massachusetts' high- and low-scoring high schools and their responses to specific survey and open-response items formed the data set analyzed to answer three interrelated research questions:

What are teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their autonomy to make curriculum decisions in their local classrooms?

What are teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their autonomy to make instructional decisions in their local classrooms?

What are teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their teaching to meet individual differences of students in their local classrooms?

Major findings based on the collected data indicated a generous tilt in a dangerous direction away from teachers' exercise of professional autonomy to make classroom-related decisions. Theoretical and practical recommendations, formulated from the data, aim to improve education for every student and enhance teachers' professional capacity:

Education administrators, policymakers, and higher education systems should support and develop teachers' professional autonomy to make "principle" decisions (Friedman, 1999) to ensure the highest quality education for each student.

Policymakers should increase efforts to involve teachers in the process of designing State assessment instruments and setting curriculum and instructional standards.

Administrators and policymakers should take a broader look at the problems encountered by low-scoring schools and address these to improve education affecting all students while minimizing infringements on teachers' professional autonomy.

toward local classrooms where education realities unfold. Moreover, these recommendations work to reinforce teachers' professional development in ways likely to reduce teacher turnover and increase job satisfaction while improving educational decision-making, which effects every American public school child.

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CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE STUDY

The high-stakes testing movement, like a tsunami, now washes over the landscape of the American public education system. Thrust into being by complementary forces, the high-stakes testing tsunami threatens what have been considered basic structures of the public education system: equity and liberty. In particular, this study examines the impact of the movement on teachers' professional autonomy, their control within their classrooms, and therefore, their ability to effectively teach America's children.

The forces that converged to raise up the high-stakes testing phenomenon include veneration of the business-model for managing institutions, pedagogical leanings towards a unified, standardized content-focused curriculum, and a belief in the power of testing to accurately measure and improve any system or process against which it is applied. The groundswell of the high-stakes testing wave was first detected in the 1980s. At that time, public education had moved toward a student-centered curriculum based on constructivist pedagogy and a belief in the right of every American child to be included in the public educational process. Public school teachers were viewed as a strong political force, entrusted with meeting the educational needs of America's school children.

At that time, as well the country was recovering from economic recession and deeply questioned its ability to continue its leadership in the economic world markets. The Reagan administration and conservative business forces aligned to enact supply-side economics, and pro-business and anti-union measures promised a new "morning in

America”; but the country continued to struggle. In 1983, a government report issued a red alert outlining the cause of America’s economic struggles – ineffective education. A Nation at Risk swept through the country and warned of “the rising tide of mediocrity” in America’s public education system. In the report, school systems and, therefore by unavoidable inference teachers, had blaming fingers pointed at them for perpetuating a system that provoked a “growing impatience with shoddiness in many walks of American life,” and, in particular, a “shoddiness... too often reflected in our schools and colleges”(p. 6). Children, the report asserted, were emerging from “high school ready neither for college nor for work”(p. 6).

The charges proclaimed by A Nation at Risk (1983) stuck, even when America regained economic momentum later in the decade. No one came forward counter charging that the country’s then-current success resulted from a good public education system with capable teachers. Instead, the accountability movement formed and promoted industry “standards” and tests to measure educational productivity and achievement.

Teachers, according to standardization proponents, could be held accountable for meeting standardized, clear goals through a strong testing program that would ensure America’s public school children mastered prerequisite skills and knowledge to succeed in the 21st century marketplace. Test results would simultaneously provide information regarding teachers’ efficacy, making them publicly accountable for what students learned in their classrooms.

The introduction of the language of accountability... and its emergence as the dominant language of educational policy... is in fact more political than educational. It represents a shift in the locus of control over schools, a

shift in the definition of public education and distancing of the larger public from the governance of schools. (McNeil, 2000, p. 260).

It came as no surprise when the accountability changes aroused predictably passionate responses, and educational titans and followers chose sides. National standards and testing/assessment proponents, like Diane Ravitch, and Lauren Resnick, along with traditionalist curriculum proponents such Allan Bloom, E. D. Hirsch and others, linked together with Chester Finn and Lamar Alexander, William Bennett and other private, for-profit, and non-unionized public schools' (charter schools) advocates. They wanted to change "...a vast mass shaped by tensions and pressures that inhibit systematic academic and vocational achievement for the majority of students."(A Nation at Risk, p. 9).

Opposing voices arose, led by educators like Ted Sizer, Deborah Meier, and Howard Gardner, and high-stakes testing critics like Robert Rothman, Richard Rothstein and Alfie Kohn, but appeared to lack the political power to prevail. These advocates supported change, but drew from educational theory that upheld principles dedicated not to production, single test assessments, and curriculum hegemony, but to standards without standardization percolating up from the faculty and staff at small schools with increased professional autonomy and responsibility for teachers. These advocates stood on the shoulders of progressive educational giants like Dewey, Montessori, Piaget, Vygotsky, Freire and others, advocates for student-centered education led by able facilitator-teachers committed to the development of learner autonomy.

Statement of the Problem

What the standards and accountability movement seemed to predict was less teacher autonomy and professional responsibility linked to an increase in what Friedman (1999) has described as “routine decisions,” and a lessening in what he termed “principle decisions.” That is, the big issue questions, affecting basic aspects of teachers’ work, would be decided by central authorities committed to achieving “excellence,” while the less fundamental questions about how to carry out plans formulated by others would remain the provenance of teachers.

Moved by their belief that standards reflect the “underlying premise that all children can learn at high levels...” and their concern “about teachers and schools lowering their expectations for poor and minority students.” (Orfield & Wald, 2000, p. 38), proponents of curriculum standards and standardized assessments ensuring compliance with those standards delivered great changes to the education landscape. By 2003, 49 states had instituted testing, much of it high-stakes testing where a single score set would determine if a child went to summer school, was retained or even denied a high school diploma.

For the most part, teachers complied with the new order. In schools with adequate resources and leadership, teachers scoured the Standards to determine where and how their curricula aligned; they then adjusted to accommodate perceived weaknesses in their local curricula. In other schools, where resources were tight, leadership weak or conflicted, or in rare cases where teachers rejected the imposed authority, the systems and faculties did not embrace and study the Standards in order to accommodate the new order. Inexorably, the State moved onward. A few teachers

stepped forward to sacrifice jobs in protest over the forcing of a competitive, single measure, state-imposed assessment system. Most acquiesced to the state's authority, and a few embraced the regulations. During this transition period, as Massachusetts high schools adjusted to the evolving and enlarging standardized testing program, research about standardized curricula and high-stakes testing began to build, most of it critical. Practical problems with testing arose and exacerbated teachers' concerns about the tests, though most remained publicly silent on the issue. All the time, the exams were shaping curricula and instruction and affecting teachers' ability to meet individual differences.

Formerly teachers, in concert with administrators, were the key educational decision-makers at the local level. They decided what content would be taught to their students. Most often, pedagogical decisions were the teacher's alone. However, with the advent of state-mandated curriculum standards and subsequent implementation of high-stakes tests geared toward evaluating a school's adherence to the externally determined standards, the teacher's responsibility for curriculum was replaced by state control. As Jones, Jones & Hargrove (2003) summarize:

For the education community, the shifts in control of what is taught, how it is taught, and who gets high-quality instruction are perhaps the most severe consequences. Whereas states once provided only curriculum frameworks and outlines, they are now dictating instruction down to the most specific detail. This shift in control from local communities to policy makers at the state and national levels has quietly occurred with little debate or recognition. Some testing programs have a provision for state takeover of the school if the students fail to achieve (as measured on high-stakes tests). This means that the state can fire the local principal and all the teachers and hire new personnel. The full implication of this shift in control has yet to be fully realized. Teachers recognize that this shift in control is occurring and are angry over their loss of creativity and flexibility in their teaching. (p. 171)

Far from the realities of classrooms, decisions are made and enforced regarding what and how a teacher should teach. A serious problem lies in the potential for dissonance between the externally imposed curriculum and the personal and specific needs of individual students. As a result, teachers can get caught between implementing what the state requires and meeting students' educational needs. What the teachers are asked to do constrains their autonomy to make decisions regarding curriculum and instruction. Certain types of questions need now to be asked in class to prepare students for the State exams. Certain types of writing need to be emphasized. A certain scope of topics must be covered to ensure preparedness for the tests. Skills, questions, and problems must address state-defined aspects of mathematics or language arts and be presented in a way consonant with the State tests in order to prepare students to succeed in this exercise, further constraining the teacher's autonomy.

Among other reasons, the erosion of teacher autonomy and opportunity to meet individual learning differences make high-stakes tests like the MCAS the subject of considerable debate. Being closest to the situation, teachers have much to tell about what is really happening in their classrooms as they experience the mounting state pressures to conform and perform to externally dictated standards, but their observations and considerations are too often missing from the debate.

However close to educational situations, teachers apparently remain voices from the lowest tier of authority in the estimation of political and business forces. They are conduits for the changes, but few are asked to weigh in publicly on the debate surrounding the change to a more 'accountable' system that measures students on standardized tests and evaluates teacher and school competence based on those

measures alone. Still the debate continues to surface, for the business model of accountability challenges fundamental beliefs about achievement inequities (their causes, their cures and, perhaps, their inevitability in a society where the gap between rich and poor seems unbridgeable) and challenges beliefs about how education is best realized in a democracy.

High-stakes test opponents often describe the loss of teacher autonomy and resulting disadvantages to effective learning. As one Massachusetts principal phrased it, "If you listen to the rhetoric, the whole theme is we're going to help you because you don't know how to do it" (Boston Globe Magazine, 2003, p.18). So dominant has the MCAS become that teachers now carry test-prep booklets into classes and rush to cover all required topics before testing days. Aspiring administrators are reported to bemoan, "the narrowing of curriculum." Teachers no longer appear to control the curricula presented in their local classrooms. This loss of professional autonomy is one of the central problems to emerge in the drive to standardization. Teachers lose their authority to govern the classroom and serve their students while political forces gain ever-strengthening control over the American institution with the greatest potential for equalizing opportunity for all learners, regardless of their personal circumstances. The problem then sets the purpose for inquiry in this study: What happens to teachers when authority to control high-stakes education assessments rests in hands at a distant helm, and what happens to their curriculum, instruction, and ability to teach to individual differences in their local classrooms under the press of such assessments?

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this descriptive “non-causal” research study (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was to illuminate positive and negative effects of high-stakes testing on teachers’ professional practice, their working autonomy (Friedman, 1999) as experienced in local classrooms and perceived by teachers themselves. Specifically, the study seeks to shed light on teachers’ perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their decision-making about mathematics and English language arts curriculum and instruction and teaching to meet students’ individual differences in local classrooms. Three central research questions guide this study:

- What are teachers’ perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their autonomy to make curriculum decisions in their local classrooms?
- What are teachers’ perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their autonomy to make instructional decisions in their local classrooms?
- What are teachers’ perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their teaching to meet individual differences of students in their local classrooms?

Definition of Terms

There will be nine terms used repeatedly in this study: autonomy, curriculum, curriculum framework, high-stakes tests, individual differences, instruction, local classrooms, MCAS and perceptions. When other terms important to the study are used,

they will be described in context. The nine major terms are understood in the following ways:

Autonomy

Webster's Dictionary defines autonomy as "the quality or state of being self-governing, especially the right of self government." In its adjective form, the dictionary describes autonomous as "undertaken or carried on without outside control" and "existing or capable of existing independently" with the synonym being "free".

Researcher Isaac A. Friedman (1999), defines teachers' work autonomy this way:

An individual with a high degree of autonomy works independently, initiates new activities, and is free to change existing work procedures in an effort to adapt them to changing conditions and situations. On the other hand, an individual with a low degree of autonomy will not make any independent decisions or will make only those decisions regarding technical matters that do not affect the basic principles or procedures of the job. (p. 60)

Lev Vygotsky infers that autonomy surfaces in the practice of intellectual freedom, as when a person "renders a ...meaning in his own words" (1997, p. 192). Paulo Freire further develops this idea of intellectual freedom.

One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one man's choice upon another, transforming consciousness of the man prescribed into one that conforms to the prescriber's. (Freire, 1997)

Free people, he says, "replace it (oppression or prescriptiveness) with autonomy and responsibility," both of which are crucial conditions for the quest to become fully human (1992, p. 31).

And if, as NCTM declares, "A major goal of school mathematics programs is to create autonomous learners...(because) students learn more and learn better when they

can take control of their learning by defining their goals and monitoring their progress” (NCTM, 2000, p. 21), it is imperative that teachers, too, exercise autonomy. As hooks, Dewey, Freire, Vygotsky and others note, oppressed and fettered teachers cannot act as effective models for autonomous learners. Education, writes Richard Shaull in his introduction to Pedagogy of the Oppressed, “...is to give voice to those submerged in the culture of silence...(so s/he) becomes a Subject who acts upon and transforms his world” (p. 12). Teachers, as prime members of the educational culture, are involved in the dynamic between Subject and Object conditions outlined by Freire. Their autonomy and ability to act out of “conscientizacao,” or critical awareness of conditions in which one acts or is acted upon, is a central subject of this study.

Autonomy, from the psychological perspective forwarded by Henry Murray in his seminal work, Explorations in Personality, is a state of being where one feels “free” or “independent.” The autonomous individual resists coercion. Furthermore, the autonomous individual is recognized as one who decides, “To avoid or quit activities prescribed by domineering authorities” (1938, p. 158). Through one of his research quotes that exemplify autonomous expression, Murray describes an autonomous person as “one who makes his own decisions.” Murray contrasts autonomy with “deference,” where one is “compliant” and “obliging” and one “...follows instructions and (does) what is expected of (him/her)” (1938, p. 154). Naturally, both autonomy and deference can be expressed to extremes, in which cases a person can become a defiant, unrestrained insurgent or a suggestible and subservient conformist.

Autonomy is a nearly sacred principle to Americans who claim, “I don’t want the government telling me what to do.” With teachers, however, it is not simply a case

of being restrained from following personal impulse, it is a case of being free to carry out professional responsibilities. By removing teachers' professional decision making rights, policy makers create an issue of teachers' professional and personal autonomy, as they evaluate students, teachers, and school systems according to standardized test scores. Autonomy in this study refers, then, to the exercise of independent and critical thinking resulting in freely made judgments about what is best to do under the given circumstances. It does not imply acting without awareness of the social environment in which one exists, rather it implies a sense of responsibility to facilitate intellectual growth and liberties for all members of the education community according to the community's values. Autonomy exists not expressly for self-expression or self-gratification; autonomy may be other-centered exercised through the capacity to freely respond to situations about which one must make decisions. And autonomy always exists within an interconnected web of influence from other individuals and groups.

Curriculum

"...(C)urriculums consist of both the external environmental conditions for learning and the students' perceptions of those conditions," according to Sinclair and Ghory (1987, p. 87). They describe the external environment as a "complex network of physical, social, and intellectual conditions that shape and reinforce the behavior of individuals," while acknowledging that "curriculum also consists of individual's perceptions and interpretations of these environmental stimuli" (p. 87). Stanford University Education Professor Jo Boaler, in her Journal for Research in Mathematics Education article, "Learning from Teaching," concurs that curriculum reflects a

triangular relationship between teacher, student, and content existing within the circles of “environments” (2002, p. 245). It is a view of curriculum familiar to students of Dewey and Ralph Tyler.

Therefore, when using the term ‘curriculum’ this study will be referring to both the content presented and the instructional practices employed by the teachers in 9th and 10th grade mathematics and language arts classes. It will in addition, refer to educational philosophies or theories of learning underpinning the curriculum.

Curriculum Framework

The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (2000) includes seven sets of standards “created to advance educational reform in Massachusetts”; however, this study is concerned only with the Mathematics Curriculum Framework and the English Language Arts (ELA) Framework, sometimes termed the ‘Standards’ which will be referred to as the Curriculum Framework, or Framework or Standards. All standards include ‘guiding principles’ that “articulate a set of beliefs about the teaching, learning, and assessing” of subject content and content area ‘strands’ that include ‘general standards’ regarding “what students should know and be able to do” which more specifically articulate ‘learning standards’ for various grade levels. The Mathematics Curriculum Framework includes four strands of mathematical content: number sense and operations; patterns, relations, and algebra; geometry; measurement; and data analysis, statistics, and probability. It also includes a “Habits of Mind” section not found in the ELA Framework. Concepts from the “NCTM Standards 2000” document guided the clustering of the learning standards that are organized by two-year grade

spans or single-year courses. Of interest here are the 9th to 10th grade spans and the Algebra I and Geometry courses. The English Language Arts Curriculum is comprised of four content strands: language, reading and literature, composition, and media, with the grades 9 and 10 standards central to this study (See Appendix A for overview sections from these particular standards).

High-Stakes Tests

Testing expert James Popham describes two main conditions that define high-stakes tests: “There are significant consequences linked to individual students’ test performance. The students’ test scores determine the ‘instructional success’ of a school or district” (2001, p. 33). Any test that has connected with it important consequences is considered ‘high stakes.’ As renowned educator Deborah Meier wrote in an e-mail dated 2/17/03 “A high-stake mandate only means that a lot rides on the results for kids (promotion, grades), schools (rank order, humiliation, takeover), professionals (merit pay, bonuses, hiring/firing), communities (real estate values, school consolidations, voter responses).” In this study, the MCAS tests are termed high-stakes tests because they regulate high school diploma receipts dependent upon passing grades for both the English Language Arts and Mathematics tests at the 10th grade level and because schools face sanctions for failure to improve low scores for all students.

Individual Differences

Acknowledging that education is not a ‘one size fits all’ endeavor, the NCTM states as one of its principles for school mathematics that effective teaching “requires

understanding what students know and need to learn and then challenging and supporting them to learn it well (2000, p.11). In order to challenge and support learners, it is, therefore, valuable for a teacher to address students' individual differences. In this study, the term 'individual differences' refers to the existence of multiple intelligences (Gardner) as well as developmental differences (Piaget, 1998; Duckworth, 1996; Vygotsky, 1997, and others) and socioeconomic or multicultural differences (Delpit; 1998, Glazer, 1997; Freire, 1992; Banks, 1991; Fairclough, 1989, and others).

The shared experience of a classroom

may mean something very different from one person to another, according to how each person organizes to take it in. (And so,) ...what is important is that (there) are different, valid ways of creating meaning of the same experience. (Duckworth, 1996, p.105 and p.111)

Individual differences then place specific demands on a teacher's methods of instruction and require ongoing professional decision making by teachers as to best methods and processes to employ when seeking to meet individual differences. In this study, individual differences will refer to students' particular ways of and needs for learning, and it shall not be construed to pertain solely to special education needs, but also to general learning differences among individual students.

Instruction

Instruction refers to classroom practices engaged in by teachers. It includes the broad elements of subject content and pedagogical approaches, as well as more specific elements. Those specific elements include texts used, pacing, sequence and general organization of curriculum content; teaching strategies such as the use of projects, work sheets, or group presentations and the like; assessment methods; evaluation systems;

curriculum presentation techniques, including the use of peer groupings such as pairs or small groups and teams as well as, whole group class discussions led by teachers or students; questioning practices which include the use of open vs. closed questions as well as the use of varying levels and types of questions, as in Bloom's Taxonomy—knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Bloom, 1956) and the time allowed for such questioning and discussion. The term instructional elements also refers to the inclusion or exclusion of supplementary materials and practices such as films, guest speakers, field trips, and additional readings.

“Instruction is a complex task because teachers constantly make decisions” about all dimensions of the curriculum - the expressed, implied and emergent (Sinclair & Ghory, 1987, p. 89). These aspects of curriculum necessarily include the wide range of practices listed above. Sinclair and Ghory further make the claim that improving instruction relies upon “improving teachers’ decision making through greater awareness of these critical curriculum dimensions” (p. 89).

Building on learning theories forwarded by Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Freire and others, the NCTM group has declared, “How the classroom environment is structured, determine(s), to a large extent, what students learn” (NCTM, 2000, p. 18). They recognize the many choices teachers make in establishing the classroom environment.

Moreover, they declare that:

Teachers establish and nurture an environment conducive to learning ... through the decisions they make, the conversations they orchestrate, and the physical setting they create. Teachers’ actions are what encourage students to think, question, solve problems and discuss their ideas, strategies, and solutions. The teacher is responsible for creating an intellectual environment where serious... thinking is the norm. More than just a physical setting with desks, bulletin boards and posters, the

classroom environment communicates subtle messages about what is important and valued in learning... (NCTM, 2000, p. 18)

The elaboration of content, they contend, “contains implications for instruction and includes expectations about teachers’ actions, such as the use of a variety of sequences, grouping procedures, instructional strategies and techniques for evaluation” (NCTM, 1989, p. 252). Thus the teacher’s instructional practices are constantly engaged to address the individual and class differences encountered in their local classrooms.

Local Classrooms

Local classrooms shall refer to the classrooms in which 9th and 10th grade teachers meet with students on a regular schedule for the purpose of learning. The local classrooms referred to in the current study are those in which either mathematics or English language arts (ELA) are taught in single schools. In general, there are other local classrooms within the single school.

MCAS

MCAS stands for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. When used in this study, the term refers to the standardized tests labeled ‘MCAS’. Instituted in 1998, the MCAS tests are administered every spring to more than 300,000 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 10th grade public school students in over 1,200 schools in the Commonwealth in a variety of subject areas. Because results can affect students’ retention, remediation, and graduation and can affect local control of school systems and teachers’ working conditions and work future, the MCAS is considered a high-stakes testing program. In this study, the terms “MCAS” and “the MCAS” are used

interchangeably, with both terms referring to the exams the system requires, unless otherwise noted.

Perception

A perception is a sense of a situation, an observation of it, believed to be true.

Murray, a psychologist, writes that it is what we attend to, apprehend and retain in memory (1938, p. 14), with apprehended meaning what we become aware of and grasp with understanding. Moreover, according to Murray, perceptions, like other 'subjective' constructions "constitute data of primary importance to most human beings" (1938, p. 47). As Vygotsky and Freire describe perception, it is "a way of seeing things" (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 170), situations, events or concepts in such a way as to lead, possibly, to changing strategies, new ways of handling those situations, events or concepts. Thus to perceive something is to believe we know it, though Freire (1992, p. 93) makes it clear that perception is not necessarily comprehension. Perception is generated from an individual's position in the world, one's values and experience and, therefore, is subject to misunderstanding from others' points of view. However, perceptions reflect how things appear to an individual, and can be either passive or critical. One can, according to Freire, either accept the status quo and the given representation of reality (by the dominant forces) or become critical, viewing the dynamics of the situation and conceiving of ways to change it. There is, he claims, "a relationship between the given objective fact (and) the perception men have of this fact..."(1992, p. 98). That relationship can either be oppressive or liberating. Murray

further explains that perceptions evolve from the interplay of the individual's psyche and environmental objects and situations over time.

Environmental objects and situations (such as MCAS) form a "press" on individuals, according to Murray. Such presses, he states, possess "a directional tendency," either beneficial or harmful, either positive or negative. This study concerns itself with teachers' perceptions of a situation, including their evaluations of that situation and, therefore, concerns itself with what Murray terms a "beta press" -- an environmental "mobile, autonomous" press that they perceive and evaluate for its positive and negative impacts. It is not a study of the press of MCAS itself (an alpha press), but of central characters' understanding and beliefs about that press's effects on their autonomy, their professional abilities to determine curriculum, to instruct as they see benefits students, and in particular to meet students' individual needs.

Vygotsky further elaborates on perception by distinguishing it from 'thought' and 'memory.' One may recall perceptions and have thoughts about them, he claims; but perceptions are more related to understanding than are memories and less conceptually organized than thoughts. It is the work of the researcher to tease meaning from the perceptions of participants in a study, though participants may also offer their own interpretations and thoughts about their perceptions.

Because, as bell hooks and other critical and feminist researchers and educators assert, an explanation for a phenomenon can be formulated from lived experience (hooks, 1994, p. 75), the perceptions of teachers regarding their lived experiences under MCAS contain the potential for delivering an explanation of reality that will help in

understanding the ongoing shifts in authority as regards decision making for curriculum and instruction in local classrooms.

Significance of the Study

This study implies both practical and theoretical significance, with its importance evident in three ways: 1) it explores the crucial interplay between teachers and the state authorities instituting high-stakes assessment tests; 2) by exploring this interplay, it contributes to the growing bank of research focused on high-stakes testing; 3) furthermore, the exploration nudges open classroom doors to allow a view of the educational scene playing out beneath the MCAS direction.

This study is important because it explores the tension between individuals and authority, one of humanity's fundamental issues. Socrates with the Athenian court, Jesus of Nazareth with Roman authorities, Ché Guevera with the Bolivian (and some say United States) oligarchy are but extreme examples of the interplay between the two forces, with at least two of these cases involving 'teachings.' The authority calls upon the individual to be silent. Sometimes, as in these cases, the individual refuses to succumb to the press exercised by external authorities. Everywhere the conflict between authorities and individuals exists, albeit more commonly in less dramatic form. The situation this study examines is one case. It examines the MCAS impact, symbol of State authority, on teachers' working autonomy to make decisions about local curriculum and instruction and to meet individual students' differences. Because the high-stakes testing movement now dominates the country's educational landscape, these

tensions between local teachers and distant authorities appear certain to gain prominence.

The frictions between seemingly opposing philosophies of education (and distribution of power) underlying the tensions described above come forward as this study looks at teachers' perceptions of their capacity to make independent curriculum and instructional decisions in the face of powerful state assessment mandates.

Fundamental, practical issues concerning what and how students are taught as a result of State institution of a standardized, high-stakes assessment program play out against a larger background where visions of what Dewey and Tyler termed 'progressive' educators clash with those termed 'traditionalists' or 'essentialists.' Through its exposition of teacher perceptions of the changes resulting from this ongoing shift from local to distant educational authorities as regards curriculum and instruction decision-making, this study unearths valuable knowledge about the issues involved in curtailing teachers' professional autonomy. This working autonomy, according to Friedman (1999), improves "organizational efficiency" and effectiveness (p. 58, p. 140). This study will also illuminate classroom changes that potentially impact hundreds of thousands of students whose needs may not be met as effectively under the new state-mandated assessment system.

This study adds to a growing body of work, relatively recent in development, that addresses conditions resulting from the State's exercise of authority to require high-stakes testing with established punishments based on test results. The field is peppered with texts published from the 1980s onward. Teachers, like Susan Ohanian (1999) and Professors Dale D. Johnson and Bonnie Johnson (2002) detail teachers' experiences in

the classroom where they are pitted against some parents, employers, professors and politicians (Johnson & Johnson, p.xvii) as they try to carry out their professional duties under pressure from distant authorities. Other researchers and educators such as Deborah Meier (2002), Walt Haney (2000), and Linda M. McNeil (2000) examine the testing experience and its impact on teachers, students, and schools.ⁱⁱ Still other researchers and educators look at the high-stakes movement from a broader perspective, presenting theoretical arguments and background, among them: James Popham (2001); Diane Ravitch (2000); Daniel P. & Loren B. Resnick (1985); and Thomas Kellaghan, et al. (1982). Some more than others of these voices have critiqued the emergence and growth of the

nationwide shift toward standards-based approaches to education, (in which) many states have begun to use standardized tests for the related purposes of establishing school accountability, determining student promotion, and driving stands-based curriculum reform. (Luna & Turner, 2002, p. 79)

Pragmatists focus study questions on issues of test validity or accommodating special demographic groups. Apologists construct supporting arguments for the authorities. It is the researchers closest to, if not in, the classrooms who most often view the situation, its conflicts and impacts, through a critical lens. None of the studies reviewed by this researcher highlighted differences between high- and low-scoring schools.

As a study of the interaction between individuals and authority mandates, this work is situated within the education debate about the rights of townspeople and local educators to conduct their local schools' academic programs in a way that serves the needs of the individual local students. The debate frequently addresses what is, or is not, lost or gained when a distant authority measures local performance using a measure that

some quantitative analysts and statisticians warn may be unreliable. In addition, the debate raises issues about ‘Subjectivity’ and ‘Objectivity’ as defined by Freire. (Freire states that “subjects” make decisions and act upon matters while others who make decisions act upon “objects”. (“Pedagogy of the Oppressed”) This study builds upon a long line of work by thinkers concerned with issues entwining education and freedom – Dewey and Freire chief among them. By listening to the individual voices of teachers engaged in the changeover to state-imposed mandates for curriculum, instruction and assessment, knowledge about and important understanding of the gains and losses endured surfaces. The knowledge lays the groundwork for future studies, perhaps, about the impacts of curriculum restrictions on teachers and schools enforced by even further-distanced authority – the Federal government.

On the practical level, this study is important because it illuminates vital issues underlying the pervasive high-stakes testing movement. Such tests have become the primary measure of performance in public school districts across the nation. Education Week’s “Quality Counts 2001” report stated that all fifty states

at that time had statewide assessments, although only forty states had developed standards in all core subjects. Forty-five states publicly rated the performance of the schools, sixteen had the power to close schools based on test scores, (and) twenty-two provided monetary rewards based on student performance. (pp. 68-71)

Testing requirements, extended now from MCAS to the ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education, “No Child Left Behind” Act, passed January 8, 2001), make it imperative that educators and citizens understand how such tests impact what is taught in public schools and how it is taught by teachers whose own role in public education appears to be shifting. This study takes an in-depth look at the experiences of teachers

in several schools to see how this most powerful and influencing school practice – the curriculum – is shaping up under MCAS pressures. Practical problems and practical responses are shared, shedding light on classroom realities associated with State-mandated assessments, high-stakes tests.

With its thick description (Geertz, 1993) of teachers' perceptions of the impact resulting from the need to operate under (1) the threat of state sanctions resulting from poor MCAS performance and (2) state rule via the Frameworks and MCAS, this study offers insight into the phenomenon of curriculum designed and implemented under state pressures and delivered by teachers publicly evaluated by the results. It will help educators and the public understand what really happens when state-mandated Curriculum Frameworks and high-stakes tests exert influence over the classroom teacher; therefore, the study will possibly inform future policy decisions by adding to the growing field of important research regarding this emerging phenomenon. Decisions to support or reject the radical departure from established systems of curriculum control - by anointing state authorities with powers formerly vested in authorities at the local level – are examined through this research, and a much-needed picture of the complex post-MCAS mathematics and English language arts classroom practice develops.

This study explores and shares teachers' perceptions of the MCAS influence on professional autonomy, so stakeholders gain deeper understanding of what happens when the locus of control for decisions about curriculum and instruction is removed from local to distant sources of power. This study will unveil some of the consequences of that program, in particular as they have emerged in 9th and 10th grade mathematics and language arts curricula.

To say the MCAS itself is significant is an understatement. Nearly one out of five Massachusetts high school seniors was expected to be denied a 2003 high school diploma due to failing all or a part of the test. Several schools now operate under state pressure to improve performance or risk the consequences. In some cases, town officials have been admonished, administrators have been released and teachers' practices closely monitored and critiqued. Some political, financial, and bureaucratic leaders have called for teacher testing when the scores do not improve. Teachers cannot remain immune to such threats, so they comply and make curriculum and instruction adjustments to accommodate the State. This study pries open the classroom door to report on these adjustments and accommodations, and this serves an important purpose; it unveils the too often unseen world of real classrooms that the State seeks to direct and influence through its policies and attending threats.

Approach to the Study

This descriptive, non-causal, study aims to show how the high-stakes, state-mandated assessment tests, the MCAS, affects secondary English and math teachers' professional autonomy to make curriculum and instructional decisions and to meet individual differences in local classrooms. Survey item responses, open-response question responses, and interview transcripts comprise the presented data, collected from sixty 9th and 10th grade mathematics and English teachers from high- and low-scoring schools (as measured on the MCAS). See Appendices G and H for samples of these documents. These data indicate in what ways the pressures of the MCAS inform

curriculum and instruction and the ways teachers' perceive their working autonomy to make decisions related to classroom practices.

Participating schools were randomly chosen from a selected sample of public secondary schools in Massachusetts. Officials at those schools were contacted and through them, teachers were notified of the opportunity to participate in the study. Only those teachers interested in participating in the study took part. See Appendices D and I for copies of the contact letters and the informed consent form.

Delimitations of the Study

This study seeks to generate a picture of 9th and 10th grade mathematics and English teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of MCAS on their autonomy to make decisions regarding curriculum and instruction and to meet individual differences in their local classrooms. Within the study, several delimitations surface. Among them: content areas and grades researched, population chosen for research, and sites selected.

Because of their importance to students, teachers, schools, and thus communities, this study maintains focus on the subjects of 9th and 10th grade mathematics and English language. Why 9th and 10th grade classrooms? Tenth grade classrooms represent the crucial cutoff point for students. Either they pass their 10th grade MCAS exams in mathematics and language arts, or they fail to receive a high school diploma. Pressure mounts for teachers, as they try to help students, especially low-level, minority, non-English speaking, and special needs students pass the State tests. Teachers know the test results can open doors for students' future plans, preserve

school integrity, and in some cases preserve aspects of school autonomy or even their own jobs. The tests became what Murray (1938) refers to as a ‘press’, an influencing event on the human psyche. It is at the 10th grade level that teachers must scramble to cover test-related topics, review test formats, and disrupt classes to accommodate the MCAS and to lift struggling students over the MCAS hurdle, though teachers at other levels report similar demands albeit with less pressure. Ninth grade classrooms are included because these educational experiences directly support the 10th grade curriculum, and it is assumed that 9th grade teachers, too, feel the MCAS ‘press’. While the secondary experience may not directly transfer to elementary teachers’ experiences, the study’s findings cover thematic threads relevant to teachers of all levels.

The study examines language arts and mathematics classes because both tests currently form the assessment criteria for graduation. Both present crucial venues for exploring the positive and negative influences of MCAS on curriculum and instruction. No other school subjects carry so much weight, though if DOE Commissioner Driscoll’s proposal to include a science exam in the high-stakes 10th grade battery carries, science teachers will be subject to the same pressures mathematics and English teachers now endure. Again, while the MCAS impact may not generate precisely the same pressures for teachers of untested subjects, it is likely that at least some of the findings will be relevant to these groups. Regardless of the content focus, the study itself offers a template for reviewing the impact of high-stakes tests on teachers, and that will likely prove of interest to those who teach or study curriculum development in fields such as science or history.

Teachers were chosen as the subjects of study because of the pivotal role they play in the execution of curriculum mandates. Teachers shape all classroom experiences, and teachers' voices must be heard in order to comprehend the effect high-stakes tests on teaching and learning. As Michael Apple writes in "Contradictions in School Reform," "...what we need to do is to pay close attention to what actually happens in schools to teachers, to children, and to successful and democratic educational practices when we look behind the rhetorical artifice" (2000, p. xviii). Teachers' voices and actions are elemental in this process of curriculum change, but as Linda McNeil, cofounder of the Rice University Center for Education states:

The sound bites that seduce policymakers always emphasize claims of benefits, not the actual costs. As documented in this book ("Contradictions in School Reform") the costs are great: a decline in the quality of what is taught and a new form of discrimination in the education of poor and minority kids. But perhaps the worst effect is the silencing of two voices most important in understanding the real effects of standardization, the teachers and the children. (2000, p. xxii)

Administration officials', students' and parental responses to the MCAS impacts on curriculum and instruction are not addressed. This decision in no way reflects a belief that the responses of these populations are irrelevant to understanding the effects of the MCAS tests and the Framework on local curricula. Rather, it was the author's decision to focus attention on the teacher as the primary agent of curriculum implementation.

This study looks at eight schools in Massachusetts, choosing to attempt deeper, rather than broader, dialogue and analysis. It will necessarily lack the intensity of detail that emerged from the Johnsons' year-long daily involvement in Louisiana's 'Redbud Elementary School' where they studied the impact of high-stakes standardized testing

(Johnson & Johnson, 2002), and the scope of the National Board on Educational Testing's study involving interviews with 360 teachers across the nation, however, an exploratory descriptive study does not lend itself to a longitudinal approach. Rather this study attempted to surface results that will be promising for future studies. Incremental changes may not be visible because the study intervenes at a moment in time five years after the high stakes tests were inaugurated. On the other hand, the study allows substantive and enduring changes to be highlighted.

Efforts have been made to select schools that represent polarities in performance on the MCAS - four schools from the top scoring secondary schools and four from the lowest scoring secondary schools. Note: while the state refers to schools that score well or poorly on the MCAS as 'high-' or 'low-performing,' this researcher chose to use the terms high- and low-scoring to refer to schools at which participants taught, for the study revealed that many a low-scoring school has areas of high performance. The disparity of performance between the two groups reflects notable differences in perceptions based on situation and yet a reinforcing similarity in perceptions that strengthens the idea of the MCAS as the governing force in certain adaptations and changes. The data reflect the inevitable mix of students and staff at any school. And from these data important themes regarding the impact of the MCAS on teachers' decision-making autonomy and ability to meet students' differences emerge.

The situations described are specific to Massachusetts and, therefore, not necessarily generalizable across states. Despite this limitation, it is expected that readers from other geographic locations will discover aspects of the study and its findings that resonate with their local experiences.

Dissertation Chapter Summary

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Descriptive paragraphs summarizing these five chapters follow. Chapter 1 describes the research problem, the purpose of the study and the three research questions, and the study's significance. Delimitations are presented, as are important definitions.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review related to teachers' professional decision-making within the MCAS framework in order to provide a conceptual base for the study. The literature review consists of three interrelated parts:

- Curriculum and teaching perspectives related to decision-making and the teacher's role in such decision-making
- High-stakes testing and the MCAS in particular
- The effect of the press of high-stakes tests on teachers, curriculum, and instruction

Chapter 3 details the design of the study, the procedures used for sample selection, and the methods used for the collection of data for addressing each of the three research questions.

Chapter 4 presents and discusses the analysis of the data and the results of the study. It is organized into sections according to data type and also according to the research questions.

Chapter 5 summarizes the major research findings, including a subsection on additional findings, and makes recommendations for action and for further research.

Chapter Summary

In summary, this study illuminates the impact of state-mandated, high-stakes testing on teachers' working autonomy to make professional decisions about curriculum and instruction and the meeting of individual differences in local classrooms. As the high-stakes testing movement sweeps across the nation, involving public schools at every level, the influence of the distant authority's actions on local schools, and teachers in particular, begs for consideration. The nation faces a teacher shortage, and teachers' perceived autonomy may play an important part in determining the viability of teacher-retention efforts. Perhaps more importantly, the impact of high-stakes testing on teachers' decision-making deeply influences teaching and learning in America's classrooms, as the findings of this study demonstrate. The education of millions of schoolchildren is at stake. The study's findings indicate that all students, and particularly low-level, minority, non-English speaking and special needs students, suffer from the negative impact of the high-stakes testing on curriculum and instruction because of the constraints imposed upon their teachers. The next chapter, Chapter 2, places the problem and purpose of this study in relevant context.

End Notes

¹A more comprehensive list of educators and researchers who address high-stakes testing issues and teachers' perceptions about or roles within high-stakes test programs includes the following who are not mentioned in this chapter: Sharon Nichols and David C. Berliner (2005); Marguerite Clark, Arnold Shore, Kathleen Rhoades, Lisa Abrams, Jing Miao, and Jie Li (2003); Jones, Jones & Hargrove (2003); Sandra Cimbricz (2002); Brett D. Jones & Robert J. Egley (2002); William A. Firestone, et al. (2002); Christopher Mazzeo (2001); Mary Alice Barksdale-Ladd and Karen F. Thomas (2000); Alfie Kohn (2000); Angela Valenzuela (2000); S.G. Grant (2000); Monty Neill (1999); Richard Rothstein (1998); David C. Berliner and Bruce Biddle (1995); Don Zancanella (1992) and Mary Lee Smith (1991).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review of literature addresses three topics salient to establishing a conceptual base for this study. The first section explores the importance of curriculum and curriculum decision-making within education, placing emphasis on the teacher's role in this decision-making. The second section discusses the emergence of rationales supporting and opposing testing for high-stakes purposes, including specifics about the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). The MCAS story and particulars described contextualize the social situation that currently confronts teachers and their students and forms the environment within which they operate. Murray, speaking in the early part of the last century, reminds us that the conduct of individuals "cannot be formulated without a characterization of each confronting situation, physical and social" (1938, p. 39). The third section presents current research and theory about the impact of standardized high-stakes tests on teachers, curriculum, and instruction. The purpose of the study arises when curriculum and teaching intersect with public policy making and political agendas as happened with high-stakes testing in general and specifically the MCAS. Research and theory have much to tell on each of these three subjects, which form the core of this literature review.

Curriculum and Teachers' Decision-making

Theories and practices related to curriculum development and implementation and development of cognition through instruction provide a fundamental framework against which teachers' perceptions regarding classroom curriculum and instruction

under the press of high-stakes testing can be situated and analyzed. Two pedagogical visions compete within the existing education environment. One vision sees education as content-driven, a process in which teachers hand down knowledge to students; this view has been adopted by policymakers seeking to install "accountability" measures for the public education system, such as high-stakes tests. Those holding the second vision view education as more student-centered and as a more complex endeavor, "not just a cognitive process, not just the transmission of facts and reasons." (Parker, 1993, p.115) Naturally, the focus of a pedagogical vision casts teachers' roles in its own light. Thus, the first section of this study's literature review examines the nature and importance of curriculum and curriculum decision-making by teachers in local schools and classrooms. Literature related to this section will contrast views held by the 'progressives' and 'liberationists' and the 'traditionalists.' These views inform the research regarding teacher autonomy to make professional decisions regarding curriculum and instruction as well as their teaching to meet individual student's differences in local classrooms. Ideas from the perspectives contribute as well to an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of actions taken within the MCAS phenomenon, particularly those relating to curriculum and instruction. Here the works of thinkers, scholars and practitioners merge to reveal the larger issues at stake.

Curricula composed of contents, sequences, methods, values and environments, act as the centerpieces and lynchpins of an education system. Whether one teaches in a madaris, a prison, a peasant village, or an American public school curriculum decision-making results in the central experiences provided as an education. The conceptualization of curriculum has altered over time, growing and refining as

understanding of teaching and learning has grown. Two main strands of thought regarding curriculum pertain to high-stakes testing and its impact on teachers' professional decision-making, their working autonomy. The first strand to be discussed can be considered content-centered. The second can be considered student-centered.

In his work entitled "Cognition and Curriculum" (1982), Eisner indicates that the earliest Western curriculum, derived from the Greeks, was based on rational, rather than empirical processes. "Mathematics and dialectics were its foremost vehicles since both depended upon the use of 'pure reason'," (p. 30) he asserts. The emphasis on rational, established knowledge resulted in the formation of an educational "canon" that anyone considered educated might be expected to know. In a world where books were rare and media non-existent, the Western canon formed the central curriculum for academic training, being challenged primarily in the last century when progressive, student-centered, multi-cultural, and liberationist theories gained a toehold in academic practice, particularly in public schools.

Among the modern-day champions of the academic canon, E.D. Hirsch, Jr., and Allan Bloom stand out. They became iconic voices used to support claims for reforming the public education system because, according to public school critics, the system had strayed too far from traditional academics and thinned itself in the process. Their emphasis on content, as opposed to experience, provided politically active educators like Lamar Alexander and Chester Finn with ammunition to blast developing educational practices based on the philosophies of student-centered, experience-oriented, non-traditional thinkers such as Dewey, Freire, Vygotsky, Piaget, etc.

Hirsch (1988) vocalized strong arguments against “the content-neutral ideas of Rousseau and Dewey” (p. 19). He warned that the abandonment of “a mastery of national culture”(p.18) would lead to “cultural illiteracy.” He acknowledged that multicultural education could inculcate “tolerance and provide a perspective on our own traditions and values,” but he declared, “it should not be the primary focus of national education” because it lacked the proven staying power of the classical curriculum which informed and supported all civilized advances. Hirsch lauded private schools because their “curricula ... impart more literate information than those of public schools” (p.116). He felt that the 1893 Committee of Ten’s recommendations and support for “traditional” subject matter showed a proper emphasis on academic content as the focus of education, as opposed to the 1918 Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education’s focus on general aims for education, such as health, vocation, and citizenship (p. 118). The issuance of this report, he writes, would declare “the most appropriate replacement for bookish, traditional culture (to) be material that is directly experienced and immediately useful to life in society” (p. 118), and would lead to a “focus upon the needs of the child and society, as Dewey had recommended” (p. 119). He, like the earlier Committee of Ten, espoused the philosophy that all children, whether headed to college or not, should receive the same cultural education, and that cultural education included a canon of content knowledge that would provide a common experience, a common knowledge for all school children, regardless of economic or social class. To that end, he and several colleagues devised a widely received dictionary of What Literate Americans Know, and advocated its use as a curriculum guide for educators.

Bloom's work (1987) preceded Hirsch's and was to some more opaque, more high-minded. Bloom decried "...the recent education of openness"(p. 26) which he claimed made truth relative and questioned all existing paradigms – especially the political and philosophical. He criticized the progressive education movement and, like Hirsch after him, championed "the classics."

Liberalism without natural rights, the kind that we knew from John Stuart Mill and John Dewey, taught us that the only danger confronting us is being closed to the emergent, the new, the manifestations of progress. No attention had to be paid to the fundamental principles or the moral virtues that inclined men to live according to them. To use language now popular, civic culture was neglected. And this turn in liberalism is what prepared us for cultural relativism and the fact-value distinction, which seemed to carry that viewpoint further and give it greater intellectual weight. (p. 29)

He dismissed the progressive movement as shallow and proposed schools and universities focus on the "Great Books," which he considered to be the "only serious solution" to what should be included in a liberal arts curriculum. His focus on content and on pre-existing truths, not students or processes or emerging truths, placed him in direct opposition to progressives, multi-culturalists, and student-centered educators.

Supporters of radical changes in public education (such as centralization of curriculum decision-making and assessment) revered Hirsch and Bloom. Reformist policymakers and theorists forwarded arguments for change based on economic ideologies and a reverence for modern business management practices, saying accountability needed to be established "Because costs have risen without commensurate gains in benefits" (Peterson, 1998, pp. 3-4), and schools subject to competition and "market discipline" will prove more efficient and successful. However, they saw in the two proponents of a return to classical education the pedagogical seeds planted that would yield several market ready programs– national 'high standards,'

objective measurements of productivity (standardized tests) and school choice— which they deemed necessary to transform America’s public school system into a free-market industry for which they ardently advocated. Their educational proposals called for high, reliable standards, high-stakes testing programs to evaluate public school and public school student compliance with these rigorous standards, and charter schools and voucher programs to be offered as alternatives to “failing” public schools. The Republican Reagan and Bush administrations and the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton supported most of these calls to change the public education system.

Advocates of small schools, small classes, adaptive curriculum, and curriculum changes instituted at the local level hold the other side of the debate table. These public school supporters believe that America’s schools are not all failed institutions. In fact, they challenge the “failing schools” perception, noting that American public schools have been doing a remarkable job of graduating more students than ever and producing the raw materials (students) destined to become computer entrepreneurs, media artists and chief executive officers as well as mechanics, store clerks and cooks. (Rothstein, 1998) Moreover, many support the claim made by former Secretary of Labor, Robert Reich (2001), among others, that the intellectual requirements for the 21st century will not be for the mastery of an existing, static, canon of knowledge, but for the attainment of higher order thinking and problem solving skills that provide citizens with the ability to acquire new knowledge and skills as needed in an ever-changing world. Like Deborah Meier, a renowned educator and transformer of urban schools, these proponents of increased local control and plurality, of high quality, research and experience informed curriculum, believe schools can “substantially affect the gap

between rich and poor where it will count, in the long haul of life” (Meier, 2000, p. 31) by “preserving plural definitions of a good education, local decision making, and respect for ordinary human judgments” (p. 29), as well as strong leadership. They imply that centralized decision-making will weaken rather than strengthen the dynamic public institution. However, school idealists currently excluded from positions of power lack sufficient voice to publicly promote their ideologies and pedagogies.² The unrelenting reality of urban school inequities and failures that 40 years of litigation and 30 years of curriculum advances have inadequately ameliorated further weakens their claims, though some argue that prevailing economic and social inequalities, as well as a lumbering adherence to traditional school models, have outweighed the power of the idealist progressives to enact changes necessary to overcome decades, if not centuries, of neglect and discrimination (Gittell, ed., 1998)

Meier, Sizer (Coalition for Essential Schools) and other educators who champion progressive education and oppose standardized curricula and high-stakes tests, draw on the philosophic works of Dewey, Freire and Apple and the cognitive works and education research of Montessori, Vygotsky, Piaget, Gardner, Eisner, and Kohn among others.

Dewey (1944) opposed the idea of a college-prep-for-all curriculum,

For one has only to call to mind what is sometime treated in schools as acquisition of knowledge to realize how lacking it is in any fruitful connection with the ongoing experience of the students how largely it seems to be believed that the mere appropriation of subject matter which happens to be stored in books constitutes knowledge.

Such appropriated knowledge he maintained, “...might as well be something about Mars or about some fanciful country unless it fructifies in the individual’s own life” (p.

42). Furthermore, he opposed what is known today as the “drill and kill” method of presentation, saying that all social interaction is educative, and “Only when it becomes cast in a mold and runs in a routine way does it lose its educative power” (p. 6). He forwarded ideas that grounded education in practical experience and students’ cognitive and social situations. He desired for schools to offer learning experiences that were both “personal and vital” (p. 8). His philosophy was formed in contrast to the traditional education philosophy that proposed a curriculum “that returned to the intellectual methods and ideals that arose centuries before scientific method was developed” (1938, p. 86). Sounding almost like Maria Montessori, Dewey wrote,

that experiences, in order to be educative must lead out into an expanding world of subject-matter, a subject matter of facts or information and ideas. This condition is satisfied only as the educator views teaching and learning as a continuous process of reconstruction of experience. (1938, p. 87)

To him, individuals and their experiences, not subject content, formed the source for learning and especially not subject content derived from distant, ancient, and stagnant sources. Dewey understood education as a dialogue between teacher and student, not as a transmission of teacher knowledge onto students. Such a view of learning does not encourage standardized testing, for education in this light is too dynamic, too local, to be regulated and enforced by distant authorities.

Dewey’s work was reflected in the research and theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, who understood knowledge as a construction of the student who undergoes experiences (Piaget) mediated by a teacher who “scaffolds” learning (Vygotsky). Thus, learning happens within an individual as s/he “accommodates” new information and understandings and learning occurs between one individual and another who seeks the

student's "zone of proximal development" and nudges one forward by presenting ideas that push the frontiers of that zone. The cognitive development they discussed required teachers to pay close attention to students and to offer learning content for which students were developmentally prepared. And as one teacher in this study noted, the high-stakes testing program has reversed that process. He likened the current high-stakes testing process to athletics and said it is as if children are asked to win a championship whether or not they are prepared for tournament play. The tests are given and students must take them when scheduled, not when they are fully prepared for them in a teacher's judgment.

Freire's work extended beyond "progressive" to become "liberationist." The Brazil-based educator repeatedly and openly criticized educational "banking." He called the transmission of a static curriculum based on others' conceptions of what knowledge is important to possess "oppressive" and declared that it "anesthetizes and inhibits creative power." treats men and women as "objects" and is a "practice of domination." He strongly opposed the content-oriented theorists, proclaiming, "The banking method emphasizes permanence and becomes reactionary" (p. 72). For Freire, true education evolved in praxis, in dialogue between teacher-students and student-teachers. Curriculum, according to Freire, is not established by the teacher for the student to acquire; it emerges from the dialogue and "investigation of the people's thinking—thinking which occurs only in and among men together seeking out reality" and in "Producing and acting upon their own ideas—not consuming those of others...." (p. 100). Freire, like Dewey, rejects a standardized curriculum established by external and

distant authorities, and therefore, rejects standardized tests that measure, according to his philosophy, the depth of a man's oppression rather than the scope of his intelligence.

Currently Michael Apple and Eisner speak to the constraints upon public education and its efforts to remain dynamic and progressive. Apple (1990) posits that curriculum scholars have not been driving curriculum. Rather, he explains, several major forces, operating far from local classrooms, drive curriculum. Among the forces he faults— standardized text books and “...a ‘technocratic’ belief system both in education and in the larger society which seemed to assume that if something moved, it should be measured,” and “...the steady growth of federal and state intervention in the shaping of curriculum policy, which was stimulated by cold war ideologies and the pressures of international economic competition” and which has become more visible “As the conservative restoration gained power during the 1980s” (p. 529). Eisner (1990) concurred with Apple's position that these days' curriculum scholars seem “irrelevant” in the modern educational schema. Furthermore, he argues that there has been little universal and substantive change in educational practice for decades because of stabilizing factors like school structures, textbooks “designed to take no risks,” and standardized testing. He claims, “Standardized tests are intended to measure the achievement of large groups of students for whom there are common expectations. Deviation from the content to be covered constitutes a political and professional hazard for teachers” (p. 525). He charges that educational innovation relies on change “not only in the form of educational method used, but also in the content and goals of education” (p. 525). Such innovation further relies “on the desire to cultivate productive idiosyncrasy among students” (p. 525). He acknowledges that “some common

educational fare is reasonable and appropriate for all students,” (but) “standardized tests that make invisible the unique and productively idiosyncratic in students perform a conservative function in school programs.” “‘A Dictionary of Cultural Literacy,’” he adds, “is a testament to such a conservative function”(p. 525). Both Apple and Eisner call for a flexible curriculum, responsive to local needs and capable of generating and sustaining unique, creative approaches to knowledge acquisition. They, like earlier progressive voices, see learning as a more fluid process and knowledge as less settled than classicists do.

Theorists espousing both pedagogies want what is best for children, but disagree in how they define ‘best.’ Their arguments have played out on public and political battlefields where the power to set public education policy remains the Helen of Troy. Radical policy reformers demand a return to a more classic and competitive curriculum with an emphasis on established Western ideas, basic skills and of traditional methodologies, standardized testing, retention, and increased remediation of test-determined ‘failing’ students. Joining this group are those who feel all children will be better served by a broad mix of public and private schools supported by public dollars allotted to families who could then shop for the best learning environment for their children. They argue that public schools do not currently equalize education and propose that the way to ensure they do lies in holding all schools accountable for the same basic academic content standards as tested on standardized tests determined by a central, unifying authority. The simplicity of the argument provided legislators with an apparently quick, uncomplicated solution to the long-lingering problem of education

disparity. These legislators leaned on arguments like those of educator Chester E. Finn, Jr., who believes,

...when our premier education goal is to close race-related achievement gaps, it is bizarre to settle for academic outcomes adjusted for 'demographics and family economics.' Such statements imply that poor and minority kids ought not be expected to attain proficiency.... (2004, p. 1)

Michael Cohen, Kati Haycock and Finn (2004) further argue, "Many high school graduates are deluded into thinking they are well-prepared, simply because they take the courses, earn the credits, and pass tests required of them (by public school teachers)" (2004, p. 38). They advocate strongly for high-stakes tests as essential for every child's achievement and claim:

...for all the harsh criticisms leveled by anti-testing advocates, ...most of these tests aren't nearly rigorous enough to ensure that those who pass them are prepared for postsecondary education or work. We need to steadily raise the floor for performance to the 12th grade level.... The next step is to keep ratcheting up, not lowering, requirements. We cannot prepare citizens to swim in the adult waters of today's turbulent global economy by letting them thrash about in the kiddie pool. (p. 38)

Opposing Finn and other reform supporters are those who believe the standardized canon of curriculum reinforces the status quo that favors the wealthy and well educated, (Lemann, 1998) or that it will result in desertion of public schools by those hoping to ride the private school train to wealth and status. The end result, they claim, will be an erosion of public school financing and the ghettoization of public schools. Concurrently, they believe that the centralized decision making and implementation of curricula (standards) and assessments (tests) will undermine democratic processes by consolidating power in the hands of elite and distant individuals who know little about the teachers or the children subject to their decrees.

Furthermore, such curricular hegemony constrains pluralistic expression and investigation that promotes cognitive development of all children in the ways they learn best. These others—James A. Banks, McNeil and Johnson & Johnson among them—often favor multicultural, social, constructivist and integrated curricula in which experiential and inquiry-based methodologies and respectful relationships are developed. These are the inclusionists, who want public schools to be integral components of the community where all children are valued for their strengths, all community members are valued for their insights, retention is a measure of last resort, and academic excellence is demonstrated by all learners through the quality of their work rather than their scores on multiple-choice and short-answer tests designed by people who have little idea what is happening in local classrooms.

These same camps of thought (content-centered and student-centered) uphold differing views of teaching and teachers' roles within the curriculum decision-making process, as well. Progressive educators view curriculum, not solely as content taught, but as an interweaving of content, instruction and learning where teachers play a central role. As Palmer Parker, writes in To Know as We Are Known, "In every classroom there are really three parties to the conversation (the discourse of seeking truth): the teacher, the students and the subject itself" (1993, p. 98). Palmer, like Tyler (1949) and Dewey, sees the interaction of teachers and students as central to curriculum development and implementation. It is Tyler who urges teachers to "know" students in terms of their practices, knowledge, ideas, interests, attitudes and backgrounds in order to produce effective teaching. By defining three dimensions of curriculum— the "expressed" or written course of study with its objectives and defined subject matter;

the “implied” or “hidden” curriculum that involves unarticulated aspects of a curriculum and the resulting unintended learning that occurs, and the “emergent” curriculum which surfaces through adaptations and adjustments teachers make in order to align the expressed and implied curricula “with each other and with learners,” (Sinclair & Ghory, 1987 pp. 88-93) reinforce the status of teachers as key players in curriculum decision-making. What teachers attend to daily becomes the emergent curriculum (unless totally scripted), and what they, under State direction, work to prepare students for (the MCAS tests, for example) within the expressed math or English curriculum becomes the hidden curriculum.

Because teachers are or can be key leaders in making curriculum decisions, however routine, (Friedman, 1999) by promoting learning in local classrooms, they hold particular importance in discussions about curriculum. Always, the teacher is central in curriculum events. As Palmer puts it, “The teacher can provide an educational experience through setting up an environment and structuring the situation...” (1993, p. 64). The central role of the teacher in determining the classroom experience with its attendant reflection of political and social policies and practices guides the curriculum research in this study. S/he, the teacher, is the final arbiter between the student and content. S/he, the teacher, decides in an ongoing decisional process what material is presented to students in class, how it is presented and evaluated, and what influences – ideological, social, pedagogical or personal – guide those decisions. As Sinclair and Ghory summarize, teachers play a “key role in making decisions about curriculum” (1987, p. 85). If, then, there are curriculum impacts from statewide institution of a discriminating evaluation tool, it is the teacher through whom such impacts must

necessarily be delivered. It is his/her decisions and actions that will testify to or oppose the power of the evaluation tool, the MCAS tests for example, to shape curriculum. In order to make the professional decisions required to educate children, one might think that teachers need to tap the resources of their own training and judgment. Not everyone agrees.

The political and social elements of curriculum, while ignored by Tyler and other strong proponents of objectives-based curriculum (Eisner, 1990), further underscore teachers' decision-making role. Teachers, through their overt and covert curricula that repeat and spiral lessons, come to inform world perspectives that, for instance, either support equality among humans or do not. Some lessons teach people to value each voice as a developing "knower;" some lessons reinforce hierarchies of an academic aristocracy where some "know" and others do not, and these hierarchies reinforce political/economic hierarchies that concentrate power, like knowledge, in the hands of a select few. The content-specialist view of curriculum tends to align with views of centralized, distant authority—"knowers"—as the source of standards-setting. These stakeholders contend that the teacher is not to be entrusted with key decision-making about curriculum and assessment. They believe the result of leaving education decisions to local authorities, such as public school teachers, has resulted in social promotions, low expectations, and unequal educational opportunities for all students. These pedagogues and policymakers often envision a more technical role for teachers, one in which teachers determine how to achieve the goals set by distant authorities and teach the content to be assessed in the ways that more knowledgeable, distant authorities determine to be appropriate.

“I, for one, believe that educators have profound responsibility to perform more than a technical role in the school system,” Eisner wrote in his work on “Cognition and Curriculum” (1982, p. 20). In 1990, Eisner sensed that teachers were losing professional status as curriculum decision-makers, and he attributed the silencing of teachers’ and curriculum specialists’ voices to the resurgence of traditionalist, transmissionist philosophies and practices. Deciding what is important knowledge to share, according to Eisner, is a major problem in modern day America.

Part of the solution for Bennett (former Secretary of Education William Bennett) and others is to take authority away from many of those professional educators who have supposedly had it. This attitude bespeaks a profound mistrust of teachers, administrators, and curriculum scholars. They are decidedly not part of the solution; they are part of the problem. (1990, p. 527)

Others argue that decision-making exists as an inherent element of teaching, and that the granting or denying of autonomy to make curriculum and instruction decisions has serious repercussions for teachers and society at large. Teacher authority and autonomy to make professional decisions about curriculum, instruction and meeting individual differences are endemic to their work, as Friedman (1999) reports. Friedman outlines four areas in which teachers make constant and substantive decisions:

achieving

a profound understanding of their students’ personal, psychological, and scholastic needs; creat(ing) positive relations between teachers and students and between students themselves in an effort to meet student’s psychological needs; us(ing) teaching techniques and aids to optimize student learning; and us(ing) counseling and assessment techniques for dealing with discipline problems and inappropriate behavior. (p. 60)

Furthermore, he explains teachers with “...a high sense of autonomy have been found to be more willing and supportive of change” (p. 59). The willingness to change becomes

crucial, whether one seeks to institute a system dedicated to dynamic progressive education or to impose high-stakes testing, for both represent serious changes for teachers. Joan Ferrini-Mundy of the National Research Council writing in 1999 offers supporting testimony to Friedman's conclusions, describing "Teaching (as) a process of making informed decisions based both on goals and understanding of where students are" (p.11). And this decision-making autonomy has far-reaching implications for teachers and all those involved with the education system, for as Jones, Jones and Hargrove (2003) indicate, "...teachers have the need to be self-determining and autonomous within their job environment" in order to experience the job satisfaction that others say helps retain teachers in the classroom. It must be noted, however, that teachers are seldom the sole or primary determiners of curriculum goals. An NCTM survey of teachers on "Who determines what is taught in your school?" reported in the April 1999 issue of "Mathematics Education Dialogues," indicated that only 13% perceived that teachers determined curriculum. The majority of respondents indicated that curriculum decisions are made at the state/province level or at the district level (with much of the district level decision-making influenced by state or province officials). What teachers may want or need in order to optimally carry out their educator roles apparently remains outside their grasp.

Current studies indicate that high-stakes testing affects the autonomy and decision-making of teachers at whatever level they perceive to occur or practice decision-making. (Cimbricz, 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 2002; Smith, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1990) And whether or not that decision-making occurs at the conceptual level, as some like Dewey, Freire, Apple and Eisner might suggest is beneficial, or at

the routine level, the decision-making of and exercise of autonomy by teachers cannot help but influence learning in the classroom. One particular consequence involves the perceived facilitation or hindrance of the very teacher change sought by education reformers. Smith and Hofer (2002) reported that among the working conditions that influenced teacher change the most the “freedom to construct their own curriculum” was one of the four most important factors. The authors reported that

...Being required to use a particular curriculum in the classroom limited teacher change; teachers who felt they were able to make changes in the goals, content, materials, or activities in their classrooms were better able to take action... (p. 6).

Teachers pressured by state mandates to present certain mathematics or certain language arts topics, skills, and assessments in order to produce viable scores on a state-driven standardized test may then be more inclined to resist rather than embrace change.

Teacher autonomy is important not only because it links to job satisfaction and effectiveness (Friedman, 1999), but also because it is essential in the workplace of the future. As a Rand report on labor and population reports,

companies have been moving toward more participatory, ‘high-performance’ work systems. Such practices invest greater authority and problem-solving responsibilities in front-line employees rather than managers. (Rand, p. xxv)

In today’s world autonomy is recognized as a state sought by whole cultures of people (Kurds, Tibetans, Palestinians) in order that they may exercise their “natural’ rights.” Now is a time full of talk about “autonomous living arrangements” for elderly citizens and “autonomous learners” who seek understanding and knowledge driven by their own compelling interest and drawing upon their own reasoning. Current research shows, it is

also a time when the working autonomy of teachers may be slipping away, grasped by distant authorities to serve a distant purpose.

Curricula, reduced by current political vernacular to “standards” and designed for an array of venues, not merely the traditional local public school, emerge from a convergence of political maneuvering, pedagogical and ideological beliefs, and classroom practices. Curricula, then, are cultural acts. Cultural acts, Paulo Freire reminds us, can “either serve domination (consciously or unconsciously) or ...serve the liberation of men” (1992, p. 180). And determining whether reforms serve democracy or reinforce oligarchies is a complicated task, for rhetoric is used as often to disguise as to illuminate truth. And as Freire notes, motives are as often unconscious as conscious.

Closing

This section outlined the importance of curriculum and teachers as agents of curriculum enactment. The codified, content-centered curriculum supporters were contrasted with those who promote a more fluid, student-centered curriculum, as these two stances appear at odds within the high-stakes testing movement. In addition, the two positions tend to hold different views of the teacher and the teachers’ role regarding curriculum. In this section, teacher’s role in curriculum decision-making was discussed, as well. The importance of autonomy in teacher’s professional work received specific attention.

Because schools and teachers touch every life in America, what they teach and how they teach and where they teach powerfully shapes society at large and individuals in particular. A broadened awareness regarding curricula power, and if one adheres to

the progressive school of thought, teachers' power, to affect politics, economics and culture has sparked intense interest in controlling them. A wide variety of stakeholders, who for years were mostly silent partners in the public education process, have emerged as educational power brokers. Now, from the classroom to the auditorium, from the cafeteria to the athletic fields, from the principal's to the superintendent's office, from the state offices to the halls of the United States Congress and White House, curriculum discussions and proclamations resound. In its description of high-stakes testing and the MCAS in particular, the next section outlines one of the most potent methods state and federal authorities have devised to effect change in local curricula and teaching practices.

High-Stakes Testing and the MCAS

The first part of this section traces the historical development of the high-stakes testing movement from a conceptual perspective as well as a political perspective. Relevant pedagogical stances are reviewed, which overlap with the stances reviewed above. Testimony from psychometricians dedicated to testing follows the outline of development for the high-stakes testing program, and additional testing issues are raised. The telescopic view of high-stakes testing turns microscopic, as the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (the MCAS) becomes the focus of the latter part of this section. As the high-stakes testing example central to this study, the MCAS warrants special attention. High-stakes testing emerges as a complex phenomenon with several thematic threads worthy of unraveling.

High-Stakes Testing

Lemann (1999) and Mazzeo (2001) present two views of the testing movement's conceptual development. Lemann outlines a movement driven by a desire to implement a "meritocracy," a movement with social and political as well as educational consequences. Mazzeo puts forth a narrower view of the testing movement, focusing exclusively on the educational developments and uses for tests.

Mazzeo (2001) outlines the history of state testing and assessment in conceptual terms. The three epochs he describes are the "examination" period from 1865-1915, when tests were used to determine who would pass on to eighth grade or high school because opportunities for advanced school were limited, so it was in the interest of the state to test; the "student guidance" period from the 1920s to the 1960s, in which testing was used to locate students in appropriate academic programs, to diagnose learning problems and guide students properly, concepts based, according to Mazzeo, on a view of student abilities as "static" and a "a belief that schools could not influence student performance, except at the margins" (p. 1) (others might argue that such testing sought ways to address each students' idiosyncratic uniqueness); and the "accountability" era which he defines as starting in the 1970s and extending into the present. Mazzeo views the concept of accountability as the current engine of State mandated testing. The drive for accountability started in the 1970s, but took on deeper and fuller dimensions in the 1980s when "states began shifting the focus of their assessment policies from detecting problems to effecting the behavior of individuals and institutions." (Mazzeo, 2001, p. 2) Central to this shift were beliefs that schools played a major role in how students learn (as opposed to what Mazzeo considers the earlier "student guidance" belief that student

abilities are static, allowing schools to influence performance only at the margins) and that standardized testing offers a precise way to measure student performance (p. 2).

While Mazzeo correctly identifies the increased “salience of education in politics” (p.12) as a crucial element in the shift towards state involvement in educational policy-making and, therefore, legislatively mandated statewide testing programs, he downplays the role that business and political forces played.

Lemann, author of “The Big Test,” outlines the development of testing starting in the 1920s and 1930s, when Harvard President James Bryant Conant conceived a new admission’s process to Harvard University and the standardized testing movement was being born. Conant wanted to admit students who were brilliant, whether or not they were aristocrats, but he needed a way to determine who the brilliant were. This movement was later paralleled in Britain, where Michael Young of England’s Labour Party penned The Rise of the Meritocracy (1958), in which he foretold “the old landed aristocracy would become irrelevant and would be replaced by a new upper class made up of highly intelligent, well-educated people” (Lemann, 1999, p. 118). However, Young protested the self-proclaimed “provision of universal opportunity,” afforded by testing that would weed out the lesser from the greater intelligences because he saw how it might undermine social justice. “The Labour Party,” he wrote,

...deprived of both its leadership and an unfair class system to complain about, withers and dies. Highly intelligent people intermarry and pass on their brainy genes to their offspring, so that meritocratic upper class begins to look like an aristocracy, more deserving of its place but also more arrogant than the previous elite based on inherited wealth. (p. 120)

Conant and his fellow administrator Henry Chauncy, a testing enthusiast who came to Conant’s rescue, were not concerned about the loss of social justice. They wanted only

the opportunity for the finest minds to attend Harvard and other Ivy League universities. To this end, Conant insisted that the test Chauncy implement indicate aptitude, not achievement. The test he envisioned came to be known as the SAT, Scholastic Aptitude Test.

Lemann asserts that many early testing proponents, like Edward Thorndike, Ben Wood and William Learner were geneticists who believed intelligence favored Europeans, and especially Nordic Europeans. Lemann describes the Progressivists' opponents' camp, as one that fostered "the idea that tough, uniform standards should be imposed on American schools"(p. 22). Lemann explains that when Learned, of the Carnegie Foundation, stood as the general in the camp, he engaged with Ben Wood in a multi-year study of Pennsylvania schools in the 1930s and declared,

The high schools and colleges of Pennsylvania were in a shocking mess. Any student who amassed the proper number of credit hours, just by sitting in class, could obtain a high-school diploma. ... Nobody along the way, in Pennsylvania or anywhere else in the United States, endeavored to find out whether students were learning anything. (p. 22)

For Learned, the answer to this disturbing situation lay in the institution of standardized achievement tests.

The idea animating the Pennsylvania Study was to establish a body of material that all students in high school and college should be required to master, test them on it, and ruthlessly weed out the student population on the basis of the test results. Then the United States could become a technocracy, led by a coterie of college graduates who would be highly skilled experts. (pp. 22-23)

This description resembles closely the core beliefs of today's test advocates.

Development of standard curriculum frameworks, which inform assessments like MCAS (and which may in turn be defining the Curriculum Frameworks³), resulted precisely from this line of thinking. In the 1980s and 1990s national business,

educational, and political leaders in the nation, as well as those from Massachusetts and other states used the need to end 'social promotions,' or diplomas granted for attending and passing a local school's prerequisite number of credit courses as a reason to intercede in local education policy decisions. They advocated for and continue to promote a uniform curriculum to be implemented in all public schools across the nation. They imply in such an argument that local schools lack the ability to set and assess viable goals for students to achieve in order to receive a high school diploma. Mastery of the national curriculum is best determined, they have decided, by issuing a universal, standardized test to all students, regardless of educational goals or learning status. Within the standardized system, learning challenged, special needs, bilingual and impoverished students all take the same test as mainstream, middle class, native speaking students at the same time and under the same conditions. To be assessed, students take the test when and how it is offered, not necessarily when or how appropriate.

Current and ongoing political and social issues inform the history of the high-stakes movement. Schooling concerns command large areas of note on the political as well as the economic agendas of the elected and non-elected leaders of the United States, a group occasionally referred to as "the elite" or the "mandarins" (Lemann, 1998) or the "dominant bloc." (Fairclough, 1989) What forced, with such overt power, curriculum issues onto the political and economic agendas was a distinct convergence of ideologies and events. As a result of this convergence, two radical breaches of the educational tower occurred in the 1980s and 1990s when the national government entered the fray surrounding curriculum development and assessment (Jennings, 1998)

and the attachment of public schools to students in particular geographic locations began to be severed. These changes, most recognizable as the standards movement, with its emphasis on curriculum frameworks and standardized testing, and the school choice movement, with its advocacy for public school choice, charter schools, and vouchers, have been promoted as sweeping efforts to attack the sources of inequality in America's classrooms (Thernstrom, 2000). In reality, these reforms are disruptions of efforts aimed at achieving parity. This disruption works to legitimize hierarchical patterns favoring an elite, though as Nicholas Lemann notes in "The Big Test," this elite is seen as a meritocracy, not an aristocracy. Within it, power and wealth are not bestowed upon citizens by privilege of birth position, but by privilege of academic worthiness.

Beginning with the Supreme Court's Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education decision in 1954, the reform movement in education was increasingly dependent on political actions to trigger changes. The overlap between political rights and educational opportunities crystallized in the public mind. Citizens came to understand that while, as Ford Foundation Director Alison Bernstein wrote in her forward to "Strategies for School Equity,"

No other nation on earth has been more committed to providing free and effective primary and secondary school education for all its children, ... the United States has also produced a legacy of unequal and inadequate schooling, especially for its most disadvantaged students. (1998, p. viii)

Activists recognized that educational inequalities had to be addressed to effect political equality for the disadvantaged. This conceptual linkage generated the first wave of reform changes in the second half of the twentieth century. The early efforts, primarily led by community activists and legal experts, aimed at correcting the

disparities created by race-driven and class-driven policies at work throughout the nation. With great clarity, the courts saw that unequal distributions of wealth and power within local school districts resulted in the marginalization of certain groups of citizens – African-Americans, Latinos, and the poor. Though promised equal opportunity, these children could not hope to embrace that opportunity because their schools were underfunded, their teaching staffs inadequate, and, according to some theorists, their curricula excluded them (Heath, 1983; Delpit, 1995; Fairclough, 1998). Through a series of court cases – San Antonio School District v. Rodriguez (1973); Serrano v. Priest (1971), etc. – outlined by Kirk Vandersall in his article, “Post-Brown School Finance Reform” (1998, pp.14-15), decisions emerged that would encourage states to set up systems to re-structure financing policies to create greater parity between the poor and the privileged. Of course, it also became clear that the state, not the federal, courts would be the most likely arbiters of such cases, for the United States Constitution does not declare education a fundamental right while most state constitutions do include clauses relating to education (pp. 14-15). By 1998, only eight states (Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Mississippi, Nevada, and Utah) had avoided court involvement in setting public school policies and/or curriculum, according to The Courts and Equity: A State-by-State Overview (Gittell, 1998, pp.70-83). The court involvement at the state level inevitably led to involvement by state political forces, elected and non-elected. Education issues became more than pedagogical debates, they transformed into stages for social acts reflecting ideologies and pragmatism. Consequently, these idealistic equity reform movements, so influential during the 1970s and early 1980s eventually lost strength.

Vandersall states it this way:

The effort to attain equitable school finance systems faltered in the early 1980s despite achieving legal and legislative overhauls of most state school finance systems. From 1971 to 1985, actual and threatened legal action produced substantially revised or altogether new systems of school finance in more than thirty-five states (Barton, Coley, and Goertz, 1991, p.17). Yet many state courts chose to uphold the existing systems of finance, and the legislatures in most of those states were unreceptive to committing new resources or reallocating existing funds. States in which the courts struck down the finance system had considerable difficulty implementing the decisions. And the Reagan administration in general and the educational excellence movement in particular focused attention away from equity issues and toward achievement and standards. (1998, p. 17)

He notes that the forces striving for equity in the classroom felt discouraged because the reforms had led to taxpayer equity, not school resource equity. In other words, poor school districts were bearing less of a financial burden to pay for their public schools, but there was little progress made towards parity of resources between the rich and the poor districts.⁴

The movement toward equal education for all children had been part of a larger political movement toward what President Lyndon Johnson termed “The Great Society.” Equal housing opportunities, equal lending opportunities, equal education opportunities – all were part of a grand scheme to finally establish equal protection under the law for all citizens, regardless of race, class or gender. In this scheme, the federal government through funded programs for the poor, the disabled and the discriminated against people of color, would play a key role in creating a more equitable society. The problems of wealth and power disparity were understood to result from a confluence of inequities, not merely from educational differences. But the tightening of the nation’s money spigot in the 1970s resulted in the tax revolts of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Forces opposed to government spending programs pushed

for limitations on local tax increases, so less money was available to towns and cities for implementation of education equity policies or any social programs. There was, in addition, a growing antipathy to redistribution of wealth or advantage.

As John Augenblick (1998) observes, "... (for) wealthy districts that have had relatively high spending levels, school finance reform is something to be avoided at all costs..." (p. 91). It was the birth of the "me generation." Personal achievement and accumulation superseded social advances in importance. It was every American for himself or herself, and the ruthless internal pruning of corporations reinforced the focus on personal gains and opportunities. Against this background, educational issues came to the forefront of public policy debates.

With the 1983 issuance of the federally funded report A Nation at Risk, the social equity reform movement was subsumed in the larger issue of school quality. As a nation, the electorate turned its back on social action and raised high the banner of economic opportunity, though the 1980s economy had deteriorated and offered little upward movement from the laboring classes. Public schools were faulted. In language now often repeated, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, attacked public schools as the source problem for a debilitated economy. They proclaimed:

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility. We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur —others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments. (p. 1)

The document language focuses on material achievement and competition for control of markets as it targets schools for being out-produced by foreigners.

We compete with them (Germans, South Koreans and Japanese) for international standing and markets, not only with (material) products, but with the ideas of our laboratories and neighborhood workshops. (p. 1)

Learning is described as the “indispensable investment” required for success. Gone are sentiments of an earlier age – education as an act of assimilation into Anglo-Saxon culture; education as a moral training; education as a development of personal gifts; and education as preparation for full participation in a democracy. Education is described as a commodity in which the nation invests in order to reap material and political rewards. A Nation At Risk became a landmark document linking economics and education in the public mind.

The authors stated in the future tense what is the truth of the present: that

...those in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life. (p. 2)

In the 1980s age of rugged individualism, students and teachers, not society as a whole, would be held accountable for conditions of poverty and disenfranchisement. The fault for lack of equality and power in society was laid on the doorsteps of schools and assumed to reflect individuals’ lack of proper training or effort rather than the inherent and inescapable reality of American life, or the natural outcome of a competition-based culture, where as Kohn has described, the situation becomes poisonous, ripe for finger pointing, because “We are envious of winners... and we are contemptuous of losers” (1990, p.18). The solution to problems of social inequality and

national loss of economic dominance was viewed not as the result of systemic, interrelated issues, but the result of stagnant teacher unions and poorly managed schools.

In 1991, Congress established the National Council on Education Standards and Testing (NCEST), which in 1992 issued the report Raising Standards for American Education. In the report, NCEST recommended that national curriculum standards be developed in what it considered five core subjects: English, mathematics, history, geography and science. These standards would be accompanied by a national system of assessments. By 1994, Congress passed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which was "intended to lay the ground work for development of state and national standards in education" (Ravitch, 1994, p. 1) and which established a version of the NCEST recommendations. As Ravitch writes, the institution of standards is required by national circumstances where "student performance remains distressingly poor; standards and expectations are too low. ... (and) most Americans do not know if their children are getting a good education" (pp. 1-2). The high-stakes testing movement was gaining momentum.

As a solution to the perceived decline and fall of the American public school system, which happened concurrently with the rise in multicultural education pedagogy and practices, the Commission called for "A high level of shared education... (that is) essential to ... the fostering of a common culture, ..." (Ravitch, 1994, pp. 1-2) echoing the sentiments expressed earlier by Allen Bloom and E.D. Hirsch, Jr. Bloom, who believed public schools and students were at their best when, in the post-Sputnik era, "Survival itself depended on better education for the best people" (1987, p. 49), decried

the rise of multicultural “ethnocentric” education courses, courses he felt were weakening curricula in the nation’s public schools. Like Hirsch (1988), a pedagogue who openly lamented the “decline of shared knowledge” known as the Western canon, Bloom and the Commissioners openly yearned for a return to the Classicist curriculum and school structures. They praised the lecture-listen method of teaching as the proper way for students to acquire important information (Freire terms such teaching ‘banking’ in that it assumes an empty minded student into whom a teacher “deposits knowledge”). That many multicultural, critical and constructivist pedagogues understood such curricula to be exclusive, disenfranchising and demeaning seemed irrelevant to them. Quality and grooming of the best now appeared to be the ultimate purpose of education, not equality and engagement of the many. And a unified curriculum with tests to grade competency levels promised to them that America’s path would inevitably lead to national superiority.

With the social activists and courts sidelined, the main forces arguing for and against the standardization and high-stakes policy directions were pedagogues, educators, and teachers. Carrying on in the Learned tradition were A. J. Schlesinger, Jr. (1992) and Sandra Stotsky (1998), along with Bloom, Hirsch, and others. These were the pedagogical voices calling for a unified, Euro-centric, ‘rigorous’ curriculum standard, the learning of which is best assessed by ‘objective,’ uniform measures like high-stakes tests in general, and the MCAS in particular. Norman Fairclough (1989) describes the “dominant culture” as one in which “the establishment of the dominance of Standard English and the subordinating of other social dialects (is) part of the dominance of the capitalist class and the subordination of the working class,” (p. 57),

and is “associated with the most salient and powerful institutions... (that define) the language of political and cultural power” (p. 56). It is this dominant culture that Bloom, Hirsch, Schlensinger, Jr., and Stotsky spoke about and speak for, pronouncing it the “model for discussion on a uniquely high level” (Bloom, 1987, p. 244).

The academic arguments forwarded by the pedagogues received support from educators like Ravitch and Finn. Finn, writing in 1994, revealed in the events of 1980s when

...many exasperated reformers... began to focus directly on the results themselves and on alternative paradigm for change that essentially said: Stop fiddling with school resources, practices, services, and regulations, and, instead, state precisely what results are expected. (Finn, 1994, p. 124)

Such actions, he hoped, would “Free schools and educators to generate those results however they think best” (p. 124). “In return for that freedom” Finn would hold public school teachers and administrators “...accountable for producing and demonstrating that they have produced—the desired results, not for just going through the motions.” Furthermore, he urged legislators and bureaucrats to “Reward individuals and institutions that succeed. Punish, or intervene in, those that fail” (p. 124).

Finn views tests as indispensable “not because they directly alter behavior or cause more learning by themselves, but because tests or something similar are the vital link in any goal-based, results-driven accountability system” (p. 125). Finn believes that national testing of national standards is the most effective, efficient way to ensure high quality schooling. The business metaphor has been completely appropriated. Finn and others describe a system in which children are raw material to be manufactured as students— tested and declared adequate, excellent or failures (Jones, Jones & Hargrave, 2003).

Ravitch focuses more on standards than on tests, but she agrees with Finn that children in America do not receive a high-quality education in public schools. She reflects on the progressive movement that “sprang back to life in the early 1960s,” and she finds it troubling that “it sprang back to life with anti-intellectualism at the forefront” (2000, p. 16). As a result of this anti-intellectualism, she claims “large numbers of children were pushed through the school system without benefit of a genuine education” (p. 16). She cries out for schools to teach “what knowledge has most value, how to use that knowledge, how to organize what they know...” (p. 17). It is time, she asserts to “renew the academic tradition” (p. 18). Such a focus, Ravitch argues, will foster equity and achievement. The path to this end, in her viewpoint, lies in the creation of national standards and, if necessary, national tests that ensure each child receives a quality education. Others hold similar pedagogical views and believe tests will motivate students, even if the curriculum does not.

Fuel has been added to Hirsch’s fire by voices like Schlesinger’s and Stotsky’s. Schlesinger (1992) whittles down Hirsch’s list of 5,000 facts to a baker’s dozen of books “indispensable to an understanding of America.” He warns forcefully of the “decomposition” of America by educators who would cater to minority groups, thereby creating a new “cult of ethnicity,” and policymakers determined to defend “the homeland” and to re-energize a sense of national purpose found in Schlesinger’s words support for asserting centralized control over local school systems. Stotsky, currently an official with the Massachusetts Department of Education, similarly warns of divisive tendencies nurtured by those desiring to address cultural identities in the classroom. She maintains that multiculturalism “fosters an animus against what are perceived as

Western values, particularly the value placed on acquiring knowledge on analytical thinking, and on academic achievement itself' (1998, p. xi). Outraged by the movement towards a more open curriculum, Stotsky argues:

...many educators and researchers today, overtly concerned with inculcating such worthy social values as tolerance and mutual respect, are seeking to do so through changes in curricular content and pedagogy that enhance group identity and 'redistribute power.' They are reshaping the entire curriculum in the process and subordinating intellectual goals to the demands of their self-chosen moral mission without any body of evidence to suggest that the pedagogy and curriculum content they are implementing develop the values they claim they seek to foster. (p. xiv)

These arguments for what is perceived as a more unified, intellectually rigorous curriculum have fed the drive to improve schools that Richard Rothstein argues are under attack by people who have fallen prey to the myth that America's schools are deteriorating (1998, p. 32). He, like Berliner and Biddle (1995), believes the assumption of the reformists that American public schools are failing is a "manufactured crisis," and, therefore, the need for high-stakes tests unproven. So, while proponents of 'high' intellectual standards are screaming for curriculum standards that reflect their pedagogy and favored content as well as sorting tests to see who has and has not mastered those standards, dissenting voices continue to rise and question the validity of these aims and expectations.

The arguments made by those opposed to high-stakes tests are reminiscent of education battles from nearly a century ago when educators like John Dewey, William Learned and Ben D. Wood, George Zook and E.F. Lindquist pitched their camps in the 20s, 30s and 40s. At that time, the Carnegie Foundation funded two separate studies that were led by Dewey and Learned, thinkers with incongruent belief systems. In today's

struggles over curriculum and high-stakes assessment testing, their arguments are repeated.

Dewey, the most famous member of the Progressive Education Association who is frequently criticized by standardization and high-stakes test advocates, advanced the concept of experiential education as a response to the traditional book-centered curricula of the early 20th century. He called for a new way of teaching and learning. He opposed the then traditional forms of education where the teacher was master, setting the curriculum and disciplining anyone cheeky, disinterested, or unable to master the subjects deemed essential in the traditional curriculum – arithmetic, rhetoric, writing, reading classics, etc. In his 1938 Kappa Delta Pi lecture, Dewey proclaimed:

The traditional scheme is, in essence, one of imposition from above and from outside. It imposes adult standards, subject matter, and methods upon those who are only growing slowly toward maturity. The gap is so great that the required subject-matter, the methods of learning and of behaving are foreign to the existing capacities of the young. They are beyond the reach of the experience the young learners already possess. Consequently, they must be imposed; even though good teachers will use devise of art to cover up the imposition so as to relive it of obviously brutal features.
(1963, pp. 18-19)

Later voices, like those of Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori and Paulo Freire, are informed by Dewey's and the Progressivists' views of education as developmental, social and democratic in its ideal form.

Unlike advocates for a fixed, common curriculum, Dewey and his followers held that "It is not the subject per se that is educative or that is conducive to growth."

(1963, p. 46) They concluded:

There is no subjective that is and of itself, or without regard to the stage of growth attained by the learner, such that the inherent educational value can be attributed to it.... There is no such thing as educational value in the abstract. The notion that some subjects and methods and that acquaintance

with certain facts possess educational value in and of themselves is the reason why traditional education reduced the material of education so largely to a diet of predigested materials. According to this notion, it was enough to regulate the quantity and difficulty of the material provided, in a scheme of quantitative grading from month to month and from year to year. (p. 46)

According to Nicholas Lemann,

The idea of the progressive education ... was to end traditional teaching and curriculum in high school and college and, down the road, to create a more liberal-minded, freethinking, tolerant class of leaders, who could build a fairer society. (1999, p. 22)

Today's members of Massachusetts' Coalition for Authentic Reform in Education (CARE), renowned educators such as Debra Meier and Eleanor Duckworth, and philosophers like Alfie Kohn, might be expected to align themselves with the Progressivists. Not coincidentally, these very same people reject the notion that any single high-stakes test like MCAS can accurately or fully measure a child's learning.

The National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) argues in its fact sheet, "What's Wrong with Standardized Tests," that

Standardized tests are based on behaviorist psychological theories from the nineteenth century. ... Behaviorism assumed that knowledge could be broken into separate bits and that people learned by passively absorbing these bits. (FairTest, 2005)

They and others believe that standardized tests end up driving curriculum toward a rote, mechanized model of learning. This is a model that has proven disadvantageous for many. These high-stakes testing and standardization opponents see learning as a developmental process (Ginsberg & Opper, 1988, Duckworth, 1996). Like their mentor, Jean Piaget, they believe that genuine learning:

...occurs when the child has available the necessary mental equipment to make use of new experiences. ... (And) if there is too great a disparity between the type of experience presented to the child and his current level

of cognitive structure, one of two things is likely to happen. Either the child transforms the experience into a form which he can readily assimilate and consequently does not learn what was intended; or else he merely learns a specific response which has no strength or stability, cannot be generalized, and probably will soon disappear. (Ginsberg & Opper, 1988, p. 210)

Such development cannot be forced, but must be acquired by children over time and through experimentation with objects and ideas, they say. Therefore, it makes no sense to devise a standardized test with the expectation that all children of a certain age will be ready to respond to it in a meaningful way. Better, they say, to allow each child to develop at his or her own pace, better to encourage each child to undertake learning as a continual process of experimentation where results are checked against established facts and discrepancies are viewed as triggers for further exploration and deeper understanding, not mistakes that reduce your score. Standardized tests, especially in early grades, discredit the prevailing educational understanding of learning as a developmental process. Such tests set “normed” benchmarks against which all learners are measured, regardless of their individual developmental processes. While a child may be making remarkable strides for herself, she may not be keeping pace at the “normal” rate. Her success becomes a failure based on a distantly determined score of performance on a one-size-fits-all test. Furthermore, interpretation of those scores sorts children into categories that they inhabit by developmental level rather than by achievement.

James Banks, for one, dissents against the views of Hirsch and Bloom because they fail to regard “knowledge as a social construction” (1991, p. 62), resulting in their ignoring or overlooking of the normative and political implications of their emphasis on “the traditional western-centric canon” (p. 62). High-stakes tests like MCAS, he would

argue, have tangible social, political and normative consequences, and these consequences too often result in the marginalization of non-mainstream Americans. If one fits the profile described earlier, one fits the “norm;” if one fits the “norm,” one is more likely to be recognized as proficient and successful. This type of thinking and action does great disservice to the many tens of thousands of students who do not fit the “norm,” he claims.

Similarly, theorists like Paulo Freire (1992) warn of the ‘dehumanizing’ consequences encapsulated in such monocultural constructs as traditional standardized canons and standardized assessments that objectify people by making them learners of others’ views rather than constructors of their own views. Schools that implement such constructs are, in Jonathan Kozol’s words, “in (the) business to produce reliable people, manageable people, unprovocative people” (1975, p. 17) who do as they are told and who learn about democracy in an undemocratic setting where certain views and certain pieces of knowledge are considered sacrosanct, unchangeable and suitable for all.

Further arguments have been set forth that challenge the notion that standardized high-stakes tests, however modernized with ‘open questions’ and ‘written responses’ as opposed to 100% multiple guess questions, are valuable for assessing the learning of all students. A recent monograph from the American Educational Research Association (“The Uses of External Examinations to Improve Student Motivation”) declares, “...available evidence does not support the claim that high stakes testing will induce improved learning” (1997). In addition, obliviousness to the privilege inherent in monoculturalist practices such as standardized testing maintains the myth of meritocracy in the United States according to educators like Peggy McIntosh, who

points out, it is a myth that democratic choice and educational success are equally available to all. Keeping this myth alive, she asserts, keeps

most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people (and) props up those in power, and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.”
(1988, pp. 18-19)

Among those marginalized by high-stakes standardized tests are women, minorities and poor children.

We know that hands-on learning and working groups “promote girls interest in learning” (King, 1999), but tests like MCAS ignore such realities. In addition, such tracking devices “influence (all) students to be competitive rather than cooperative, opportunistic rather than altruistic and elitists rather than egalitarian” (Suzuki, 1979). “The tests reflect rather than cause inequities,” according to the American Association of University Women’s (AAUW) report on How Schools Shortchange Girls. So what inequities do high-stakes test reveal? They reveal that students of color, and in some cases girls and in some cases boys, do not match up to the vision of intellectual standards outlined by higher academic authorities distant from local schools. Given that 49 percent to 83 percent of Black and Latino students failed the 2002 10th grade English, mathematics and science and technology sub-tests while as few as 19 percent of whites failed the English test, for instance, it appears that even with standardized testing inequities in classrooms persist. As data from this study suggests, the root causes of educational disparity may be too complex and difficult to amend by applying the band-aid of standardized testing. Setting equally high academic standards for all students to achieve in no way guarantees all receive equal education or equal opportunity to succeed.

The AAUW, NCTM and other educational organizations call for a movement beyond standardized testing for assessment of student learning. Like Sandra Parks, they advocate minimizing racism and cultural inequities by using “assessment practices (that) include alternative methods that allow for cultural differences... to ensure an equitable appraisal of students’ work” (Parks, 1999, p.18). Suzuki echoes their sentiments. He calls on schools to provide

multiple learning environments that properly match the academic and social needs of students... (rather than promoting a curriculum that generally exhibits an overwhelming bias towards the views of the dominant group... with its preponderance of Western perspectives, (1979, pp. 47-48)

curricula like those inherent in high-stakes standardized tests like MCAS.

In his discussion of racism in the United States, Meyer Weinberg comments on two facets of this phenomenon:

First a belief in the inherent superiority of some people and the inherent inferiority of others; and second, the acceptance of distribution of goods and services— let alone respect— in accordance with such judgments of unequal worth. (1990, p.xiii)

Weinberg makes these comments in the context of race/ethnicity, but his words come to mind as one considers the premises for and outcomes of powerful assessment tools like high-stakes tests, where competence and success are linked in a way that separates those who apparently are and will be the leaders and successes from those who are and will be the followers and failures.

Weinberg reminds us that racism consists of an “ideology of treating others as inferior” (1990, p. xv). He notes that “According to public opinion studies, a sizable minority of Ivy League alumni still believe whites are born superior in intelligence to blacks...About a third of white Chicagoans express similar views...” (p. xv) Results

from the high-stakes tests serve to affirm these prejudices without challenging the causes for minority "failure."

There is strong evidence that academic pencil and paper tests benefit a certain profile of people. Catherine Walsh, in "Literacy as Praxis: Culture, Language and Pedagogy," goes so far as to claim that test mastery depends on being raised in circumstances that breed familiarity with the values and practices of the "dominant culture" (1991, p.10), dominant culture in this country being white middle/upper class, non-disabled, and male oriented. Walsh is not alone in her assertions. Many educational researchers point out that the most likely to succeed at exams like MCAS are the confident, product-oriented, competitive individuals with manual dexterity, an active cortex and parents who are college educated and/or high income earners. In fact, "If you know the education level of the parents, which correlates well with household income, you have a better predictor of educational success than scores on the SAT" (or MCAS). (Hodgkinson, 1995, p.178). What standardized high-stakes test results affirm for the public is what it already knows: Children from well-educated, well-to-do families perform better as a group on standardized tests than do children from low-literacy, poor families. The tests appear to reinforce the traditional curriculum approach that has proven so unequal in the results it produces, leaving open the question what they truly test.

Ronald Takaki writes in "A Different Mirror," "...I agree with Hirsch that we need a core (of knowledge), but the question is, whose core of knowledge will this be?" (1999, p. 10) Sizer (1994) raises a similar question:

The process of establishing standards repeatedly raises the question of who sets them. When you or I or some commission demands that 'we'

must have some standards, who is 'we'? And what right do 'we,' as defined, have to do those things? We—whoever we are—are dealing with youngsters' minds and hearts, a matter of their fundamental mental intellectual freedom. No freedom is more precious in a democracy than intellectual freedom. The question of the 'we' is not a trivial one; it is a fundamental one. In the current debate, the issue cannot be avoided. (p. 34)

The high-stakes testing movement has a long and divisive history. Many of the original arguments for and against standardized testing of students, formed in the early part of the last century, resurface in today's curriculum wars between adherents of the traditional, content-centered, Western-oriented curriculum as well as those who favor centralized curriculum standards and tests to ensure equality and adherents of student-centered curricula meant to address emerging local issues and student interests and needs as well as those who see in standardized curricula and high-stakes tests instruments that reinforce rather than ameliorate inequalities. Adding to the conflicts are opposing perspectives on the existing quality of America's public education system, its impact on national economic viability, and its very right to exist as a public service operating outside the "free-market" economy. There are, however, further issues of concern connected to the high-stakes testing phenomenon.

Rothstein (1995) warns that,

many of the problems associated with tests that we have seen – narrowing the curriculum, accentuating the gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students – have come about because high test stakes lead educators to focus on raising test scores, not raising achievement. (1995, p. 129)

Rothstein raises one of many issues surrounding high-stakes testing: having a test drive curriculum, rather than the curriculum determining the assessment. This issue surfaces

as one of several explored below. Key among these issues are the design and purpose of assessments, test weaknesses, and testing costs.

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) echoes prevailing pedagogical belief that assessments be tied to instruction. They seek “shifts in assessment practice” toward “aligning assessment with curriculum and instruction,” and away from “treating assessment as independent of curriculum or instruction,” toward giving support to teachers and credence to their informed judgment” and away from “designing ‘teacher proof’ assessment systems,” toward “basing inferences on multiple sources of evidence” and away from “basing inferences on restricted or single sources of evidence” (NCTM, 1995, p. 83). Popham (2001) supports similar views, seeing assessment deriving from instruction and applauds teachers’ growing awareness of “...testing’s instructional implications;” but he cautions that when it happens that high-stakes tests, where “significant consequences become attached to individual student’s test scores” (p. 33) on a single test, U.S. educators must speak out to help “educational policy makers understand why the current high-stakes testing programs yield inaccurate pictures of educational quality” (p. 36). Too often, testing is driving curriculum and reducing teacher capacity (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003; Popham, 2001; McNeil, 2000).

Most psychometricians warn against using a single measure for such high stakes decisions, such as graduation and teacher or school sanction. They note that there is always a margin of error in such tests. In addition, environmental conditions can unduly affect any participant’s scores. Even colleges that use SAT scores, proven predictors of

college success, do not rely solely on those standardized test scores for admission decisions. Testing expert James Popham warns,

The task before educators is to provide pivotal policymakers with the information they need to disabuse themselves of the erroneous idea that it is possible to ascertain the caliber of schooling from a student's score on standardized achievement tests. (2001, p. 74)

Other test designers support certain standardized tests as "valid," meaning that they test what they are designed to test. There seems to be a consensus regarding the validity of MCAS tests. Most believe the tests do measure what they purport to measure – knowledge of material contained in the Curriculum Frameworks. According to Professor Ron Hambleton, a noted psychometrician from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, the tests are well designed. Others agree, though as Popham again warns, teaching and testing do not always match. Even in states, like Massachusetts, with well-articulated standards, the result can be a "laundry list" of content standards that overwhelms the teacher, who in Popham's estimation must "sensibly direct their instruction toward only a modest number of instructional targets" (2001, p.106-18). Thus, the tests often fail to measure what teachers teach. Further complicating this situation, testing overseers often want to eliminate test items that all children answer correctly and that demonstrate teacher success in meeting Frameworks' objectives because the items fail to differentiate between levels of students when everyone succeeds at them. Thus, teachers prioritizing standards to decide what to teach becomes more complicated. This "Catch 22" has disturbed teachers and causes concerns, as will be outlined in Chapter 4.

It appears, however, that when high-stakes are not connected with standardized testing, teachers form few negative perceptions of them. In their seminal study, Effects

of Standardized Testing, Kellaghan, et al. (1982) examined results from 300 Irish teachers divided into three groups with high-stakes and no-stakes testing information provided to some and no testing information provided to the third group. They discovered that teachers tend to rely more heavily on their own judgment than on test information to group students, and that “experience with tests diminished rather than heightened” negative perceptions about teaching to the test and labeling students (pp. 91-98). However, the fact that the testing the Irish teachers addressed required no truly high stakes for them, that is no one’s job or school was jeopardized by the results, means the research findings may have underestimated the effects of truly high-stakes testing on teachers.

Adding to teachers’ and administrators’ concerns about high-stakes testing are the many scoring issues raised by these tests. In a later study, conducted by Kathleen Rhoades and George Madaus (who had co-researched with Kellaghan) for the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy and published in May 2003, the authors wrote of the misuse and inaccuracies involved with high-stakes testing. Their introduction states:

Many proponents of high-stakes testing take a technological view: they choose to ignore the cumulative effects of test-based decisions, and view test takers as objects (Barbour, 1993; Foucault, 1979). Moreover, they ignore the fallibility of testing. Like any measurement tool that produces a number whether a simple blood pressure reading or complex laboratory test – tests contain error. The widespread belief in their precision does not admit this inherent fallibility.

Two major types of error random measurement error and non-random human error – are associated with tests. The first, random measurement error, is well documented and not treated in this paper. Briefly, it may be defined as ‘the consistency with which the (test) results place students in the same relative position if the test is given repeatedly’ (Bloom et al.,

198, p. 76) so that tests with less measurement error produce more stable results than those with more.

This monograph is concerned with human errors, which differ from random measurement error in many ways. ... These errors are of greater concern than random errors because they are capricious and bring with them unseen consequences. (p.5)

Rhoades and Madaus present a collection of testing errors generated in the prior twenty-five years. They found that

human error can be, and often is, present in all phases of the testing process. Error can creep into the development of items. It can be made in the setting of a passing score. It can occur in the establishment of norming groups, and it is sometimes found in the scoring of questions. (p.29)

They conclude that "...testing, while providing users with useful information, is a fallible technology, one subject to internal and external errors." Like Eugene Paslove, former Harcourt Brace (test developers and administrators) president, Rhoades and Madaus, who quoted Paslove in their study, hold that "tests like Massachusetts' MCAS exam should not be used as the sole determinant of who graduates from high school and who does not (p. 29).

Kane and Staiger (2002) writing in the Journal of Economic Perspectives, concur with Rhoades and Madaus. "In the rush to implement accountability systems," they write, "little attention has been paid to the imprecision of the test score measures on which they are based" (p. 94). Kane and Staiger note that much of testing reliability may be suspect because adjustments are not made for initial performance levels or the demographic characteristics of students, so changes noted on successive tests may "not necessarily (be) due to persistent educational practices in the schools." Furthermore, they argue that often gain scores and changes in average level of performance can show more than 80 percent of their variance due to "one-time, non-persistent factors." The

conclude that “Overall, these results suggest that annual test scores are quite unreliable measures of performance differences across schools and over time, particularly in smaller schools” (pp. 98-99). In addition to potential testing errors and scoring difficulties, several other test-related issues bring into question the usefulness of high-stakes tests.

Exact figures for the cost of high-stakes testing programs remain elusive, due to the evolving nature of such programs under the popularly termed “No Child Left Behind Act,” which calls for yearly testing in America’s schools. However, the costs for high-stakes testing are estimated to be between \$2 and \$6 billion. The costs incurred to prepare students for the tests and to implement the tests and to analyze the results for the tests and to adapt curriculum and instruction to improve results remain incalculable.

While test supporters believe the billions of dollars budgeted for testing represent the unavoidable cost of accountability and assume such costs to be necessary in efforts to improve education, test detractors argue that these abundant resources might be better allocated to supporting struggling schools and school systems— by improving professional development opportunities, classroom facilities, community liaison efforts, textbooks, etc. Berliner and Biddle (1995) explain that high-stakes tests are enormously popular, but attack them for representing the aims and goals of distant authorities acting under the guise of managing dwindling education resources.

A major Neoconservative buzzword for our times is accountability. As funds for public education have become more threatened, many Neoconservatives have proposed programs that would tie funding for schools or salaries for educators to ‘objective’ performance indicators such as average-gain scores on standardized tests, ratings of teaching performance or numbers of students going on to higher education or landing suitable jobs. And this means that the efforts of local schools are to be controlled through state or federal mandates. (p. 195)

Berliner and Biddle further assert,

...accountability programs cause enormous problems. One reason may be that such programs represent yet another poor strategy for applying outdated, conservative economic ideas to the complex institution of education. (p. 200)

They consider that legislators are drawn to such programs because they offer the promise of improving education with limited expenditures and parents and citizens find the plans attractive because they seem a clear-cut way for “achieving control over those failing schools” (p. 201). (Berliner and Biddle devote several chapters to debunking the myth of a schooling crisis.) High-stakes testing programs, they summarize:

...are radically unfair and place serious and unnecessary burdens on America’s best administrators and most dedicated teachers. ...The shaky reasoning and unknown biases of (basing educational accountability on outcomes, as indicated by student achievement scores,) are not tolerated in America’s courts when applied to other public servants or professionals, and Americans should be no more tolerant of them when it comes to education. (pp. 201-202)

Having outlined the myriad issues related to testing, from the pedagogical to the political to the psychometric and economic, this section concludes with a look at the Massachusetts high-stakes tests, the MCAS. The MCAS tests provide the impetus for this study’s examination of the impact of high-stakes testing on teachers’ autonomy to make professional decisions about curriculum and instruction and to meet individual differences in local classrooms.

The MCAS

Massachusetts policy makers were among the leaders of the high-stakes testing movement. Beginning in the early 1990s, they funded a system to develop state

curriculum standards, which became the guide for standardized tests developed to ensure students were learning and teachers teaching to these standards. The resulting standardized tests, known collectively as the MCAS, or Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System were designed by policy makers to remedy school inequities. Seven years later, however, inequities persist, as the scope and number of the tests has increased. This section discusses the test parameters, scoring issues, costs and history, in which the pedagogical battles discussed above resurface.

Instituted in 1998, the MCAS tests are administered every spring to more than 300,000 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 10th grade public school students in over 1,200 schools in the Commonwealth. And the No Child Left Behind Act will increase the number of grades in which students are tested. "Parents may not legally refuse their child's participation in MCAS," according to Department of Education regulations. The primary purposes of the tests, according to the Massachusetts Department of Education are to measure the performance of individual students, schools, and districts based on the state standards outlined in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, to raise student achievement, to improve classroom instruction, and to determine competency in English language arts and mathematics in order to award high school diplomas. Such testing acted as a direct effort by the State to control local classrooms by evaluating them on established State curriculum standards. The shift in locus of control from town boards and educators to the State Board of Education and its consultants has a complex and informative background.

The 1998 Massachusetts Board of Education, with John Silber at the helm, inaugurated the tests in response to legislative mandates to

adopt a system for evaluating on an annual basis the performance of public school districts and individual public schools. ... (And) in addition, (adopt a) comprehensive diagnostic assessment of individual students (to be) conducted at least in the fourth, eighth and tenth grades. (The Education Reform Act of 1993, pp. 14-15)

The Education Reform Act itself was prompted in part by a lawsuit filed on behalf of a student in the working class city of Fall River whose complaint centered on unequal educational opportunities available to students in this financially strapped community. It called for multiple and appropriate assessments, hence the term "Comprehensive Assessment System." To date, however, only the standardized tests have been used for these assessment purposes.

Any student enrolled in a public school, charter school, educational collaborative, or enrolled in a private school receiving special education that is publicly funded under Chapter 766 is required to take the MCAS tests. Also required to participate in the testing are those receiving educational services in institutional settings, or in custody of either the Department of Social Services or Department of Youth Services, students with disabilities or with limited English proficiency provided they have been in U.S. schools for three or fewer years and are ineligible to take the Spanish-language version of MCAS. Home schooled and private school students are exempt from the tests, as are a small number of disabled public students.

The MCAS tests are based on the learning standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. The exams cover both the general Framework learning strands and/or corresponding grade-specific standards. Grade 10 students are responsible for all pre-K through Grade-10 standards, though some teachers contend Grade 10 students do not routinely cover parts of the exam content. Item types on the tests include: multiple

choice, open-response, short-answer (mathematics only) and writing prompts (English Language Arts - ELA Composition test only).

Multiple-choice items offer four options. Students receive either 0 or 1 point for each answer. Open-response items “require students to generate rather than recognize, a response. Depending on the content area tested, students provide a written response of one or two paragraphs, or create a chart, table, diagram or graph.” Students receive 0-4 points on these items which are scored by trained scorers, hired by the Department of Education. Short-answer questions require students to generate a brief response, usually a numeric solution to a computation or a short statement. These items are also scored by trained scorers, who award 0-1 points per item. Writing prompts are included only on ELA composition tests, and require students to respond by creating a written composition. Again trained scorers award points: 2-12 for Topic Development and 2-8 for Standard English Conventions. The Department of Education routinely changes test items and regulations.

There are several forms of each test with about 80% of the same material on each form and about 20% matrix-sample questions for new versions. Individual test scores are based exclusively on common items. The tests are un-timed, but are generally comprised of two to three sessions with a recommended testing time of 45 minutes/session. State guidelines consider “reasonable” extra time to be 5-30 minutes, though teachers report that students routinely take 45 extra minutes to complete the exams. Tests are offered in Braille, Spanish and large-print versions. The table below shows the tests, by subject, required in grades three through 10, as listed at the

Massachusetts Department of Education web site. The types of tests conducted in a given grade are designated with an 'X.'

Table 1. MCAS Tests as of 2001

Grades	English Language Arts (ELA)* Reading/Language/Lit. Composition	Mathema- tics	Science and Techno- logy/ Engineer- ing	History and Social Science
3	X	X		
4	X X			
5	X	X	X	X
6	X	X		
7	X X	X		X
8	X	X	X**	
9				
10	X X X	X	X***	X

* Grades 4,7, and 10 ELA Composition and ELA Language and Literature tests (reading) are combined to generate one overall English Language Arts score for each student. Students receive comments from scorers about their ELA Compositions.

** Specific content area tests are given grades 9 and 10 - biology, chemistry, introductory physics, earth science and technology/engineering in addition to the integrated science test given in grade 8.

*** Education Commissioner David Driscoll currently proposes to include a science exam at the 10th grade level and to include it as part of each student's graduation requirement.

Scaled results are reported on four universal levels of achievement: advanced, proficient, needs improvement and failing. To graduate, a student must score 220 or more on both the mathematics and English language arts 10th grade tests. In general,

the levels are defined by the Massachusetts Department of Education in the following way:

Table 2. MCAS Scoring System

Level	Description	Numerical Score Range
Advanced	Students at this level demonstrate a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of rigorous subject matter and provide sophisticated solutions to complex problems.	260-280
Proficient	Students at this level demonstrate a solid understanding of challenging subject matter and solve a wide variety of problems.	240-259
Needs Improvement	Students at this level demonstrate a solid understanding of subject matter and solve some simple problems.	220-239
Failing	Students at this level demonstrate a minimal understanding of subject matter and do not solve simple problems.	Below 220

Score reports in 2004 showed that 76% of students state-wide passed the exam on their first try; however, only 45% of students in low-scoring districts passed. These 2003 results further showed a wide discrepancy between white and non-white students.

Boston Globe reporter Suzanne Sataline, reported in 2004:

60% of Hispanic juniors have passed after two tries vs. 55% of seniors after two tries; among Black students 64 percent of the 2005 class passed after two tries, compared with 62 percent of the 2004 class. Among whites and Asians, the passing rates have slipped slightly, but still outstrip those of minority students: 91 percent of white and 85 percent of Asian juniors passed the exam by the second try versus, 96 percent of white and 92 percent of Asian seniors. ---93 percent of states' seniors have passed, leaving 4,676 students in class of 2004 who have not earned a high school diploma ...this does not include the thousands who have left school. Three fourths of all special needs students, but only 62 percent of limited English proficiency (LEP) in senior class passed. (p. B2)

Reports of re-take scores for those retained (2004) showed that 48-75% of students did worse or the same as in their first round of tests, according to the Massachusetts Department of Education's report: "Grade Retention in Massachusetts Public Schools, 2003-04." Such results have left many wondering about the effectiveness of the tests to level the playing field for all students, regardless of learning capacity, language background, and minority status. These testing results ignore test-related problems such as those outlined below.

Authors Dennie Palmer Wolf and Ann Marie White (2000) outline what they consider to be serious flaws in one specific high-stakes test, the MCAS, records and reports achievement results. These flaws, they charge, greatly reduce the usefulness of test data. Many fundamental questions remain unanswered by the data as recorded and reported, they say, and though they often focus on the Grade 4 MCAS tests, the questions they pose easily transfer to Grade 10 concerns. They ask for instance: Have 4th graders in different year classes always performed differently, and what factors affected those differences? Does remediation need to occur before 4th grade? Is it possible a year group of 4th graders started out well in school then lost momentum? When did that happen? What if this year's students started out a lower level than last years' and their lower test scores actually imply a larger knowledge gain? At the heart of their concerns, though, is that "There is no way to inquire about, never mind acknowledge, students' growth toward (the school reform) standard." (2000, p. 6).

Wolfe and White acknowledge that MCAS is well-designed and carefully scored, and accept its use as part of an effort to set higher standards. However, they note that "education reform is (or once was) a social compact to promote growth over time in

all segments of the population” (p. 6). The focus on growth is essential, they claim, in order to determine whether or not curricula and teacher efforts truly are or are not working. But as it stands, MCAS and other high-stakes test results give no indication of either. The psychometric flaws Wolf and White consider most detrimental include cross-sectional data collection, horizontal scoring, broad achievement level reporting and wide testing intervals.

Cross-sectional data collection means that at each testing point different students’ performances are measured. Therefore, it is possible to compare cohorts (2005’s 4th graders vs. 2004’s) or groups within cohorts (wealthy districts vs. poorer ones), “But this design makes it impossible to look at how students grow over time” (p. 8). Wolf and White note that such impossibilities do not prevent people from making inferences about developmental patterns.

Horizontal scoring, which awards points based on amount, detail or length of response rather than quality of response, is the second area of concern. They assert, “This kind of scale focuses largely on the amount of information that students give, not on their problem solving abilities” (p. 9). By then reporting the already skewed results in broad levels, which favor verbal skills and memory over problem solving, the authors see additional problems. For instance, they say that by using broad categories like “needs improvement” people are left in the dark concerning the proportions of those students who are nearly in the “proficient” category or who are closer to “failing.” It must be noted here that many educators and parents reject the whole categorization process and particularly the category titles used with MCAS that are described below. They feel it is detrimental to student self-perception and to teaching efforts to declare,

for instance, that a child is one of those “failing” to meet standards that may not directly correlate to work done in the classroom, or the child’s developmental situation. Such categorization obscures the more detailed picture of the child’s learning and casts him or her as a pariah in the classroom, one who has lowered the class’ and the schools’ scores.

The broad achievement level reporting of results in criterion-referenced, standardized tests like the MCAS further exacerbates motivational issues by potentially reporting insignificant gains in ways that make them seem substantial, according to Wolf and White. For instance, a child reported as “needs improvement” may have only been a point or two away from being ‘proficient,’ but when he or she moves into the upper category, it makes it appear that huge learning strides were effected.

Finally, the lack of a “...broad, public inquiry into student learning until or between (the three testing) points ...” (p. 9) results in long periods of uncorrected activity. In addition, such wide interval testing puts undo pressure on teachers in particular grades (in one school a teacher actually refused to teach 4th grade because she did not want to be held accountable for test scores which reflected far more than her teaching time with the students). These problems can be corrected, according to Wolf and White. But, they ask, “How realistic is it to imagine collecting and reporting longitudinal data? Not very – if you want to displace the current paradigm of large-scale cross-sectional testing.” Yet if the standards-based school reform is going to succeed in keeping promises about ongoing improvement, “then faculties and families need a supplementary, low-stakes assessment system that will allow them to follow the progress that children make toward meeting the standards” (p. 10).

Wolf and White plead for low-stakes longitudinal monitoring of student learning:

Because without a system designed to monitor growth, we will confuse the benefits of socioeconomic advantage with the results of good teaching. Teachers in poor schools will be doomed to underperformance, and teachers in wealthier settings can coast on the backs of special lessons, summer camps, and parental education levels.

Because we need a professional teaching culture that emphasizes shared responsibility for continual improvement, not simply high scores at certain grades. It takes a school, not a few good teachers, to educate a child.

Because if we are genuinely interested in developing the abilities of a wider range of students, nothing is more crucial than diagnosis – the skill of knowing what will support the next increment of growth, however small. Until we are willing to create professional systems that focus squarely on change over time, we are unlikely to nurture this capacity.
(p.10)

Wolfe and White make strong arguments that the MCAS test results can be of greater use to teachers, administrators and parents in understanding a child's learning development if offered within a different, longitudinal paradigm. However, they do not address the full array of concerns expressed regarding the tests' effectiveness. There are many people speaking out against the tests because they do not measure a student's ability to speak publicly, care for others, draw, play an instrument, or organize an event or project. An improved testing paradigm might result in more useful data from the tests, but others argue, the substance of what is tested remains as limited as always. The tests still focus almost exclusively on verbal and mathematical ability as well as memory skills, contradicting what Gardner (1983) informs us is the true order of intellectual capacity: multiple in form.

Whether or not the test scores are useful as reported, the resulting reliance on numerical data will require additional time and training of school administrators and

staff to ensure their ability to interpret the data accurately and use it appropriately, further adding to the costs of testing preparation and implementation programs, already in the billions. Currently, the State has no plans for this training, nor are there funds to institute it. So, despite the tight design of the tests, the usefulness of the data they generate remains in doubt.

Despite the questionable usefulness of MCAS test scores for evaluating teaching or even providing accurate data about students' growth in learning, the State spends millions of dollars on the testing program. In 2003, the State spent about \$80 million dollars on the MCAS tests and test support programs. This figure does not include any local costs incurred. Approximately \$50 million of the 2003 costs covered test preparation support, such as tutors, computer programs, and the like. The cost figures vary from year to year, depending on the State's budgetary conditions. In 2004, the Massachusetts Legislature awarded \$118 million to the New Hampshire firm, Measured Progress, for administration of the tests through 2009. Measured Progress won out over Harcourt Brace, which had been awarded an \$82 million contract for test administration for the previous five years. Measured Progress developed new mathematics and English tests required for every grade, 1-10, as required by the Federal government and administered the MCAS, as well. The New Hampshire firm received an additional \$16 million to administer an MCAS alternative test for severely disabled children and an English proficiency test for children who are not fluent in English.

How did the tests begin? McDuffy vs. The State of Massachusetts. The entire MCAS story began with a 1993 court case in which Fall River's McDuffy plaintiffs argued that school systems in poor cities like theirs were being shortchanged by the

state. They claimed that conditions in these schools, which included classes of 50 and more students, made it difficult, if not impossible for college-bound learners there to compete with students from wealthy suburbs like Lexington, Weston and Brookline, where class size ranged from the teens to the twenties. The court agreed. It declared that the state did have a moral and financial obligation to establish greater equity between its communities' school systems. In a brief two months, the Education Reform Act of 1993 was crafted, introduced to the legislature, debated and enacted.

The Education Reform Act was designed by a coalition of political, business and education leaders. Among the chief architects were state legislator Mark Roosevelt, Chair of the Education Committee, Senate President Thomas F. Birmingham, Jack Rennie of the Massachusetts Business Alliance, and Paul Reveille, of the Education Alliance in Worcester, a non-profit group. Their job was to create state regulations for school systems widely known as being among the least regulated in the country. Central to their concerns were "accountability" and "opportunity."

Section 27, p. 11 of the Act addressed the issue of "Quality Education as the Goal of the Commonwealth", according to the Department of Education's section-by-section summary.

This section declares that a paramount goal of the Commonwealth is to provide a public education system of sufficient quality to extend to all children the opportunity to reach their full potential. It also declares the intent of the bill which is to ensure that each classroom provides the conditions for all pupils to engage fully in learning without threats to their sense of security or self-esteem; a consistent commitment of resources to provide a high quality public education to every child; a deliberate process for establishing and achieving specific educational performance goals for every child; and an effective mechanism for monitoring progress toward those goals and for holding educators accountable for their achievement.
(p. 2)

Thus teachers and administrators were to be responsible for each child's academic development, regardless of pre-existing or ongoing environmental influences such as poverty and family literacy levels. The authority to oversee this process of opportunity improvement and increased accountability was granted to the Board of Education. In Section 29, p. 14, the Board's powers are outlined. They are given responsibility for:

...establishing standards for recognition of high achievement by students and districts, and establishing the process and standards for declaring schools and districts 'under-performing' and 'chronically under-performing.' ... It authorizes the Board to direct the commissioner to develop academic standards for the core subjects of math, science and technology, history and social science, English, foreign languages and the arts. The standards include criteria for three determinations or certificates: (1) the competency determination for 10th grade and as a condition for high school graduation' (2) the certificate of mastery; and (3) the certificate of occupational proficiency. ... In addition, the Board must annually evaluate all public schools to assess student acquisition of skills called for in the academic standards... districts are required to file annual reports on statistical measures and educational programs. The section directs the Board to designate schools as under-performing when they fail consistently to improve the academic performance of their students. Such schools must adopt remedial plans and if a school does not show significant improvement within 24 months, the Board can declare the school 'chronically under-performing' and take additional action such as removing the principal and designating a receiver for the districts who will report to the Commissioner. (p. 3)

With the stroke of a pen, the bill had been signed into action. It changed the face of education in Massachusetts by effectively relocating the power and authority over schools from local school committees to the state Board of Education. At first, however, many citizens did not see it that way.

In 1993, teachers were basking in the excitement that had been generated by the process of creating the state's Curriculum Frameworks. "For the first time," wrote one of those teachers in a recent e-mail communication, "I was really seeing teachers come

out of their rooms and talk about teaching. . . . the conversation that followed (the drafting of the Frameworks) was wonderful.”

The law seemed to offer genuine hope of continuing that dialogue. For while the law called on the Board to “adopt a system for evaluating on an annual basis the performance of both public school districts and individual public schools,” as well as individual students. It also called for the use of “a variety of assessment instruments on either a comprehensive or statistically valid sampling basis,” in order to fulfill that evaluation. It went even further, stating that

As much as is practicable, especially in the case of students whose performance is difficult to assess using conventional methods, such instruments shall include consideration of work samples, projects and portfolios, and shall facilitate authentic and direct gauges of student performance.

The legislature seemed to have a good grasp of current educational theory regarding best practices for assessment, and the curriculum standards being assessed seemed to reflect teachers’ beliefs and practices— teachers felt they had been included in the decision-making process. Time and again, the law called for “sensitivity to different learning styles and impediments to learning.” There was every reason to hope that just as the Frameworks had been generated through a collaborative process led by teachers active in the field of education, so too, would the assessment tools be. It did not turn out that way.

Starting in 1993, grassroots efforts by teachers to re-tool their programs to emulate best practices were undertaken as the teacher-driven Curriculum Frameworks⁵ were researched and written. Schools began to receive more money from the state, though not enough for full funding of textbooks for every student in every class, nor to

cover the cost of expanded enrichment programs. Where leadership was effective, everyone was committed to provision of quality education for all and system-wide curriculum reviews and alterations started. Reading Recovery programs and other literacy efforts were initiated to improve language skills, block scheduling was introduced to allow in-depth investigations in the content areas, and teachers were taking classes and attending workshops to improve their teaching and increase their expertise, though complaints arose about the quality and availability of college/university courses and workshops. Rigorous administrative reporting requirements were established. Paperwork mushroomed without increased State funding for support staff to handle the increase. But just as everything started to kick in, the Board of Education decided to subject the seedling effort to a high-stakes test. Confusion ensued.

With the MCAS tests, the Board of Education subjected students to days of testing to determine if they had learned the material outlined in the "broad guidelines" of the Curriculum Frameworks. The students had just recently (over two to three years) been introduced to the first efforts of teachers to implement these Frameworks in their classrooms.

On teachers the state imposed the do or die deadlines for test preparation. Mathematics teachers, whose students were declared underperforming, became subject to State competency testing. Students, teachers and schools were to be held accountable for not accomplishing full growth within the seedling programs. School scores were to be publicized and teacher status attached to them, and in an unintended turn of events real estate sales would be tied to them. The tool used to measure the level of growth and accomplishment was the MCAS test, and no longer were teachers leading the way.

Decisions were increasingly made at the State level and handed down to teachers through administrative hierarchies.

From all accounts in the field, it was the wrong tool used for the right reason. Taxpayers who support the public schools, parents who entrust their children to these schools, students who attend them and the faculty and administration who run them wanted to ensure local schools provided quality education, though they did not necessarily agree to fund it.⁶ All wanted children to reach their potential, to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for social harmony and equality, and to broaden and deepen their understanding of both the conventions and questions that underlie our society, world and cosmos. However, growing numbers of these people charged that a single test based on Standard English verbal and mathematical acuity and a visual learning style is not the true measure of the achievement of the aforementioned goals. Some offer even broader criticism of the tests, saying they are detrimental to teaching and learning and, possibly, were foisted on the public schools by forces hoping to demonstrate their inadequacy in order to dismantle public schools through privatization.

Needless to say, with the futures of millions of young citizens at stake, the arguments grew heated. Raising much of the heat is the argument over locus of control. People are concerned not only with what is taught, but who determines what gets taught in public schools. Silber's Board, like subsequent state Boards of Education, sought total control over curriculum, from setting standards to assessing performance. Silber made this statement at a Board meeting,

After we have more time, and after we have competed not only the Frameworks, but the guides to teachers and the lesson plans and everything else so that we can refine these (proposed MCAS) tests then

maybe we're going to reach that stage (of benefiting from customized tests)." (Massachusetts Board of Education, 1997)

Silber outlined a process of top down imposition of curriculum right down to the lesson plan level, which he maintained needed to be in place in order to refine the tests. Gone is the sense of need for teacher involvement that encouraged so many practitioners to participate in formulating the Curriculum Frameworks. Through his public statements, Silber advocated for centralized control of classroom content and assessment. It was all said under the guise of making the right decision about what type of test to order all schools to administer. Silber did not wish to waste money on customized tests until the new state-mandated curriculum was fully in place. Beneath his veneer of logic regarding test selection, the bottom up reform movement was being dismissed.

Silber argued about the need for standardized curricula and tests on the basis of transience in public schools. He said that such regulation of teaching was necessary to ensure that all students could move from school to school and remain certain to cover all necessary topics and skills. But however logical his arguments might seem, there were those who poked holes in them by staying focused on the major issues. Renowned educator Debra Meier, known for her commitment to quality education for all, was among those who took on this task of challenging the State's drive to standardize curriculum and assessment. She stood before the Board in 1997 and argued against standard curricula. She spoke in particular about the social studies framework, which she said, "dictates a particular narrow politically correct answer to issues of both pedagogy and curriculum." She concluded that the framework "...offers us not standards, but standardization" (p. 5). Meier decried the imposition of content and

pedagogy from a centralized power base. She maintained that “There is no one right answer to an old and honorable issue of what constitutes the best education...” as she advocated for an open and ongoing discussion of this question, a discussion precluded by the adoption of Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks used as guides for standardized high-stakes test preparation.

Meier reminded the Board, which had earlier heard inquiries from Silber about the creation of “required reading lists” for each grade (citing transience as the crucial factor in creating a need for such State-determined lists), “...The genius of this country, historically, has been our being prepared to examine those trade-offs (of different approaches to teaching) rather than try to develop a highly centralized system” (p. 6).

Meier had earlier chided the Board, saying there is

no indisputable evidence that students for example, from my state of New York, with its long history of state-mandated curriculum and testing, has produced better educated citizens than you of Massachusetts which has no history of such mandating.

Such realities, she argued, should encourage the Board to let communities decide what will be taught in their schools and what constitutes mastery at the high school level.

Such community control is better than “allowing solutions to be imposed by government agencies or experts far removed from our lives and the lives of our children” (p. 6).

Proponents of the tests, who include many business leaders, politicians and education officials within the government, want accountability in the schools. They argue that the use of the single instrument allows the state to determine if all children are receiving an adequate education. Adequate education, they contend, involves attainment of ‘high standards’ that will make Massachusetts children academically

competitive and primed for high tech jobs. "One of the biggest problems we have in this growing economy is the work force," stated Fleet Boston Financial and Greater Boston chamber of Commerce Chairman Chad Gifford (Weber, 2000). Gifford made the statement as he urged his business colleagues to invest in Boston's schools and support MCAS tests as urged by Education Commissioner David Driscoll at a meeting between business and education leaders held in Boston. Like thousands of business leaders across the country, Gifford expresses concern about the quality of workforce personnel entering the world of work from the world of public schooling. Joining forces with the business groups and leaders, Massachusetts' politicians have maintained the pressure to sell the MCAS tests to the public. In a separate Boston Herald article (Hayward & Macero, 2000) reporters quote Education Commissioner Driscoll as saying, "People have heartfelt concerns, but a greater injustice would be to send kids out into a global economy and call them high school graduates when they don't have the skills to compete."

The shift toward business culture determining education policy underlies the movement toward centralized curriculum and tests. Business forces readily assemble the political clout to forward their agenda, and this is more easily accomplished at the state, rather than the local level. Under the banner of educational improvement and equity, these forces have supported standardized tests and an accountability system that may work well in industry, but may oversimplify educational issues.

Any effort to revoke the mandated tests would

violate the consensus reached between union, business leaders and legislators in 1993 when Beacon Hill approved the landmark Education Reform Law, which has pumped nearly \$6 billion into Massachusetts

schools over the years. Accountability for students, teachers and administrators was the linchpin of the deal and now is no time to bail out,” according to the Boston Globe’s report of Driscoll’s statements. This agreement, apparently, did not involve educators at the lower levels of authority – school administrators and teachers.

Comments from then (2/10/97) Board of Education Chair Dr. John Silber further support the premise that a business-oriented platform, in this case of international economic competitiveness, drove the institution of both the Standards and the MCAS test. During a discussion about whether or not MCAS should use ‘off-the-shelf tests’ or customized tests created by Advanced Systems of New Hampshire, Silber argued against committing “ourselves to the expense of customized tests ”because they ‘will not give us the capacity to answer one question the legislature insists on, and that is whether our students meet international standards....” He insisted that the board was “obligated to have a test that shows that the achievement of Massachusetts high school graduates meets international standards” (Board notes, 2/10/97). Silber was advocating that test content be determined at levels even further distanced from local schools. He did not prevail at that point, and the MCAS tests were designed to align with Massachusetts’ Curriculum Frameworks.

The first events recalled from the implementation of the MCAS were reports of children straining to achieve or giving into despair as they faced question after question after question demanding recollection, application and evaluation of material presented on endless pages by a distant, faceless entity called the Department of Education. Then parents spoke up, asking why their children were being subjected to these tests. They were told it was to make sure their children were receiving optimum opportunity and

“Standards-based” education. Politicians, bureaucrats, powerful people like Silber and Peyser defended the test and its high standards that they believe will lead to internationally competitive students. Teachers, including 1998 Teacher of the Year Mary Ginley and Harvard’s proponent of constructivist teaching, Eleanor Duckworth, parents, students and some administrators like Meier, began to chafe at being told they weren’t ‘good enough’ for the competition. They shot back the statistics proving their accomplishments:

- Advanced Placement Tests – 71% of Massachusetts’s students who took these tests scored in the top three levels, nearly eight points higher than the national average of 63.5%.
- SAT Tests – 1999 Massachusetts students raised their SAT scores and produced the highest average scores in a decade, scoring at the national average in English and Math despite the fact that 78% of MA high school seniors take the exams (representing the third highest participation rate in the country).
- TIMMS Scores – On the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, only eight out of 41 nations outscored local students in math, and in science Massachusetts’s students ranked #2.
- Iowa Test of Basic Skills – Nearly 70% of Grade 3 students in Massachusetts scored in the top two levels, Proficient or Advanced, on this reading test, but in 1998 these now 4th graders placed only 20% of their numbers in the MCAS test levels of Proficient and Advanced. (All figures were provided by FairTest, a not-for-profit national organization that

opposes high-stakes testing and advocates for the use of multiple forms of assessment for high-stakes decisions).

Massachusetts students are doing well both nationally and internationally, they said. And, these protesters argued, "The lack of correlation to these other indicators point out that this test is designed to produce high failure rates, and that our public schools should not be 'shamed' for 'low performance' nor bullied to raise test scores on a single indicator." This is especially true since testing experts universally agree that no single standardized test should be used to make important decisions such as who will graduate or be retained and which schools will be taken over by the state.

Thousands of American educators find themselves caught up in a score-boosting obsession that seriously detracts from their effectiveness in teaching. ... (And the) most frightening aspect of the pressure on educators to raise test scores is that it's a score-boosting game that educators have no chance to win.... (Popham, 2000, pp. 16-17)

A groundswell of activity began to rise on the placid landscapes of schools.

While it is true that many teachers and citizens, especially those not directly involved in the testing, remained publicly silent on the issue, others began to act. Flyers were printed, posted and removed. Small meetings were held in library basements and larger ones in auditoriums. Teachers like Ginley warned others to be careful in their protest efforts because "we are being watched." Some, like Jim Bougas of Harwich Middle School, refused to give the history exam because his students had not studied all the material on it (and it is a basic lesson of education schools that students not be tested on what they have not been taught). In 1999, Bougas asked to be reassigned duties while the MCAS Test was administered to his students. In an email he wrote,

Fortunately, I had then a principal who obliged. He has since retired. The new principal will not be so accommodating. I intend to ask for the same reassignment this year. If refused, I intend to go to plan B: request personal leave without pay while the MCAS Test is being administered. If refused that? ... plan C...

Such confrontations between teachers and administrators, between teachers and students and between students and administrators continued to grow at the turn of the century.

Opponents of the tests received tremendous support from a group called "CARE," Comprehensive Assessment Reform Education. CARE supports four main points of contention regarding high-stakes testing. They assert that (1) MCAS "undermines high standards"; (2) its "scores are being misused for high stakes decisions"; (3) this high stakes "burden...will fall heavily on our most vulnerable students"; and (4) such "testing is not a viable strategy for school improvement."

While the Education Reform Act of 1993 "was based on the idea that a good education helps young people get to the heart of things," CARE members express fears that, "...the MCAS tests encourage young people to skim the surface and memorize material they will soon forget." They proceed to warn about the narrowing of curriculum and instruction, as teachers focus on the short-term goals of raising test scores. As they foresee it, this narrowed instruction will undermine equity for many in the underclasses because access to innovative and successful programs will be restricted in the rush to measure achievement only by test scores. These MCAS opponents support high standards, but not standardization. Students learn and show their learning in different ways, they claim, and the main goals of assessment should be to help students learn and to help teachers support student learning. They maintain that assessment

should, under no circumstances, restrict students' access to rich and varied learning experiences.

Furthermore, the group asserts through its pamphlets and handouts that single high-stakes' test scores should not serve as a "gateway to high school graduation, grade promotion, and course placement." Such important decisions, they argue, "should be made locally on the basis of multiple sources of information and never on the basis of a single standardized test score" because such a process "takes important life decisions away from the teachers and other adults who are closest to students and know them best."

On the subject of school improvement, CARE states that MCAS like other "state testing systems across the nation, is an effort to whip schools into shape." To do this, they explain, "educational authority (has been) taken away from local communities and put in the hands of the testing bureaucracy." Such relocation of authority will not work to improve schools, they say. Rather, it is an "attempt at a quick fix (which) hasn't worked elsewhere and ... won't work here." To improve schools they suggest local stakeholders build strong curriculum, provide ample professional development for teachers, and, most important, foster local community involvement.

Despite criticisms from recognized teacher and school leaders, the powers supporting the tests maintained their stance, which benefited from their political clout. Among their number were governors and commissioners. In one case, Governor Paul Cellucci explained at a meeting with the press reported in the Boston Herald (2000) that he and Education Commissioner David P. Driscoll, believed that the tests' "objective" measurements are the best way to assess student education. That assessment then

reveals which schools are failing to provide a “quality” product and which are doing an adequate or superior job, he claimed. It is all about accountability he said, adding, “It is necessary to know whether or not public schools are developing young citizens who can make it in the marketplace.”

The issue of who should control curriculum and pedagogy is central to the MCAS test debate. The test has forced the issue by wresting from local communities their control over what gets taught in public schools, and therefore, wresting control from teachers, as well. Public school students cannot graduate if they do not master the material and the method of response to the material that the MCAS tests require. Furthermore, the State has threatened to take over schools that fail to show score improvement over two to three years, despite the psychometric issues involved in comparing one year’s 4th grade test scores against another year’s, for instance. Recent efforts call for State intervention sooner, and already the State has instituted Department of Education reviews of several school systems it declares are “underperforming.” Teachers at several of the schools being reviewed report that Department of Education’s presence during these reviews is pervasive. The Massachusetts Department of Education, they say, scrutinizes and critiques teachers’ instruction, institutes intensive paper trails and examines system finances and administrative policies as part of its review process.

In fact, one of the main thrusts of MCAS testing is to assess schools themselves. In order to do so, the test scores are aggregated to evaluate the performance of various schools and school districts. Specifically, the scores are used to determine whether these schools and districts are “improving students’ performance based on the learning

standards contained in the Curriculum Frameworks,” according to Department of Education publications. (Again, these Frameworks were compiled under the guise of creating guideline documents to help teachers and schools create useful curricula that would teach essential material to students at all educational levels; they were not designed with the knowledge that they would be used as rubrics for tests. And certainly, they were not aware that score results from these tests would be used to evaluate school systems.) Such a use of the tests puts schools in poor districts or with large special education programs at a distinct disadvantage. A school that attracts special education students because of progressive programming is likely to see its test scores drop in comparison with other systems serving fewer disabled learners. And as Robert Gaudet of the University of Massachusetts/Boston discovered in his research of MCAS reported in an Associated Press story (2000), “...though demography is not destiny, it sets a strong tendency.” Most of the variation in tests scores, Gaudet learned, is tied to differences in community affluence. What was meant to be a tool to level the playing field is being revealed as a marker of the field’s unevenness.

Despite ongoing research and debate, resistance dwindles. The tests have been changed, and more accommodations for special needs students have been made. Scoring has been adjusted, so fewer students failed, though thousands of Massachusetts’s youngsters who complete 12 years of schooling, often with passing grades, still fail to graduate high school. Many more are reported to have left the system earlier, convinced they cannot pass the test. Schools have developed programs to prepare students for tests and teachers have adjusted curriculum and instruction in order

to help students over the MCAS hurdle. What these accommodations and adjustments have meant to teachers became the subject of this study.

Closing

The learning in local classrooms may be deeply affected by high-stakes tests (Popham, McNeil, Johnson & Johnson, Meier, Sizer). Therefore, standardized testing was examined from a global as well as local perspective. Issues related to standardized testing as a high-stakes assessment mechanism were discussed, with particular attention paid to those issues relating to the MCAS tests.

This section began with a history of the testing movement in the United States. Following the history came a review of the social and political issues connected with education and the motivations for high-stakes testing programs. An exploration of opposing pedagogical positions in regards to high-stakes testing followed. Finally, some of the psychometric and economic issues connected with high-stakes testing were explored.

The section closed with an overview of the MCAS high-stakes test. Background material regarding the conception and evolution of the tests was offered first. Next came an outline of testing procedures and regulations. Psychometric and economic issues were also addressed. A history of events surrounding the test and an explication of the forces supporting and opposing the tests closed the section.

Current Studies on The Effect of High-stakes Tests on Teachers,
Curriculum, and Instruction

Literature explicitly linking the two concepts of curriculum/teacher decision-making and high-stakes testing/MCAS is reviewed in this final section. Within this literature there exists a natural overlap with literature reviewed in previous sections where the two views of curriculum— content-centered versus student-centered— surface in opposition. However, the perspectives shared by theorists, researchers, and advocates show other divisions as well. Many of the voices that promote content-centered curricula also espouse national standards and assessments, including high-stakes tests, and a business model for schools, one where there “is a convincing way to relate inputs to outputs,”(Gerstner, et al., 1994, p. 230). These “reform” proponents remain convinced that America’s schools are in crisis. Those voices speaking in favor of student-centered curricula often champion de-centralized decision-making with de-emphasis on national standards and assessments, including high-stakes tests, and reject the business model for schools, insisting that children are not equivalent to the raw material of industrial activity (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003). Among those who question the results of high-stakes testing on education— curriculum instruction, and teacher decision-making— one hears a plurality of researchers speaking. Advocates of high-stakes standardized tests and standardized curriculum most often draw on theory and observation, rather than classroom research. Levine (1996, p.112) describes it as a battle between those who seek “harmony,” or the blending of knowledge and ways of knowing, and those who seek “unity” or the imposition of a single, best canon of knowledge and way of knowing. Before these current perspectives are explored, a brief review of events leading up to today’s high-stakes testing phenomenon is presented.

Among those who see America's schools in crisis and a need for educational "unity" (Ravitch, 2000; Finn; 1994; Gerstner, et al., 1994), political figures William Bennett, Jr., and Lamar Alexander are among the most visible, having served national political administrations. The history of their pro-free market business, nationalized education goals, and standardized high-stakes testing positions extends back in time to the debates between traditionalist and progressive educators, but surfaced most recently in the 1980s.

During the 1980s, an atmosphere supportive of rugged individualism, vociferous capitalism, termed "ruthless" by some, international competitiveness and governmental distrust created the backdrop for the political stage across which strode the national Commission on Excellence in Education. The Commission's eighteen members were convened in 1981 by then President Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Education T. H. Bell, who was concerned about "the widespread public perception that something is seriously remiss in our educational system." At the time, however, most people expressed greater interest in recharging the flagging U.S. economy than altering the public school system. In fact, President Reagan had been elected by promising a "new morning in America," and was credited with generating a renewed sense of hope and activity within the nation that former President Jimmy Carter had characterized as being in the grip of a 'malaise.' Throughout the Education Commission's document, hints of these economic concerns surface:

We live among determined, well-educated, and strongly motivated competitors. We compete with them for international standing and markets.... The risk is not only that the Japanese make automobiles more efficiently than Americans and have government subsidies for development and export. It is not just that South Koreans recently built the world's most efficient steel mill, or that American machine tools, once the

pride of the world, are being displaced by German products. It is also that these developments signify a redistribution of trained capability throughout the globe. Knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce.... If only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets, we must dedicate ourselves to the reform of our educational system.... Learning is the indispensable investment required for success in the 'information age'.... (A Nation At Risk, 1983, p. 1)

These quotes provide unavoidable reminders of the more critical economic problems underlying the rush to reform the United States' public schools. Many understood that United States industries were failing because of business decisions, not educational policies. However, the drive was on to remodel the premier social institution in the United States – its public schools – into a capitalistic, market-shaped industry in order to correct economic failings.

Education became an investment, not just a door to opportunity, dealing with the 'raw materials' of ideas and facts. Education became an arm of commerce. These concepts fueled a series of political actions and commission reports in the ensuing years, serving to refocus attention in education from providing an equal opportunity for all children to learn and grow into their potential to providing a return on an investment. Again quoting Gerstner, et al. (1994), "The strategies that business have developed to deal with change, and to manage large and small organizations, have a direct bearing on schools" (p. 15) that will help schools yield the "highest payoffs."

Recommendations to create more rigorous "new basics" curricula in American schools were offered up as a solution to national and individual economic slumps.

We firmly believe that a movement of America's schools in the direction called for by our recommendations will prepare these children for far more effective lives in a far stronger America.... It is by our willingness to take up the challenge, and our resolve to see it thorough, that America's place

in the world will be either secured or forfeited. (A Nation At Risk, 1983, p. 6)

A new stage was being set, one on which the latest in a long line of education reformers would strut their brief hour and in which teachers would be held responsible for poor economic showing, criticized as inadequate, and considered incapable of handling important principle decisions about education.

A Nation At Risk laid the foundation for those reformers who supported standardized tests and curricula, more and stricter oversight of teachers, a more intensive academic life for teachers and learners, and privatization of public schools. Not only did the report specifically call for standardized tests, it advocated what pedagogue Allan Bloom called "...a fund of shared experiences and thoughts on which to ground ... friendships with one another" (1988, p. 343). Like Bloom, and later E.D. Hirsch and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the Commission argued, "A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture, especially in a country that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom" (p. 2).⁷ It was easy to see in the rhetoric a subtle attack on the nascent multicultural curriculum movement. Plainly discernable also was a belief in education systems as the arbiters of the American meritocracy. The broad plain of economic and civic opportunity, so valiantly fought for since Brown vs. Board of Education, would become a steep hill of competition. Merit would be earned by the most deserving – those who scored well on tests of a uniformly fashioned curriculum.

By 1999, 16 years after A Nation At Risk was released, journalist researcher Nicolas Lemann would declare,

There is now a sturdy and well-established conservative defense of the system, which argues that...we're right to assign economic destinies through education and test scores, because that's the fairest way and the most likely to promote the quality of sheer brainpower that fuels the modern American economy. (1998, p. 346)

Support for creation of an academic aristocracy that would secure America's preeminence in the world was championed under the guise of creating a better system for all. The standards movement was born and with it the standards-testing movement. The great "sorting out of individuals according to ability...very nearly the most delicate and difficult process our society has to face." John Gardner ("Excellence," 1961 as quoted by Lemann, p. 346) was permitted to extend to ever-earlier stages of development. What had once occurred at the high school level through the SAT's and college level through the GRE's and LSAT's, etc. would come to be practiced as early as the third and fourth grades of school. With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, standardized testing may be applied to students in first grade as well, with some advocating it begin in kindergarten, or even in pre-school.

Following in the wake of these explosive critiques of "the rising tide of mediocrity" in America's public education system, came a series of political initiatives that strengthened the authority of business leaders over educational policies, displacing curriculum theorists, school administrators, and teachers. By 1983, for instance, the Washington Roundtable (comprised of CEO's—chief executive officers—of major companies), citing "dissatisfaction with student performance," undertook its own study of the public education system. These private business leaders continue today to study and propose changes in public education via pro standards-based and privatization reform efforts like CEO America, the State Policy Network, Mass Insight, and various

conservative think tanks. Gerstner's New Century Schools offer a prime example of the expansion of business forces into the field of education (Gerstner has been chairman and CEO of RJR Nabisco and of IBM).

To effect the educational changes they deemed and deem necessary to manage the workforce in away that fulfills their labor needs, however, business leaders are dependent on the authority of elected officials to enact laws that support their goals and non-profit organizations to research, support and sustain their efforts (Gittell, 1998). Though usually active behind-the-scenes with donations and key commission memberships, the influence peddling by business groups is sometimes blatant. In 1984, the governor of Texas requested help from business magnate Ross Perot, a political ally, in order to generate public-and-private-sector support for increased education funding.

Literally taking over the committee, Perot challenged every sacred cow in Texas education. ...Under his aggressive leadership, Perot's committee increased student testing requirements, initiated teacher testing... (and) reshaped the school accountability system to include more stringent sanctions for non-performance by students. ...What started as a strategy to increase state support for teacher salary funding turned into a runaway reform wagon that eventually caused that governor's subsequent electoral defeat. (Cortez, 1998, p.188)

Though seldom as clear-cut as Texas' interweaving of business interests and mentalities and political outcomes, the growing influence of business on educational policy has been documented in the states of Washington (Darling, 1998); Michigan (Vitullo-Martin, 1998) and Massachusetts. In her comparison of reform efforts in New York, political scientists and researcher Marilyn Gittell argues, "The business community in most cities and states has been an important collaborator in school reform." (1998, p.131) While Gittell recognizes the influence of non-business community groups as agents of social change, she states that in Chicago, at least, the

groups recognized that substantial reforms would only be achieved “with business leaders playing a dominant and supportive role.” (p.152).⁸

In reality, economic powers have been accepted as essential to the political process, particularly as campaign finance sources and lobbyists. They are integral members of the structures that initiate, formulate, enact and implement education policy, and therefore, curriculum. As well, they enforce changes on teachers in local classrooms. But business leaders do not constitute the only set of players seeking control of the public education system. State courts have also been prime movers in the education reform arena, though their actions usually support funding reallocations, etc. designed to bring about greater equity rather than pedagogical change. If the courts consider issues of quality, it is only in relationship to provision of more equitable education. In her description of “The Alabama Experience,” Helen Hershkoff (1998) outlines the influence of the Harper case in forcing funding reforms to establish educational equity in a state notorious for its segregated and unequal political, economic and educational structures. A lawyer, Hershkoff contends that “...states that are most advanced in systemic change (toward equal funding) have had the benefit of court decrees.” And Al Cortez (1998, p. 191) notes that the true funding equalization occurred in Texas only after a series of court battles known as the Rodriguez or Englewood cases. But while the courts may force legislators to do something to equalize funding, it is businesses that are determining the shape and activity of that reform. Researcher Clarence Stone, who heads up a National Science Foundation grant to study civic capacity and urban education in 11 cities (Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Denver, Detroit, Harrisburg, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh,

St. Louis, San Francisco and Washington D.C.) notes that while a variety of civic actors can and do play important roles in the promotion of reform

Cities such as Atlanta and St. Louis, where business involvement was limited, are also cities in which there is little reform activity. Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, and Boston, by contrast, have wide and institutionalized business involvement and an extensive amount of reform activity. (1998, p. 172)

Clearly, business is becoming an, if not the, major player in current education reform movements.

Business forces have become chief architects of current public school curricula through a variety of education summits and ongoing input into various commissions appointed by legislators. What these events and publications illustrate is the expanding influence of economic directives upon education. A similar evolution has been observed by foreign policy pundits like Donald Kaul, who noted in a May 31, 2000 commentary that “shifting from anti-communist to pro-commercialization” ideology was evidenced as the nation’s legislators passed the China Trade Act in which the benefits to business outweighed concerns about human rights violations and other social and political concerns. But while political scientists like Marilyn Gittell believe the shift to include business leaders in setting education policies represents an opening of the processes guiding education reform to “common goals and coalitions of stakeholders in the cities and the states” (1998, p. 23), others disagree. They see centralization of curriculum decisions emerging as a result of what turn out to be high-level interactions of business and political leaders and public school critics, a process that inevitably excludes average citizens from education decision-making.

Among those criticizing America's schools and calling for change, Ravitch, Resnick, Finn, and Gertsner have generated much of the press. Though they differ in some aspects of their reform suggestions, all see a need for high-stakes testing. As Ravitch (1994) wrote, "At an abstract level, a compelling case can be made for national standards and national assessments, because they are a way of establishing what needs to be taught and learned and whether progress is being made." The case for national standards and high-stakes tests is forwarded because "American schools are underachieving institutions. Their aspirations are too low, and they are not working up to capacity" (Resnick & Nolan, 1994, p. 94). Finn (1994) states the case more forcefully:

Test help satisfy the craving for second opinions and outside validations. ...Test results help all these hungers (for competition and evaluation in comparison). They also facilitate accountability. Are Americans getting their money's worth from the local schools? Should that principal be replaced? Have the incumbent mayor's policies accomplished what he promised? (p. 128)

To Finn, Gerstner, Ravitch and others, tests are fair and objective measures of performance. They are part of a group that Popham (2001) says, "...accepts the idea that good test scores equal good education" (p.16) and who play on the "...sort of knee-jerk deference given to the folks who create and administer standardized tests" (p. 37). Gerstner (1994) explains it this way: "The most powerful stimulus for change in business is the discipline of the marketplace," and tests provide a way "to guarantee that schools will become and remain internationally competitive" (pp. 34-35). Furthermore, the tests facilitate the "rewarding (of) success and (the) penalizing (of) failure," further helping to improve education in an ongoing manner and monitor teacher performance. The rewarding and punishing system "...should be applied to teachers, principals, schools, and school system," asserts Gertsner (1994, p. 85), hinting

at the need to regulate what he and other business and political leaders, as well as traditionalist pedagogues, consider as to be the inadequate performance of these individuals and institutions. A case was being made to reposition educational decision-making authority from the school-based and local level to the state and even national levels.

Ravitch and Resnick and Resnick (1985) make the case for high-stakes standardized testing based not on a drive to re-create a successful business model in America's schools, but based on what they perceive as the inevitable link between standards and testing. Tests

Appropriately used, ...can motivate study and make clear to students and teachers alike what kinds of learning are expected in a given course of study. Cumulated across individuals, assessment results allow communities to judge whether schools as institutions are setting acceptable standard sand helping student to meeting them." (Resnick & Resnick, 1985, p. 11)

Again, the underlying premise remains: teachers and current curricula and methods of instruction fail to appropriately educate America's public school children.

In both the business-model and the standards-model support of high-stakes testing, hints of dissatisfaction with teacher performance are heard. However, differences exist between these two factions in their response to that perception. Resnick and Resnick (1985) declare that tests designed by distant, knowledgeable authorities would exert "...influence on the content and style of teaching..." and set "...a floor—a very high one—for the kind of instruction that will be offered...." (pp. 12-14). Tests then become incentives or guidelines for higher educational standards. Gerstner opposes centralization of authority, but advocates for tests because they objectively demonstrate accountability and generate change in institutions, such as

“Public elementary and secondary schools (that) are a protected monopoly, owned and operated by government and enjoying captive clienteles....” (1994, p. 13). Schools can individually set goals, but “At the same time that schools set goals, they must measure their progress toward them” (p. 69). He admonishes, “The business adage ‘What gets measured gets done’ must be accepted by schools. Clear goals must be measured with unequivocal yardsticks” (p. 69). Not all agree, however.

Research questioning the effectiveness of centralized decision-making about curriculum and instruction predominates research archives. Most literature supporting tests, as seen above, comes not from researchers, but from theorists and political, as well as business leaders. The works of Dale D. and Bonnie Johnson, Deborah Meier, Linda McNeil, G. F. Madaus, and Susan Ohanian among others, speak to the negative impacts on curriculum that result from standardized high-stakes testing and externally-established standards. Their claims echo beliefs of most teachers. In Education Week’s annual Quality Counts report, 2001, “A Better Balance: Standards, Tests, and the Tools to Succeed,” where survey results revealed that

sixty-seven percent of teachers said their teaching had become ‘somewhat’ or ‘far too much’ focused on state tests. And 66 percent said they were concentrating on test information to the detriment of other important areas of learning. (p. 20)

Research conducted by the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy (NBETPP) (2003) presented related findings from its survey of more than 4,000 teachers that concluded, “state testing programs are influencing both what teachers teach and how they teach” (p. 55). State testing programs, teachers reported, affect time devoted to activities not directly related to specific test subject areas, influences the time spent on various instructional methods, and the use of problems like those on their

state's tests (p. 55). Moreover, the severity of stakes attached to tests directly influences teachers' responses (p. 1).

Overall, Pedulla, et al. found that while teachers may recognize that "...state testing programs have refocused attention on important educational issues and reflect high academic standards," their "...views on the value of the state test are highly negative and fairly consistent regardless of the type of testing a program and school in which they work" (2003, p. 46). Teachers do not perceive institution of high-stakes standardized tests has improved students' learning. In related research by the NBETPP (Clarke, et al., 2003), interviews with 360 teachers in three states unearthed similar findings. The researchers interviewed teachers from Michigan, Kansas, and Massachusetts, with Massachusetts being the sole state with high stakes for educators and students. Not surprisingly, Massachusetts' teachers reported the most significant impact from state-mandated tests. On the positive side, these teachers perceived changes that resulted in the removal of unneeded content from curricula, a heightened emphasis on important content, and the addition of important, but previously untaught topics. Negative effects perceived included an overemphasis on certain topics at the expense of others, a narrowing of curriculum and an overcrowding of curriculum. These same teachers perceived negative effects on instruction and assessment that included increased preparation for tests, reduced instructional creativity, a focus on breadth rather than depth of curriculum, and a curricular sequence and pace they found inappropriate for some students. Instructionally, perceived positive effects included "renewed emphasis on writing, critical thinking skills, discussion, and explanation"(Clarke, et al., 2003, p. 9). The interview research concluded, "As the

stakes increased, interviewees reported more negative impacts on students, particularly elementary students, special populations, and students in urban districts” (p. 92). Survey results showed that the higher the stakes, the more teachers taught to the test, felt pressure to align instruction with the test, and make sure students do well on the tests, etc. (Padulla, et al. 2003, p. 123). Similar findings surface in studies presented by Nichols (2005), Brett and Egley (2002), Barksley-Ladd and Thomas (2000), Haney (2000), Freedman (1994), Smith (1991), and Darling-Hammond (1990). Books by Johnson and Johnson (2002) and McNeil (2000), as well as others, detail the accounts of teachers who experienced similar changes to their professional practice. Ohanian (1999) attacks “standardistos” who create the standards documents on which such tests are formulated. A veteran teacher herself, Ohanian writes, “In a deep sense, the Standardisto documents are not about curriculum; they are about bureaucracy, group think, and getting control of other people.” The current study revealed many similar findings. See Chapter 4 for more details.

Johnson and Johnson (2002) provide particularly powerful arguments about the loss of instructional time that results from emphasis placed on high stakes tests. They argue, too, that the cost of the testing and test-remediation programs steer valuable resources away from the classroom. They implore policy makers to eliminate expensive test programs and “Give the savings to the schools so that the teachers can purchase needed materials and supplies” (Johnson & Johnson, 2002, p. 113).

Meier argues that “Because the tests now claim to measure exactly what should be taught, it is far easier (for better or worse) to script teaching down to a lesson for

every day in the year, each corresponding to a set of potential test questions" (Meier, 2002, p. 128). But such scripting has its educational costs. Meier laments:

Adopting such a system means that many a curriculum related to children's interests or contemporary or spontaneous events ... must be ignored – or at best noted only in passing – in order to cover the standardized test-driven fare. It's hard to justify spending whole months on any topic, much less one that might involve only one or two questions on the test.... (p.129)

The MacArthur genius and educator further observes:

...the kinds of learning required of citizens in the modern world cannot be accomplished by standardized and centrally imposed systems of learning ... Human learning, to be efficient, effective, and long-lasting, requires the engagement of the learner on his/her own behalf, and rests on the relationships that develop between schools and their communities, and between teachers and their students. Powerless school communities simply cannot produce many powerful citizens. (p. 2)

Meier, like Sizer, Ohanian, Johnson and Johnson, among others, feels strongly that educational practice cannot be standardized and packaged so that one set of standards, one test, can result in quality education for all. Unlike Ravitch, Resnick and Resnick, Finn, and others, these educators believe strongly in local control. Local decisions about what should be taught and learned, they assert, require locally devised tests that align directly with instruction students receive. The costs of implementing a standardized, "efficient" system, they charge, far outweigh any benefits.

Having closely studied schools in Texas, McNeil (2000) concludes:

The technical language of accountability silences those professionals who want to stay in public education because it takes away the legitimacy for any other, counterlanguage to shape school practice. This problem is exacerbated as a system becomes so 'aligned' that professionals in the system are locked into compliance if they are to stay in the system." (p. 263)

This silencing of the professionals, in particular teachers, is reported over and over again. As Smith (1991) explains, "Whatever the actual consequences of test results might be... (they) lead to decreased teacher autonomy over curriculum and teaching methods" (p. 525). What happens when teachers attend to tests and do not follow their own professional training and instincts? Schorr, et al. found "Where teachers feel more pressure, they report increasing their 'didactic' instruction" (2003, p. 398), though overall they found that without "effective professional development, testing leads to minimal changes in teaching practice" (p. 373). Jones and Egley (2002) and Haney (2000) reported that teachers narrowed their curriculum, focusing more often on test-related topics, and the institution of testing programs encouraged teaching to the test. Yet, while Jones and Egley found in their survey of 708 teachers that responses to testing pressures were mixed,

Most of the teachers believed that the testing program was not taking schools in the right direction. ... (t)hey cited negative effects on the curriculum, teaching and learning. ... The positive effects cited were much fewer in number and include the fact that the testing held students, educators, and parents accountable for their actions. (p.1)

Haney found in his survey of 148 teachers that test emphasis in Texas is hurting more than helping teaching and learning in schools there. Results from this study confirm these findings.

Finally, it must be noted that groups, as well as individuals have spoken out against testing, in large part, no doubt, because of the scope of research indicating "the intended consequences are not realized through current state accountability programs, and many of the unintended consequences are negative" (Jones, Jones & Hargrove,

2003, p. 167), and in foreign countries the questioning of state intrusion into schooling through the use of high-stakes tests is also surfacing.

In 2000, the National Council of Teachers of English passed the following resolution:

The efforts to improve the quality of education, especially in underachieving schools are laudable, and the desire for accountability is understandable. However, high-stakes tests often fail to assess accurately students' knowledge, understanding and capability. Raising test scores does not improve education. Therefore, the use of any single test in making important decisions—such as graduation, promotion, funding of schools, or employment and compensation of administrators and teachers—is educationally unsound and unethical.

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics also opposes the use of a single test score to make high-stakes decisions. In addition, reports from Britain (Freedman, 1994), Finland (Alphonso & Harding, 2004) and China (Xiada & Zizhao, 1998)) indicate that the use of high-stakes testing as an agent of positive change is highly suspect. Freedman terms it “elusive,” while Xiada and Zizhao note that high-stakes testing mandated from distant authorities “makes curriculum and instruction reform difficult and that negative influences increase as the competition increases” (Xiada & Zizhao, 1998, p. 1). Finland, whose teenagers rank at or near the top in international tests in mathematics and reading, “rejects the idea of standardized testing, focusing instead on a curriculum that allows teachers to chart their own courses in the classroom” (Alphonso & Harding, 2004, p. A-1). Research and classroom experience, both in the United States and abroad, appear to seriously contradict the position forwarded by testing advocates who maintain that standardizing and centralizing education and assessment will improve it and offer support for teacher participation in decision-making about curriculum and instruction.

Closing

This section addressed the ways that high-stakes testing intersects with teaching and learning, especially as it relates to the role of the teacher. The section began with an overview of the opposing stances taken toward externally-determined learning standards and standardized high-stakes assessments—tests. First the perceptions and theoretical positions of those supporting standardized curricula and tests were delineated. These included proponents of a business-model for education and those who favor reform of the existing educational system, but are not necessarily proposing to replace it with a business-model system. Next the perceptions, theoretical positions, and research findings that question and refute the usefulness of standardized curricula and tests were presented. Lastly, the stances of groups and foreign researchers who oppose the continued use of high-stakes tests to evaluate students, teachers, and school systems were touched upon. Relevance to this study and its findings were noted when applicable.

Chapter Summary

This study's investigation into the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS, a standardized, high-stakes test, on teachers' autonomy to make decisions about curriculum, instruction, and their ability to meet individual differences in local classrooms, led this researcher to consider three interrelated substantive topics in this review of educational literature: curriculum and teachers' decision-making; high-stakes tests and the MCAS, and the effect of high-stakes tests on teachers, curriculum and instruction and ability to meet individual differences.

Pedagogical and theoretical stances relevant to each of three literature topics were presented. Section one detailed the education theories and political stances related to curriculum and teachers' role in curriculum and instructional decision-making that underlie the high-stakes testing phenomenon. Section two presented historical data on and highlighted test-related concerns related to high-stakes testing, and the MCAS in particular. The second section also included information about positions supporting and rejecting the use of high-stakes tests to evaluate student, teacher, and school performance. MCAS rules and regulations were also outlined. Section three reviewed current research and literature concerned with the effects of high-stakes testing on teachers, curriculum, and instruction. The role of teachers was examined in each subsection whenever relevant. The issue of teacher autonomy was specifically addressed in section one, though it also surfaced in section three. This research laid the groundwork both for the present study and for the data analysis.

End Notes

² The rising centralization of decision-making, with decreased input from local sources, is a situation that exists globally. For a broader picture of the situation, read Naomi Klein's "The Rise of Disaster Capitalism," *The Nation*, May 2, 2005, pp. 9-11.

³ At a recent meeting, an adult basic education teacher reported that a Massachusetts Department of Education official was editing the State's adult basic education mathematics frameworks to eliminate any content standards not covered by the Department's proposed standardized mathematics test, which is currently being pilot tested. This is an overt case of the assessment driving the curriculum.

⁴ The inequities in teacher salaries provide reflect less obvious inequities that continue to exist between Massachusetts' public school systems. The highest level of pay for teachers in the wealthy Dover-Sherborn district approach \$90,000 while those in the rural Frontier School District that includes the towns of Sunderland, Deerfield, Whately, and Conway (and is not considered a 'poor' district) top out at around \$54,000.

⁵ The Curriculum Frameworks were initially designed as broad guidelines for content and suggested pedagogy in the areas of mathematics, English, World Languages, social

studies, science and technology, health and the arts. Teacher dominated work teams met over an extended period to discuss what should be included in these Frameworks to reflect best practices and most necessary content coverage. For a more detailed account of the Curriculum Frameworks' process, see Dan French's Phi Delta Kappan article, "The State's Role in Shaping a Progressive Vision of Public Education."

⁶Funding constrictions for education arose in large part because of Proposition 2 1/2. As state funds for education increased under the influence of the Education Reform Act, towns operating under Proposition 2 1/2 limits, in some cases, used the State funds to decrease local tax liabilities rather than increase education budgets.

⁷It must be noted that Allan Bloom also opposed the inclusion of practical curriculum courses such as computer literacy at the university, though nearly all business leaders supported them. This clash of ideologies regarding curriculum essentials is ignored when it serves those in power, however. Bloom is more commonly heralded for his support of pro-Western, unified curriculum and "superior," traditional values.

⁸Legislative bodies do respond to their financial backers (most often business industries and leaders); however, they also respond to stimulus for reform generated from the courts. John Augenblick, "School Reform," 1998, p. 94, notes that in at least fourteen states (Kentucky, Alabama, Arizona, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Washington, West Virginia and Wyoming) the substantive threat of court intercession resulted in legislative school reform efforts.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the research design, instruments, data collection, and analysis procedures used in this descriptive study. The design is comprised of two major parts. The first part provides a general explanation of relevant aspects common to the three research questions, such as the selection of schools, the selection of teacher participants, and the instrumentation used for collecting data undertaken with a phenomenological approach meant to lead to "... a 'practical understanding' of meanings and actions" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 8) experienced by selected secondary public school teachers. The second part describes the specific steps taken to answer each research question.

Research Design

This descriptive study falls in the category N. L. Smith (1987, p. 311) termed "noncausal research," research that answers the question, "What is X?" Here the researcher sought to answer questions about teacher perceptions of the impact of a standardized, state-mandated assessment on their teaching practice – what is the impact of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) on teachers' autonomy to make curriculum and instructional decisions and their teaching to meet individual differences in local classrooms? As Donna M. Mertens writes, "Descriptive research questions are designed to produce information about what is or has been happening in relation to the target of the research" (1998, p. 52). In order to uncover and thus illuminate the likely influence of MCAS on teachers' autonomy to make

decisions about curriculum and instruction at the local level, data were collected in three formats – interviews, a forced-choice survey, and open-response survey questions – from selected English and mathematics teachers at public high schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The design called for both qualitative and quantitative procedures to strengthen findings by linking themes and results in a way that made clear the data patterns. Miles and Huberman (1994) rely upon earlier work by Firestone (1987) when they suggest that linking qualitative and quantitative data allows the researcher to persuade the reader in two ways. Qualitative data persuades

the reader through de-emphasizing individual judgment and stressing the use of established procedures, leading to more precise and generalizable results. On the other hand, qualitative research persuades through rich depiction and strategic comparison across cases.

They “believe that the quantitative vs. qualitative argument is essentially unproductive” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 41). Rather, one procedure supports the other in this inductive study, thereby allowing the researcher to form more solid conclusions from the data. Qualitative analysis permits a close study of the data “in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied” (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 562), while the introduction in this study of quantitative data analysis supplements the interpretive analysis and supports the knowledge claims forwarded in the findings section. Though visits to schools left clear impressions – security guards, locked doors, and blank walls or open doors and colorful student work hanging everywhere, such details will neither inform the analysis, nor play a major role in the data description.

Selection of the Schools

This study involved mathematics and English language arts teachers at diverse Massachusetts' public high schools, from urban to rural. Using what Donna M. Mertens describes as "stratified purposeful sampling" (1998, p. 263), this study focused on sample cases that involved only 9th and 10th grade teachers at schools with either high or low performance ratings on the MCAS. From an initial population of 55 Massachusetts public high schools, either falling at the highest or lowest score levels on the 2002 MCAS tests, eight were selected to participate in this study. Several criteria were applied to select the first 55 schools, and these will be described below. Once the initial criteria were met and the potential research sites identified, the final participating schools were randomly chosen by blind selection of school names separated into high-scoring large- and small-school groups and low scoring large- and small-school groups. If a selected school declined to participate, a new site was selected from the relevant pre-determined subgroup of schools.

The original 55 public high schools were selected from the more than 350 high schools in Massachusetts. Test results' analysis focused on traditionally defined high schools, and disregarded scores for vocational, alternative, charter, and other specially designated schools. Criteria for selection were:

- High school included grades 9-12. This factor ensured that teachers from both grades 9 and 10 would be available and operating within similar administrative structures.
- Average MCAS scores for the year 2002 were either high— greater than or equal to 250 points— or low— less than or equal to 235 points. The use of these

parameters, which cover both ends of the scoring spectrum, was intended to avoid data bias.

- No more than one school from a district was included in the study. This restriction was placed on the data pool to avoid over representation of any one district, such as Boston, which has multiple schools that fit the other criteria.

This process yielded 32 high-scoring secondary schools and 23 low-scoring secondary schools. There were no multiple-school districts in the high-scoring category and six in the low-scoring category, which reflects the greater number of urban districts in the low-scoring category. Therefore there are more than 23 Massachusetts public high schools with average 2002 MCAS scores at or below 235 points. The selected 55 schools were then further separated into subgroups by population size. The final configuration yielded 11 large, low-scoring schools; 12 small, low-scoring schools; 16 large, high-scoring schools, and 16 small, high scoring schools from which eight schools, two from each category, were randomly chosen for participation (see Appendix A for a listing of the original 55 schools by MCAS scores). As of 2002, the Massachusetts Department of Education ceased reporting average mathematics and English scores on its school profile pages; however, a look at MCAS results for 2003 indicates that performance differences between schools persist for those schools included in this study (See Appendix B). Of the original eight schools contacted, four declined to participate. Three failed to respond to queries and one cited labor difficulties as a reason for not participating. New schools were selected; and these schools agreed to participate, though the efforts to engage participants required considerable

persistence in some cases. Participation was established between November 2003 and June 2004.

A brief comparison of the eight schools shows significant disparities, which are discussed below then summarized in Table 3. High-scoring schools serve far fewer poor students, perform better on SATs and send a much larger percentage of students on to four-year colleges. State assistance has helped most schools offer competitive salaries to teachers, which is reflected in the narrow range of per-pupil expenditures (excepting one school). Percent figures for students receiving free or reduced-cost lunch reveal low-scoring schools served subsidized lunches to between 16.1 and 40.6 percent of students while high-scoring schools served free or reduced-cost lunches to no more than 8.3 percent of students, with most serving fewer than two percent. A look at United States census data from the year 2000 (not included in the table) revealed that median household income data reflect the difference in subsidized lunch percentages at high- and low-scoring schools. The median household incomes for low-scoring schools were as follows: School 1 – \$33,750; School 2 – \$35,672; School 7 – \$47,979; and School 8 – \$30,441. In contrast, the median household incomes for high-scoring schools were generally more than double those for low-scoring schools: School 3 – \$88,079; School 4 – \$51,851; School 5 – \$97,748; and School 6 – \$91,624. Differences again surfaced between high- and low-scoring schools when post-graduation statistics were studied. High-scoring schools sent between 67.7 percent and 88.5 percent of students on to four-year colleges, whereas low-scoring schools sent far fewer, between 33.3 percent and

Table 3. Sampled School Demographics

Demographic Categories	State Averages	School 1 (Sm. Low)	School 2 (Sm. Low)	School 3 (Lg. High)	School 4 (Sm. High)	School 5 (Sm. High)	School 6 (Lg. High)	School 7 (Lg. Low)	School 8 (Lg. Low)
2002 Scores	Unavail-able								
Math		237	229	252	251	253	257	234	227
ELA		230	236	255	250	256	254	230	232
Average		233.5	232.5	253.5	250.5	254.5	255.5	232	229.5
Enrollment (Gr. 9 & 10)	Unavail-able	437	1061	1214	264	666	1490	1957	1224
SAT (2000)	Unavail-able	V - 512 M - 478	V - 484 M - 490	V - 561 M - 570	V - 495 M - 516	V - 587 M - 581	V - 589 M - 611	V - 479 M - 488	V - 490 M - 482
% free lunch '00 - '01	24.7	22	17.7	1.3	.3	0.9	1.4	16.1	40.6
% drop out '00 - '01	3.5	6.9	5.5	.2	.2	2	0	3.1	7.4
Per pupil expenditure '01	6,177	6,290	6,578	6752	5,579	5,825	6,348	11,679	6,892
Avg. teacher salary '01	48,649	41,373	45,145	53,689	38,405	44,324	52,096	54,197	39,411
% 4-yr. college - '01	53.6	35.2	34.4	88.5	67.7	87.8	77.8	64.8	33.3
% race/ethnicity	.3	1.6	.1	.0	.6	0	.3	.02	.2
Native Am.	8.7	1.8	.9	3.0	.4	.9	.8	38.9	4.9
African Am.	4.4	.91	.7	4.8	.1	1.3	11.1	10.7	0.9
Asian	10.7	.6	10.8	1.7	2.1	.7	1.4	14.6	50.4
Hispanic	75.9	94.1	87.5	90.6	92.1	97.1	86.4	39.6	43.4
White									

64.8 percent, with most sending fewer than 40 percent. Furthermore, low-scoring schools, particularly large sites, were generally more diverse than high-scoring schools.

Selection of the Participants

Teacher participants included 60 self-selected 9th and 10th grade mathematics and English teachers (see Table 4: Teacher Participant Profile for summary information regarding participants in this study). Securing teacher participants required a variety of

Table 4. Teacher Participant Profile

Number of Participants	Descriptors
60	Total interviewed
59	Total survey submissions
23	English Teachers
32	Mathematics Teachers
5	Non-designated teachers
25	High-scoring school teachers
34	Low-scoring school teachers
35	Large School teachers
24	Small School teachers

steps that involved personnel at different administrative levels. First, principals at all eight schools where respondents taught were contacted by mail and asked to approve involvement of their schools in the study (see Appendix C Principals: Introduction Letter for a sample of the letter of introduction mailed and the response card included). Follow-up phone calls were then placed and, in some cases, the researcher was redirected to approach department heads to ask their permission and assistance in reaching potential respondents within the school system. In three of the eight schools, principals handled scheduling arrangements and initial contact procedures. In the remaining schools, department heads played a significant role in establishing contact between the researcher and respondents and arranging interview locations and times. In two cases, MCAS coordinators intervened between the principal, or principal's office, and department heads. Personal thank you notes were mailed to each party who facilitated logistics. Of the eight schools, three requested the researcher to appear at one or more faculty meetings to present the study and seek participants.

Teachers were asked to participate in the study in order to share their perceptions about the three issues raised by the study: the impact of MCAS on decision-making about curriculum, instruction, and teaching meet individual differences or needs. If they agreed to join the study, teachers received a copy of the two-part survey described below which they completed at their convenience and returned to the researcher at the time of their interview. In most cases participants had at least two weeks to complete the brief survey before they met with the researcher, either singly, in pairs, or in groups of three, for the interview. Only teachers of 9th or 10th, or both 9th and 10th, grade mathematics or English language arts class were contacted. Reasons for limiting the study to teachers of these academic subjects have been outlined above, but primarily it is the emphasis on 10th grade mathematics and English MCAS scores as a graduation requirement that makes these teachers particularly important to study. Admittedly, some had little teaching experience in the period preceding institution of MCAS; however, all shared some views regarding current practice and influence of MCAS on curriculum and instruction. See Table 5 below for a summary of teacher participants by school.

At the time of the first meeting between the researcher and teacher participants, or prior to this by mail, all teachers received a letter of introduction (see Appendix D: Teachers: Introduction Letter for a sample), and they received a copy of the purpose statement (see Appendix E: Purpose Statement) to help clarify the study for those interested in participating. Teachers were self-selected, and no one was coerced into participation. All signed informed consent forms willingly (see Appendix F: Informed

Table 5. Teacher Participants by School

School	Teacher Participants		
	English Language Arts	Mathematics	Undesignated
School #1 (small/low-scoring)	3	3	
School #2 (small/low-scoring)	5	6	
School #3 (large/high-scoring)	4	7	1
School #4 (small/high-scoring)	1		1*
School #5 (small/high-scoring)	4	3	
School #6 (large/high-scoring)	3	1	
School #7 (large/low-scoring)	1	3	
School #8 (large/low-scoring)	4	8	3
Totals	23	31	5

*While this teacher participant did not identify as a mathematics teacher on the survey, this information was revealed during the interview. Thus every school had participants from both the mathematics and English departments.

Consent Form), and only one person expected to interview failed to post at the agreed-upon time. In two cases mathematics department chairs were reluctant at first to participate while only one English department hesitated. However, teachers from both mathematics and English departments were represented in each of the eight schools.

Data Collection

Two instruments were developed for this research: the two-part MCAS Impact Survey (see Appendix G for a copy of the Survey and administration instructions) and the MCAS Impact Teacher Interview (see Appendix H for a copy of the Interview questions and administration instructions). Research data were compiled in spreadsheet

form for survey items and transcribed then compiled in spreadsheet form for survey open question responses and transcribed for interviews. To prevent the chaos that might result if recorded data somehow became disarrayed, the researcher catalogued all interview transcriptions and surveys by site and number.

Data collection instruments were field tested in a Massachusetts public high school that was not included in this study. Twelve mathematics and English instructors participated in the field test and were asked to identify survey questions as curriculum-, instruction- or individual differences-related to verify the researcher's intentions and were asked to re-take the survey later to check for reliability. Out of the original cohort of 12, seven submitted the repeat survey. As a result of the field test, several minor changes were made to instruments and procedures and are described below.

While the researcher had expected to interview teachers individually for the study, the field test indicated that in some cases teachers actually preferred to interview with others. They enjoyed the exchange of ideas and hearing from other departments what was transpiring there. In addition, group interviewing did not appear to interfere with elaboration or statements of position vis-à-vis the MCAS, local administration, or local curriculum. Therefore, final research interviews were conducted both individually and with groups, though only one interview was conducted with more than three people; and all interviews concluded within the 30-45 minute timeframe anticipated by the researcher. A group of three seemed maximal for interviewing. Open-response items on the survey were differentiated and engaging enough that field test participants added comments on the survey re-take, though they had been told this was unnecessary. The majority of teachers also identified survey items as relating to the categories intended

by the researcher. However, three items were sufficiently ambiguous that they required minor changes in syntax. Teachers' responses on the re-take were similar to those on the original surveys, ensuring reliability.

The MCAS Impact Survey completed by teacher participants includes two parts. Part I is a brief, 12-item forced choice survey. Part II includes three open-response questions. In Part I, four items were dedicated to each of the three primary research questions. A four-point scale, from Agree to Disagree, was attached to each survey item. The use of a four-point scale forced a dichotomy; respondents were 'forced' to either choose a '1' or '2,' which indicated varying degrees of agreement with a survey item, or to choose a '3' or '4,' which indicated varying degrees of disagreement. All statements were framed in a positive way. As the survey is brief, no negatively framed comments were included to test for inconsistencies in respondents' choices. The survey was designed to be personally anonymous, but responses were identified by school and subject area. Teachers were specifically requested to not write their names on the surveys. Inclusion of the open-response items allowed teachers a venue to express their thoughts in original language, and afforded a way to corroborate and augment data from the item survey and interview. These questions about impacts were followed by tagged spaces marked 'positive' and 'negative' so participants could choose to designate their comments as one or the other in nature. Originally, the researcher intended to distribute surveys immediately prior to interviews; however, early on teachers indicated a preference for completing the surveys at their convenience prior to the interview. In most cases, participants did, in fact, bring completed surveys to the interview; but it was necessary several times to allow teachers time to complete the survey during the

interview meeting, during the school day after the interview, or, in one case, on-line at a later time.

For this study, interviews were conducted on site at participating schools and included from one to three teachers, though one group of four was interviewed. Most department chairs did not take part in the survey and interview process. Participants at Site 1 were offered the option of not being taped and chose that. Ensuing difficulties with recapturing exact extended wording by the researcher led to a decision to tape all interviews. (Note: Copies of notes were submitted to Site 1 participants with no follow-up corrections, so the researcher assumed those data to be accurate and usable.) However, the researcher also took notes during all interviews in the event of tape failure. Interview analysis relied on transcripts of tapes, as there were no tape failures.

All interviews were conducted during the school day at locations designated by principals, department heads, or teachers. Some were conducted in teacher classrooms, some in department offices, some in general meeting spaces, and one in a media viewing room. All interviews were completed in 45 minutes or less, but in several cases teachers stayed on for further conversation.

At the start of each interview, the researcher greeted the participants and engaged in introductory remarks, particularly if this was a first meeting for both. On occasion the researcher supplied snacks of some sort as a token of appreciation for teacher participants; these were always gladly received. The researcher collected the surveys and filed them immediately without examining them. Next the researcher distributed informed consent forms and collected these when signed. Already the

researcher had hooked up the tape recorder, but the recorder was not turned on until it was clear to all that it was time to begin the interview.

During the initial stages of the interview meeting, the researcher commented upon aspects of school life or environmental conditions or general news as a way to establish rapport with teachers. However, such comments normally ceased once the interview began. In general, the researcher asked the four established questions on the guided interview form in the order previously outlined, noting that the questions were familiar to participants because they closely aligned with those asked in the survey. Regularly the researcher encouraged teachers to elaborate or offer examples if none were forthcoming. Occasionally she prompted responses by offering insights from research literature or prior interviews and asking interviewees how their experience reflected, or differed from, these circumstances, always considerate of providing sufficient wait time for teachers to ponder before responding. Teachers were generally asked each question separately, though in several instances conversation naturally flowed from one topic to the next (from curriculum to instruction, for instance), and so shifts in conversation were identified rather than specific questions being asked. In a few cases, the combination of time constraints and teachers' responses led the researcher to not ask question three about meeting individual needs. This was only done when teachers had to some degree addressed this question in earlier responses.

At several of the initial interviews, it appeared that teachers were not directly responding to the issue of 'autonomy,' so the researcher inserted a fourth question asking teachers if there was "anything more you would like to say about the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS tests on your professional autonomy for making

decisions about curriculum, instruction, and meeting individual differences?”

Participants seemed compelled to offer perceptions of the MCAS in general, in addition to commenting on the researchers’ specific questions. To accommodate a clear, though unstated request of the participants, the researcher did add to the list of questions an invitation to teachers to speak about issues related to MCAS that interested them, but remained unaddressed in the interview. This addition appeared appreciated as an acknowledgement of individual concerns and spoke to the use of a grounded theory approach whereby the researcher constantly interacts with the data to reform frameworks and theories. Moreover, the emergent nature of supplementary questions asked during the interviews – about logistics, specific curriculum practices, etc. – drew from grounded theory practice as well. At the close of each interview, the researcher thanked participants for the gift of their time. On several occasions the researcher was invited to observe classes during free time between interviews, and on two occasions she accepted these invitations. That teachers offered invitations to observe their classes suggested to the researcher that teachers felt comfortable with her and the research process, but more significantly that teachers viewed the study as important enough to warrant further engagement with the school, teacher, students, curriculum and instruction. The researcher transcribed all interviews and forwarded copies of these transcripts for review, along with a letter thanking each teacher for his or her participation in the study (see Appendix I: Teachers’ Letter of Thanks).

All hard copies of data were stored in files established for each participating school. Copies of transcripts and initial coding efforts were stored in a separate file as well. Transcription occurred at a date convenient to the researcher. Once all transcripts

for interviews at a participating school were complete, the researcher forwarded copies to the individual participants or to a volunteer participant who agreed to distribute copies to all in his/her interviewing cohort. In an effort to ensure anonymity, no teacher or administrator at a school who was not a part of an interview viewed the transcripts. Parts of all the interviews were, however, shared with those asked by the researcher to assist with establishing co-rater reliability. To further ensure anonymity, the researcher replaced references to specific localities or individuals with 'XXX' marks in the transcripts. The same device was used to mask specific details, such as number of years teaching in the system or teaching in general, which might, if used in the study, aid in surfacing a particular teacher's identity and thereby violate that individual's privacy. All such references were double-checked and eliminated in the report of findings found in Chapter 4.

Four participants responded to the receipt of the transcripts, with one noting two typographical errors, another finding an incorrect word, and a third asking to see a copy of the findings prior to publication in order to assess any quotes of hers that might appear there. The typographical and word errors were addressed and the request honored. A fourth participant called to be assured that ungrammatical, conversational phrases would be presented in a way that appeared grammatical. The researcher assured her this was so.

Data Analysis

Each of this study's three data types was analyzed separately. For each data type, the item(s) relevant to each research question were also considered separately.

Findings from each of the data types relative to each research question were considered together in order to establish the current study's general findings. Figure 1 (below) summarizes the organization of the data for analysis.

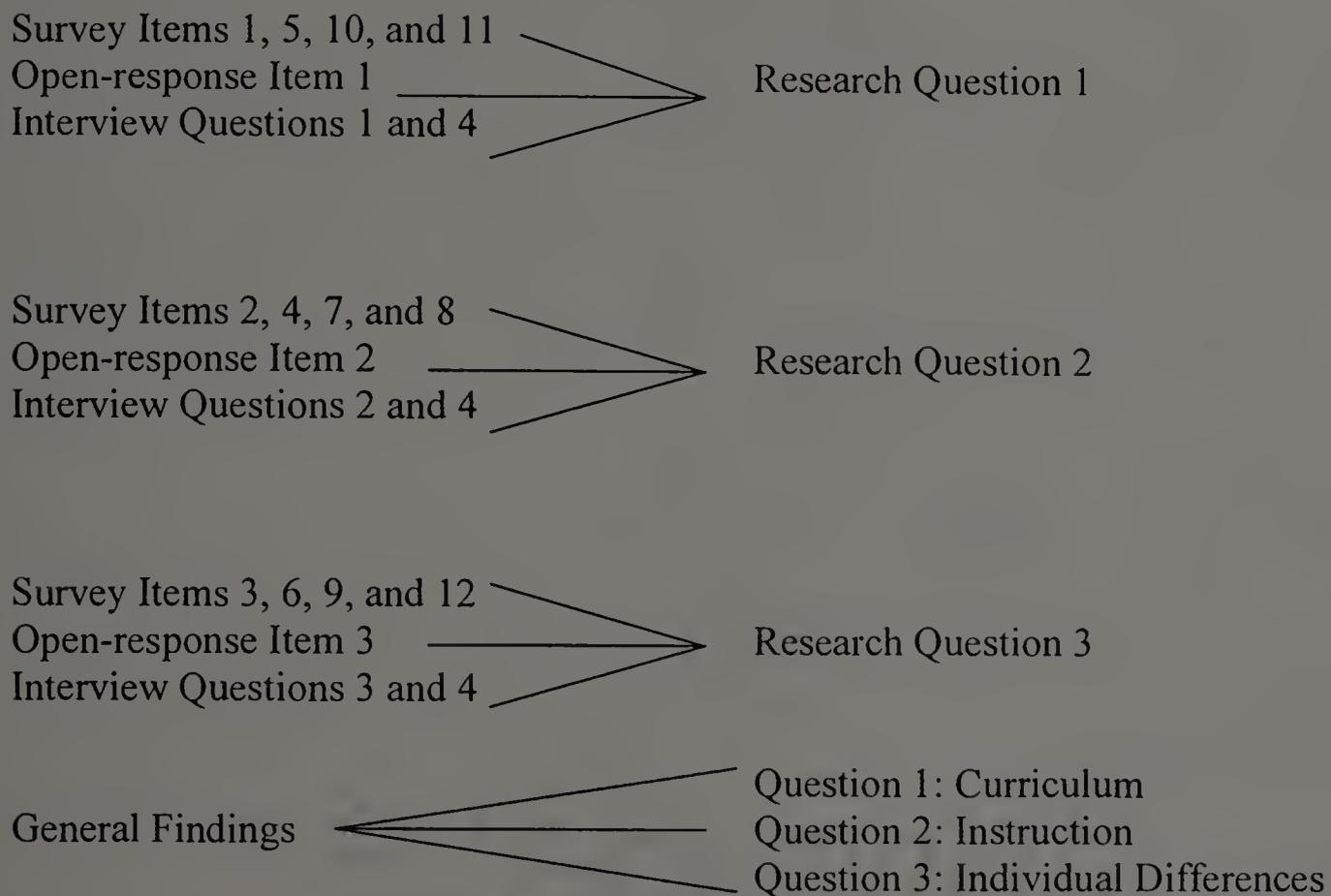


Figure 1. Analysis Process

All survey data were entered into a spreadsheet where participants were listed by site number and subject taught. Open-response item quotes were also entered in a spreadsheet with columns representing positive, negative and neutral responses to the three main research questions. Interview data were transcribed and subject to open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Mertens, 1998; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Two educators not connected with this study read some or all coded data and findings to verify that findings accurately related

to coded data. In addition, these educators considered the final analysis to confirm correspondence between findings and professional experience.

Approach to Survey Item Analysis

The original survey presented 12 items on a four-point, forced-choice, scale. The items related to the three research questions about: autonomy to make curriculum decisions and to make instructional decisions, and to meet individual differences in the local classroom operating under the impact of MCAS. A '1' or '2' response on the survey showed agreement with a survey item, with a '1' showing stronger agreement than a '2.' A '3' or '4' response indicated disagreement with a survey item statement, with a '4' response showing a more robust disagreement than '3'. However, three mathematics teachers and one unidentified teacher chose to insert decimal responses (2.5 or 3.5) for several survey items. For purposes of clarity, each 2.5 was considered a 3 and each 3.5 was considered a 4.

A response tilted toward agreement (a "1" or a "2") on 10 of the 12 items indicates perception of positive impact from MCAS on autonomy for curriculum and instruction decision-making and for meeting individual differences. Agreement with these items infers an increase in decision options available to teachers, while disagreement infers a reduction in options. Exceptions include Item 5 ("I have increased the amount of test-related content I include in my curriculum because of MCAS.") and Item 7 ("Because of MCAS I more often instruct in ways designed to improve test cores, such as telling how to do certain problems or how to write particular responses."). For Items 5 and 7, disagreement indicates a positive impact on teacher

decision-making about curriculum and instruction. Table 7 in Chapter 4 summarizes the survey findings based on dichotomies between positive and negative impacts.

To facilitate the analysis process, frequencies for response values for all teachers were determined then averaged to find the mean. This allowed the researcher to see the range of data and data clusters within, as well the typical response values for each survey item. Response averages for all items are reported in Chapter 4. Mean response values for subgroups: mathematics and English teachers (M and E); high- and low-scoring schools (H and L); and large and small schools (Lg. and Sm.) were also determined. Modes are discernible within each survey item chart in Chapter 4.

Survey item results were grouped by relevance to each research question, so findings might fully reflect responses to the questions. For Research Question 1, Survey Items 1, 5, 10, and 11 were analyzed. For Research Question 2, Survey Items 2, 4, 7, and 8 were analyzed. For Research Question 3, Survey Items 3, 6, 9, and 12 were analyzed. First, however, the items were considered individually, and then they were considered as a group.

Approach to Open-Response Item Analysis

A multi-step coding process, described by Strauss & Corbin (1998) and Miles & Huberman (1994), provided the framework for analysis of the open-response data from the MCAS Impact Survey used in this study. Initial concepts were coded in an ongoing and iterative matter, as Miles and Huberman suggest then concepts were categorized into themes. Part II of the survey included three requests for written responses (henceforth termed “open-response items”) from teacher participants, with each request

directly related to one of this study's three research questions. The Open-response Items were:

1. Please comment on the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on your autonomy to make curriculum decisions.
2. Please comment on the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on your autonomy to make instructional decisions.
3. Please comment on the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on your teaching to meet individual students' needs.

Blank space for listing "positive" and "negative" impacts follows each open-response item on the survey. However, while some participants included statements under each subheading, others combined positive and negative comments within a single statement, or they combined comments related to more than one open-response item. Furthermore, while 59 teacher participants submitted a completed survey, 55 responded to one or more of the open-response items. Because some respondents shared multiple responses to an item, the number of responses counted for each item varies from 61 to 79.

Responses were first categorized as positive or negative. However, a substantial number of participants wrote what became coded as "other" or "neutral" statements. Most neutral statements indicated that MCAS had had "no impact" on practice. Further complicating the coding process, participants sometimes wrote responses randomly on the survey page, whether positive, negative, or neutral/other, rather than beneath the subheadings provided by the researcher, or they employed irony in their responses. Since not all statements clearly differentiated the participants' positions, the researcher

needed to establish a system to carefully scrutinize responses for correct semantic coding as positive, negative, or neutral. The researcher, along with three other professional educators who did not participate in this study, agreed on coding placement. When differences of opinion arose among the co-raters, discussion ensued until all agreed on a rationale for placement; however, it must be noted the researcher brought to her reasoning process information that was not on the surface evident to the others. That is, the researcher might share information about the participant's responses and non-verbal communication expressed during interviews, and this information informed data coding.

Coded data from the open-response items were counted and positive, negative, and neutral frequencies are listed in Chapter 4. Responses are further sub-grouped on the basis of MCAS scoring levels (high and low) and teachers' areas of instruction (mathematics or English language arts). Furthermore, the researcher took note of those situations where a teacher used a qualifying word or phrase within a comment. For example, if the teacher used words such as "may" and "sometimes," or phrases such as "has the potential," such responses were considered "qualified." The researcher assumed that such qualifiers reflected less certainty on the teacher's part, and so were analyzed as being weaker statements than those statements free of qualifiers.

Responses were further coded into descriptive categories. Statements coded as "positive," "negative," or "neutral" curriculum-related, instruction-related, or individual differences-related, were later sorted into thematic categories. The description category sample shown below provides the title of the descriptive category, the number of total responses included in the category, as well as summary data about the split of

comments by school type (high- and low-scoring) and teacher type (mathematics or English). The number of descriptive codes for each open-response item varied from nine to fourteen. Response totals for descriptive codes varied from one response to 21 responses. Page numbers referenced below refer to the researchers' spreadsheet page numbers on which responses were entered. The researcher and a second educator agreed on all quote placements in these descriptive categories, one of which can be seen below.

Open-response Item I: Curriculum. Descriptive Category: Curriculum Structure – Positive An (n) indicates that the teacher also wrote a statement coded as 'negative.' A (q) indicates the researcher considered the statement to be qualified. "H" and "L" signify whether the statement came from a teacher at a high- or low-scoring school.

Total Responses: 6;
Low-scoring school responses: 5;
High- scoring school responses: 1;
Mathematics: 4;
English: 2.

P. 3 "It keeps the curriculum structured." L (n)
P. 3 "MCAS has given me the frameworks of what I need to each. It is spelled out for me." L (n)
P. 6 "MCAS provides me with a framework for critical thinking skills; I chose how to teach these skills and what material to use." H
P. 8 "It provides some structure where there was none before." L (n)
P. 8 "Knowing what is expected of students, regarding the questions, helps to plan curriculum." L (n)
P. 10 "The test covers worthwhile material. ... The test does bring unity to what is being taught statewide." L

Figure 2. Open-response Item 1

The descriptive code data related to each category— positive, negative, and neutral perceptions— within each research question section were considered as a group in the analysis of results (see Chapter 4). This analysis process laid the groundwork for

discovery of findings that illuminated teachers' perceptions relative to each research question.

Approach to Interview Data Analysis

This study's 29 interviews with 60 teachers from eight schools were conducted under varying conditions. As few as one, and as many as five, teachers participated in a particular interview. Most often interviews involved two to three teachers. Following each interview the tapes were transcribed. The only exception was the first interview, which was not taped upon request from the teachers. After each session the tapes or notes were transcribed and an initial analysis performed. Transcriptions were distributed to teacher participants who checked for errors.

Interview data related to four questions:

1. How have the MCAS tests influenced your professional decision-making about curriculum?
2. How have the MCAS tests influenced your professional decision-making about instruction?
3. How have the MCAS tests affected your ability to teach to meet individual differences of students?
4. Is there anything more you would like to say about the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS tests on your teaching or professional autonomy?

The nature of the interview data analysis evolved over time. At first a narrative description of the salient comments was provided, but by the second round of

interviews several concepts began to emerge. This list of conceptual codes developed and grew over time. These codes were then reorganized into themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Mertens, 1998). However, to connect the interview data with those obtained through the open-responses and survey items, a new analysis approach was developed.

Analysis of the open-responses from Part II of the survey yielded a list of codes that were organized into 10 themes (See Table 6 below). These themes and the codes became the springboard for re-examining interview data. All transcripts were re-read and the open-response codes applied. While the theme list stayed in tact, the code list was enlarged, for it became clear that the interview data revealed greater detail and a broader scope of topics related to the research questions than did the open-response data. In fact, several of the categories present in the open-response data presented less salience in the interview data, with several not being mentioned directly at all. Among those not mentioned were: accountability for results beyond control, benefits from changes in instruction to accommodate the MCAS, the usefulness of the tests in supporting the Frameworks, and the defense of practice offered concurrently with statements of the MCAS having no impact upon practice. New codes did emerge, several of these under the theme of autonomy (the comparison of conditions at schools of varying socio-economic status, professional disrespect/distrust and professional respect/trust). Also notably emergent were the codes of "reduces options," under the changing instruction theme and "not just MCAS," under the "preparing for the tests" theme. Interview data faced multiple examinations and checks for accuracy in coding. Outside sources confirmed coding placements and organization.

Table 6. Interview Code Themes List

Theme Number	Theme Title
1	Autonomy
2	Motivator
3	Changing Instruction
4	Changing Curriculum
5	Shortening of Instructional Year
6	Preparing for the Tests
7	Decreased Attention to Individual Learning Needs and Conditions
8	Test Concerns
9	Usefulness of Tests
10	No Impact

So few interview participants mentioned codes in Theme 2: Motivator and Theme 9: Usefulness of Tests, that these themes are not addressed in Chapter 4. Suffice to report that teachers from two schools said they did not feel compelled to use MCAS as a motivator and that, in some cases, MCAS acted as a de-motivating force within their classrooms. Those who "...use it (MCAS) as a stick" to motivate students, do so because they believe it either focuses students' attention on studies, helps them set priorities, or establishes a need to learn material. In other words, for these teachers, MCAS has beneficial affects in the classroom and aids them by increasing their arsenal of instructional tactics. The fact that so few teachers made statements about the tests' usefulness supports both the Survey Item and the Open-response Item data. As one teacher commented: "I think the test is useless as an assessment. It doesn't tell us anything we don't know about the population of kids that we're dealing with."

The coded interview data were related to each research question, with data from Interview Question 4, which was added to the original three interview questions for reasons described above in the Data Collection section, analyzed within relevant

research question sections. Within the analysis of results for each research question, data were sub-grouped according to perception type positive, negative, and neutral. Data within each sub-group were considered independently first and then as a whole. This analysis process laid the groundwork for discovery of findings that illuminated teachers' perceptions relative to each research question.

Methodology

The second part of this chapter details the specific steps of the design taken to address each of the three research questions. These steps include methods for the collection, analysis, and organization of the data gathered throughout the research process. Each question is stated then followed by the steps for the methodology.

Research Question 1

What are teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their autonomy to make curriculum decisions in their local classrooms?

Research Methodology for Research Question 1

The following steps were taken in order to answer Question 1:

1. The researcher contacted principals' offices in schools selected for participation and asked permission to include the school in the study.
2. The researcher either worked through the principal or the principal's designee, such as a department chair, to contact teachers.

3. Teachers were asked to participate in the study either by the principal, department chair, or the researcher.
4. The MCAS Impact Survey was distributed to teachers. Forced-choice items 1, 5, 10, and 11 referred to curriculum in Part I of the survey, while Question 1 from the open-response section related to curriculum.
5. A 30-45 minute interview was conducted with one to three participants (in one case only there were four participants) on site in their school. Question 1 of the interview directly addressed curriculum impacts, though references to curriculum-related issues often surfaced throughout the interview. Surveys were collected at the start of the interview process. Informed consent forms were signed as well.
6. Interview data were transcribed and copies mailed to participants for review. Ongoing coding occurred concurrently with transcription and included a blend of what Miles & Huberman (1994, p. 57) term 'descriptive', 'interpretive', and 'pattern' codes that were later refined.
7. Survey item data were entered in a spreadsheet. Analysis was performed to determine the statistical mean for each relevant question and to check for differences between high- and low-scoring schools as well as large and small schools. These findings are reported in Table 20 in Chapter 4. Relevant survey item details are found in Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11. In addition, a positive-negative dichotomy was established for survey items based on response values teachers chose. Table 7 in Chapter 4 displays a summary of teachers' perceptions (positive or negative) relative to each survey item.

8. Survey open-response data were transcribed, and frequency distributions for positive and negative impacts were tabulated for Question 1. See Table 21 in Chapter 4 for results. Positive, negative, and neutral responses to Question 1 are summarized in Tables 22, 23, and 24. These data were also coded using the themes and codes that emerged from interview analysis. Table 30 displays the frequency of codes and themes present in these data.
9. The researcher refined codes for interview data, organizing descriptive and interpretive codes into themes or patterns relevant to the question. Inter-rater reliability was established by having two individuals confirm the researcher's use of codes. Only minor differences surfaced, so no major changes to codes took place. See Table 31 for a grid representation of the codes used in this study.
10. All data relevant to curriculum decision-making were assembled and reviewed to determine significant findings.

Research Question 2

What are teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their autonomy to make instructional decisions in their local classroom?

Research Methodology for Research Question 2

The following steps were taken in order to answer Question 2:

1. The researcher contacted principals' offices in schools selected for participation and asked permission to include the school in the study.

2. The researcher either worked through the principal or the principal's designee, such as a department chair, to contact teachers.
3. Teachers were asked to participate in the study either by the principal, department chair, or the researcher.
4. The MCAS Impact Survey was distributed to teachers. Forced-choice items 2, 4, 7, and 8 referred to instruction in Part I of the survey, while Question 2 from the open-response section related to instruction.
5. A 30-45 minute interview was conducted with one to three participants (in one case only there were four participants) on site in their school. Question 2 of the interview directly addressed instructional impacts, though references to instruction-related issues often surfaced throughout the interview. Surveys were collected at the start of the interview process. Informed consent forms were signed as well.
6. Interview data were transcribed and copies mailed to participants for review. Ongoing coding occurred concurrently with transcription and included a blend of what Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 57) term 'descriptive', 'interpretive', and 'pattern' codes that were later refined.
7. Survey item data were entered in a spreadsheet. Analysis was performed to determine the statistical mean for each relevant question and to check for differences between high- and low-scoring schools as well as large and small schools. These findings are reported in Table 20 in Chapter 4. Relevant survey item details are found in Tables 12, 13, 14, and 15. In addition, a positive-negative dichotomy was established for survey items based on response values

teachers chose. Table 7 in Chapter 4 displays a summary of teachers' perceptions (positive or negative) relative to each survey item.

8. Survey open-response data were transcribed, and frequency distributions for positive and negative impacts were tabulated for Question 2. See Table 21 in Chapter 4 for results. Positive, negative, and neutral responses to Question 2 are summarized in Tables 25, 26, and 27. These data were also coded using the themes and codes that emerged from interview analysis. Table 6 displays the themes present in these data.
9. The researcher refined codes for interview data, organizing descriptive and interpretive codes into themes or patterns relevant to the question. Inter-rater reliability was established by having two individuals confirm the researcher's use of codes. Only minor differences surfaced, so no major changes to codes took place. See Table 31 for a grid representation of the codes used in this study.
10. All data relevant to instructional decision-making were assembled and reviewed to determine significant findings.

Research Question 3

What are teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their teaching to meet individual differences of students in their local classrooms?

Research Methodology for Research Question 3

The following steps were taken in order to answer Question 3:

1. The researcher contacted principals' offices in schools selected for participation and asked permission to include the school in the study.
2. The researcher either worked through the principal or the principal's designee, such as a department chair, to contact teachers.
3. Teachers were asked to participate in the study either by the principal, department chair, or the researcher.
4. The MCAS Impact Survey was distributed to teachers. Forced-choice items 3, 6, 9, and 12 referred to meeting individual needs in Part I of the survey, while Question 3 from the open-response section related to meeting individual differences in local classrooms.
5. A 30-45 minute interview was conducted with one to three participants (in one case only there were four participants) on site in their school. Question 3 of the interview directly addressed meeting individual differences, though references to issues related to meeting individual differences often surfaced throughout the interview. Surveys were collected at the start of the interview process. Informed consent forms were signed as well.
6. Interview data were transcribed and copies mailed to participants for review. Ongoing coding occurred concurrently with transcription and included a blend of what Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 57) term 'descriptive', 'interpretive', and 'pattern' codes that were later refined.

7. Survey item data were entered in a spreadsheet. Analysis was performed to determine the statistical mean for each relevant question and to check for differences between high- and low-scoring schools as well as large and small schools. These findings are reported in Table 20 in Chapter 4. Relevant survey item details are found in Tables 16, 17, 18, and 19. In addition, a positive-negative dichotomy was established for survey items based on response values teachers chose. Table 7 in Chapter 4 displays a summary of teachers' perceptions (positive or negative) relative to each survey item.
8. Survey open-response data were transcribed, and frequency distributions for positive and negative impacts were tabulated for Question 3. See Table 21 in Chapter 4 for results. These data were also coded using the themes and codes that emerged from interview analysis. Positive, negative, and neutral responses to Question 3 are summarized in Tables 26, 27, and 28. Table 6 displays the themes present in these data.
9. The researcher refined codes for interview data, organizing descriptive and interpretive codes into themes or patterns relevant to the question. Inter-rater reliability was established by having two individuals confirm the researcher's use of codes. Only minor differences surfaced, so no major changes to codes took place. See Table 31 for a grid representation of the codes used in this study.
10. All data relevant to meeting individual needs were assembled and reviewed to determine significant findings.

Chapter Summary

The research design for the present study employed quantitative and qualitative methods to describe teachers' perceptions of the impact of MCAS on their autonomy to make curriculum and instructional decisions and on teaching to meet individual differences in local classrooms. Data were collected from 59 teachers through the use of a two-part survey that included 12 forced-choice items and three written open-response items for written responses and from 60 teachers through interviews.

The design is divided into two major sections: Research Design and Methodology. The Research Design section describes the procedures used to select the eight high- and low-scoring schools and the 60 teachers who participated in this current study. The section describes as well the instruments used to conduct this study and how these were applied within the study. Finally, it describes the processes used for data collection and for data analysis. In the Methodology section, detailed steps for answering each research question are described.

The next chapter provides a detailed account of research results and findings for each of the three research questions as revealed through the three types of data collected.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This chapter details the results of the study as they relate to its main purpose: to examine teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) on teachers' autonomy to make decisions about mathematics and English language arts curriculum and instruction and meeting students' individual differences in local classrooms. The findings discussed and presented here correspond to the three specific research questions that guided this study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their autonomy to make curriculum decisions in their local classrooms?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their autonomy to make instructional decisions in their local classrooms?
3. What are teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their teaching to meet individual differences of students in their local classrooms?

This study's findings surfaced through three types of data: survey items, survey open written responses, and interviews. The findings relative to each of these data sources are presented separately for each research question. The chapter closes with a general findings section that ties together findings from the three data sources.

Survey Findings

Survey item data from Part I of the MCAS Impact Survey are introduced in this section. An item-by-item analysis is presented first and includes tables summarizing data for each of the 12 items, which are then analyzed. The section closes with an overview of survey results that encompasses one summarizing table and a presentation of the findings.

Survey Item-by-Item Analysis

In the section below, each of the MCAS Impact Survey's 12 items is analyzed. Items are grouped to reflect the research question to which they relate. Therefore, survey items 1, 5, 10, and 11 are treated in the sub-section related to teachers' perceptions of the MCAS impact on curriculum in local classrooms; survey items 2, 4, 7, and 8 are examined in the sub-section related to teachers' perceptions of the MCAS impact on instruction in local classrooms; and items 3, 6, 9, and 12 are analyzed in the sub-section related to teachers' perceptions of the MCAS impact on their teaching to meet individual differences in local classrooms. Each sub-section ends with a summary of findings and the whole section closes with a summary of survey-related findings related to each of the research questions.

To illuminate the findings, the results were simplified to indicate the direction of response— positive or negative. For items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, a participant's choice of a "1" or "2" reflects a positive impact on autonomy because these positions indicate an increase in options available to teachers in their decision-making. A "3" or "4" reflects a negative impact on autonomy because the positions indicate a reduction of

options. For items 5 and 7, a “1” or “2” shows a negative impact on autonomy; a “3” or “4” shows a positive impact on autonomy. Table 7 (below) summarizes the direction of response for each item based on the numbers of participants who chose positive- or negative- direction responses for that item.

Table 7. Positive/Negative Survey Item Responses

Item Number and Type	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	General Finding Positive or Negative Impact
Curriculum			
1	5	53	Negative
5*♦	22	37	Negative
10*	13	45	Negative
11	1	58	Negative
Instruction			
2	19	40	Negative
4	4	54	Negative
7♦	16	43	Negative
8	1	58	Negative
Individual Differences			
3	5	54	Negative
6	8	50	Negative
9	9	50	Negative
12	10	49	Negative

(*) Items surfaced interesting differences between responses from high- and low-scoring schools.

(♦) Items 5 and 7 indicated a negative impact on decision-making autonomy if participants chose a “1” or a “2” on the survey.

Curriculum-Related Survey Items

Survey items 1, 5, 10, and 11 were determined in a field test to be identifiable as related to curriculum decision-making. All items correspond with Research Question 1: What are teachers’ perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their autonomy to make curriculum decisions in their local classrooms? An analysis of

each of these items follows. Tables 8 through 11 summarize the data related to survey items about curriculum decision-making. For each item discussed, the table with response frequencies and means is presented first then followed by an analysis of the results. The curriculum-related section closes with a summary of findings from the four-related survey items.

Table 8. Item 1: As a result of MCAS, I have increased my independent decision-making about what curriculum content to offer.

Survey Values	1 Agree	2	3	4 Disagree	Total Means
Participant Categories					
Total n = 58	0	5	19	34	3.5
English n = 22	0	2	5	15	3.59
Mathematics n = 31	0	3	13	15	3.39
Unknown n = 5	0	0	1	4	
High-Scoring n = 25	0	2	3	20	3.72
Low-Scoring n = 33	0	3	16	16	3.33
Large n = 35	0	0	9	26	3.74
Small n = 23	0	5	10	8	3.13

* one English teacher did not respond to this item

Table 9. Item 5: I have increased the amount of test-related content I include in my curriculum because of MCAS.

Survey Values	1 Agree	2	3	4 Disagree	Total Means
Participant Categories					
Total n = 59	10	27	13	9	2.36
English n = 23	5	11	3	4	2.26
Mathematics n = 31	4	15	9	3	2.35
Unknown n = 5	1	1	1	2	
High-Scoring n = 25	2	9	8	6	2.72
Low-Scoring n = 34	8	18	5	3	2.09
Large n = 35	7	12	11	5	2.4
Small n = 24	3	15	2	4	2.29

Table 10. Item 10: The curriculum content I offer my students has improved due to MCAS.

Survey Values	1 Agree	2	3	4 Disagree	Total Means
Participant Categories					
Total n = 58	1	12	23	22	3.11
English n = 23	5	2	12	9	3.3
Mathematics n = 30	1	10	10	9	2.9
Unknown n = 5	0	0	1	4	
High-Scoring n = 24	0	1	11	12	3.46
Low-Scoring n = 34	8	11	12	10	3.12
Large n = 34	0	5	11	18	3.38
Small n = 24	1	7	12	4	2.79

* one mathematics teacher did not respond to this item

Table 11. Item 11: MCAS has freed me to include special topics of interest to me in my curriculum.

Survey Values	1 Agree	2	3	4 Disagree	Total Means
Participant Categories					
Total n = 59	0	1	12	46	3.76
English n = 23	0	0	7	16	3.7
Mathematics n = 31	0	1	5	25	3.77
Unknown n = 5	0	0	0	5	
High-Scoring n = 25	0	0	3	22	3.88
Low-Scoring n = 34	0	1	9	24	3.68
Large n = 35	0	0	4	31	3.89
Small n = 24	0	1	8	15	3.25

Item 1 Findings. The MCAS has a negative impact on independent decision-making about curriculum by teachers in local schools. Not one teacher strongly agrees, and only five out of 55 agree somewhat that MCAS has resulted in increased “independent decision-making about what curriculum content to offer.” Fifty out of 55 teachers, nearly 90 percent, indicate that autonomy has not increased. The finding is not unexpected. Research has shown teachers associate a loss of autonomy with high-stakes

accountability measures (Johnson & Johnson, 2002; Smith, 1991). Such perceptions received elaboration in the open-response portion of the survey. "There is not autonomy other than in style of presentation," stated one teacher matter-of-factly. Another illuminated the loss of professionalism: "If I feel certain topics should not be addressed (whether in my professional opinion it's too advanced or not necessary for the students' education at that time), I have no say." Still others' words evoked a sense of despair: "I have no autonomy. What a joke. The DOE (Department of Education) is going to dictate curriculum, types of test, in fact, nearly everything. The DOE (staff members) think they know something about education. I have probably taught longer than the total experience of the administrators in the DOE."

Thirty of 59 teachers disagreed strongly with the statement, "As a result of MCAS, I have increased my independent decision-making about what curriculum content to offer." Eighty percent of high-scoring school respondents and more than 40 percent of respondents from low-scoring schools strongly disagreed with the item statement, suggesting that the MCAS has greatly infringed upon their decision-making autonomy. Open-response data described below support this conclusion. MCAS was designed to improve teaching and learning by providing standardized feedback about student and school performances across the State; however, teachers are not likely experiencing an increase in professional decision making as regards curriculum, which calls into question the nature of teaching improvement generated by the feedback. As Cimbricz discovered in review of high-stakes testing literature, testing can generate change without improvement (Cimbricz, 2002).

It is important to acknowledge that some of the negative responses attributed to the MCAS impact on curriculum may arise from other sources. For instance, the indication that professional opinions are ignored in the MCAS epoch may reflect institutional conditions rather than the power of the tests themselves to dampen professional decision-making. The MCAS implementation and response processes enacted by administrative leaders within a system may lead teachers to feel disempowered in ways not directly related to the tests themselves. An historical examination of the policies and practices within districts would be necessary to discern which factor is more salient in teacher perceptions voiced in this study. However, the teachers link their perceptions regarding loss of autonomy in curriculum decision-making to MCAS, and so the researcher takes them at their word.

Item 5 Findings. MCAS has had a negative impact on curriculum decision-making by pressing teachers to include more test-related content in their curricula, therefore reducing decision-making options about curriculum in local classrooms. Most teachers report increasing the amount of test-related content they include in their curricula because of MCAS, particularly those in low-scoring schools. Thirty-seven of 59 teachers agreed (10 strongly) that MCAS has had a negative impact on their curricula due to the increase in test-related content, presumably because such an increase reduces time for other more valued content. Similar findings surfaced in interview and open-response data. However, while the overwhelming majority (77%) of low-scoring school teachers agreed they had increased test-related content in their curricula, slightly less than half (44%) of high-scoring school teachers reported the same. Thus the mean response value tilts slightly toward the disagree side of the scale,

especially since nearly 25% of high-scoring school teachers strongly disagreed that they had increased test-related content due to MCAS. Interview data indicated that many high-scoring school teachers previously included test-related content in efforts to prepare students for the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs) used when applying for college.

Open-responses hinted at some of the teachers' concerns about the MCAS pressure to increase test-related content in local curricula: "So much is geared toward the MCAS that other important information is put on the sidelines even though the areas are needed for the next mathematics class." "MCAS has changed the way that I design curriculum in the sense that I have incorporated more test preparation material," and it "Requires certain material be covered in sophomore year when an excellent curriculum might actually teach that topic a later year." Interview data detailed these assertions, with teachers noting the introduction of simulated test problems, as well as entire units of curriculum integrated into their system in order to cover MCAS material and prepare students for the tests. As one high-scoring school participant remarked, "...I personally have tried to include more multiple choice questions than I ever would have prior to this."

These findings are consonant with other research findings (Grant, 2000; Haney, 2000; Jones & Egley, 2002; Schorr, et al., 2003; Smith, 1991). The perceived need for inclusion of greater amounts of test preparation material is received from many levels: state authorities, local administrators, parents, and students. However, the value of such a change in curriculum offering remains highly debated. See Chapter 2 for more on this issue.

Item 10 Findings. MCAS has failed to improve curriculum content, according to 45 of 58 participants in this study, and therefore has not benefited teachers' decision-making about curriculum. Teachers' average responses to Item 10 ("The curriculum content I offer my students has improved due to MCAS.") indicate that teachers do not think MCAS has resulted in improved curricula. However, it is important to note here that high-scoring-school participants' average of 3.46 drove up the lower average of 3.12 cast by low-scoring-school participants. Slightly more than a third of low-scoring-school teachers agreed that their curriculum content has improved due to MCAS, pointing towards possible long-standing problems in these schools. Only one high-scoring-school participant agreed that his/her curriculum has improved because of MCAS. This may mean that teachers in high-scoring schools perceive their pre-MCAS curricula as sufficient to the task of preparing students for the MCAS, as several related during interviews and in open-response data.

Interview data support the conclusions that MCAS fails to drive curriculum and curriculum decision-making in a positive direction and that it is less consequential for faculty at high-scoring schools. As one high-scoring school teacher explained, "It's not the donkey that leads our curriculum, but what happens is it's the donkey that visits our curriculum, depending upon its timeliness and proximity to the MCAS tests." Another high-scoring school teacher said,

...(I)n theory it's (MCAS) supposed to create a system where you're teaching more to the student. ...(B)ut at the end of the day, it doesn't really work in practice because it's a standardized test, and it's culturally biased.

Mathematics teachers often discussed an increase in 'open-ended' questions or other instructional changes they had made that they might view as improvements to their traditional curriculum content; however, they repeatedly remarked on the forced inclusion of "stem and leaf plots" and other curriculum topics that they saw no value to teaching, which accounts for the significant number of mathematics teachers who saw no improvement in their curriculum due to MCAS.

Along with the MCAS, Proposition 21/2 and other budget constraints may be affecting curriculum improvement efforts, as well. Still, it must be noted that millions of State tax dollars have been dedicated to test score improvement and even test 'selling.' (In one year, Mass Insight, a private non-profit company, received approximately \$300,000 to promote the tests throughout the Commonwealth.) One could argue that these millions of dollars might have been appropriated for alternative curriculum improvement efforts that would have helped alleviate the existing budget constraints with which schools, especially those in poorer districts, wrestle.

From another perspective, it might also be argued that teachers are sadly misconceiving the purpose and usefulness of the MCAS tests. Those who believe the tests offer an efficient mechanism for determining whether or not all students in the state are receiving adequate instruction in curriculum areas considered crucial for further education and as markers of academic achievement worthy of a high school diploma, might view teachers' response to this survey item as off base. They would claim that the tests were not designed to "improve curriculum," but to assess it. But because assessment is part of an iterative instructional loop that involves making

adjustments based on assessment results, it is not unreasonable to associate a powerful assessment tool like the MCAS with hoped for or expected changes in curriculum.

Item 11 Findings. MCAS has produced a decidedly negative impact on teachers' autonomy to make curriculum-related decisions in local classrooms by constricting their ability to include special topics of interest to them in those curricula. Item 11 surfaces robust evidence concerning the MCAS-related erosion of teachers' autonomy to make curriculum-related decisions in local classrooms. The statement, "MCAS has freed me to include special topics of interest to me in my curriculum," generated the strongest teacher disagreement on any of the survey items, with a mean response of 3.76. That 46 of 59 teachers marked "4" on their surveys speaks to the perceived severity of constraints on teachers imposed by the state via MCAS. This constriction on freedom to share unique content reflecting individual teacher expertise and/or interest affects not only autonomy, but also creativity. As Jones et al. (2003) explain, teachers express a loss of creativity in their work and in students' work as result of pressures to perform well on high-stakes tests. Drawing upon work by Oregon social studies teacher Bill Bigelow, they explain his position, "...the testing movement is an attempt to shut down educators..." (p. 27). While it would be a leap of interpretation to associate teachers' responses on this item with Bigelow's assertion, it is clear that teachers feel a sense of loss in this expression of professional autonomy.

Interview data show that teachers lament the loss of particularly powerful curriculum items lost due to content coverage required to prepare students for the MCAS. "I used to present a segment on art in geometry. Now I have to put it off until the end of the year and hope there's time to do it, but it's not the same because it's out

of sequence,” said one teacher. Another teacher shared this story: “At one time I had the students design a newspaper on WWII, so the students could better understand the characters in A Separate Peace – not anymore.” Teachers also talk about the reduction in “project-based work,” considered by many educators to be an essential component of any curriculum and frequently reflecting teacher expertise or interest in a particular topic area. Teachers now offer less of their unique expertise in a subject and express less creativity as a result. Consequently, Item 11 received the strongest negative response of any item on the survey.

Only one teacher agreed with the statement: “MCAS has freed me to include special topics of interest to me in my curriculum.” All other teachers disagreed, and they disagreed strongly. The state appears to be controlling curricula by homogenizing content, denying teachers (intentionally or not) the right to choose content with personal, as well as academic, meaning to present in local classrooms. On the other hand, pre-MCAS curricula may have lacked cohesion, with teachers pursuing what was easiest or most interesting for them to teach, whether or not they prepared students for the next course taken. So while teachers may lament the loss of autonomy in regards to selecting content of high value or interest to them, this may not necessarily be a regrettable loss for students in all cases.

Differences between response levels for high- and low-scoring-school teachers and teachers of mathematics and English were minimal. The stability of responses indicates that teachers are in general agreement, regardless of professional environment, that MCAS has inhibited their opportunities to tap into personal professional interests to share with students. This situation may be particularly salient in low-scoring schools

that exist almost invariably within poor districts that find it hard to offer both MCAS preparation and remediation programs and unique courses of study. It might also happen that the situation described is less problematic in Grades 11 and 12, when MCAS preparation and implementation is less pressing. Teachers in those grades may well retain their ability to offer topics of personal interest or expertise, though if the No Child Left Behind proposals to test in every grade succeed, these teachers, too, may experience the loss. As standardization is achieved, systems risk the loss of teachers' ability to augment 'basic' departmental offerings with unique content. The de-skilling of teachers who may develop instructional virtuosity, but not curricular talents, again speaks to the loss of teachers' professional autonomy as well as a more general, negative influence of the tests on teachers' professionalism. As teacher and author Susan Ohanian (1999) wrote in "One Size Fits Few:"

If keepers of the canon would admit, "Here is what interests us, warts and all, now why don't you make your own list of what interests you?" I'd say, 'Fine.' I know that good teachers are quirky, opinionated, and strongly devoted to hobbyhorses. I know their lists would differ from mine and that our students would be better for our differences. But Standardistos don't want me making my own list. They insist that their shrink-wrapped, committee-certified curriculum is better than my accumulated wisdom, not to mention my devotion to a sublime wackiness. They present their lists as important and necessary. For everyone. I tell you my lists worked this year with these individual children. And knowing you can't step into the same river twice, I don't count on their working for next year's group. Each year is a new beginning. (p. 44)

Summary of Curriculum-Related Survey Item Data

All curriculum survey data showed the State's high-stakes tests are having a negative impact on teachers' autonomy to make professional decisions regarding curriculum in local schools. Mean response values for the survey's four curriculum-

related items were as follows: Item 1 – 3.5; Item 5 – 2.4; Item 10 – 3.11; and Item 11 – 3.76. With the exception of Item 5, all response values indicated teachers perceive as negative the MCAS impact on autonomy to make curriculum decisions in local classrooms. The response value for Item 5 indicated only a slight tilt toward a negative MCAS impact on autonomy to make curriculum decisions; however, as discussed above, this appearance results from the relatively large group (25%) of high-scoring school teachers who strongly disagreed that they had increased the amount of test-related content in their curriculum due to MCAS. The majority of teachers, 37 of 59, agreed that they had increased the quantity of test-related content they offered to students. Thus, all curriculum-related survey item responses support the conclusion that teachers' perceive a loss of autonomy to make curriculum-related decisions in their local classrooms. They see as a particularly negative impact the loss of freedom to include topics of professional interest to them in their classroom curricula. Open-response and interview data support these findings.

Instruction-Related Survey Items

Survey items 2, 4, 7, and 8 were determined in a field test to be identifiable as related to instructional decision-making. All items correspond to Research Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their autonomy to make instructional decisions in their local classrooms? An analysis of each of these items follows. Tables 12, 13, 14, and 15 shown below summarize the data related to survey items about instructional decision-making. For each item discussed, the table with response frequencies and means is presented first, followed by an analysis

Table 12. Item 2: The MCAS tests positively influence how I structure and present my classes.

Survey Values	1 Agree	2	3	4 Disagree	Total Means
Participant Categories					
Total n = 59	2	17	23	17	2.97
English n = 23	1	6	7	9	3.04
Mathematics n = 31	1	9	13	8	2.94
Unknown n = 5	0	2	3	0	
High-Scoring n = 25	1	4	7	13	3.32
Low-Scoring n = 34	1	13	16	4	2.71
Large n = 35	0	9	14	12	3.09
Small n = 24	2	8	9	5	2.71

Table 13. Item 4: I have more say over the sequencing and pacing of my classroom because of MCAS.

Survey Values	1 Agree	2	3	4 Disagree	Total Means
Participant Categories					
Total n = 58	0	4	15	39	3.6
English n = 22	0	0	5	17	3.77
Mathematics n = 31	0	4	9	17	3.32
Unknown n = 5	0	0	1	4	
High-Scoring n = 24	0	4	3	21	3.88
Low-Scoring n = 34	0	4	12	18	3.41
Large n = 35	0	2	8	25	3.66
Small n = 23	0	2	7	13	3.35

*One English teacher did not respond to this item.

Table 14. Item 7: Because of MCAS I more often instruct in ways designed to improve test scores, such as telling how to do certain problems or how to write particular responses

Survey Values	1 Agree	2	3	4 Disagree	Total Means
Participant Categories					
Total n = 59	14	29	9	7	2.15
English n = 23	7	12	1	3	2.0
Mathematics n = 31	5	15	8	3	2.29
Unknown n = 5	2	2	0	1	
High-Scoring n = 25	4	10	6	5	2.48
Low-Scoring n = 34	10	19	3	2	1.91
Large n = 35	8	15	7	5	2.26
Small n = 24	6	14	2	2	2.0

Table 15. Item 8: Due to MCAS, I more readily address emerging interests within each class.

Survey Values	1 Agree	2	3	4 Disagree	Total Means
Participant Categories					
Total n = 59	0	1	21	37	3.6
English n = 23	0	0	9	14	3.6
Mathematics n = 31	0	1	10	20	3.6
Unknown n = 5	0	0	2	3	
High-Scoring n = 25	0	0	5	20	3.8
Low-Scoring n = 34	0	1	16	17	3.47
Large n = 35	0	0	9	26	3.74
Small n = 24	0	1	12	11	3.42

of the results. The instruction-related section closes with a summary of findings from the four related survey items.

Item 2 Findings. MCAS has failed to positively affect how teachers structure and present their classes, therefore, it has not benefited teachers' instructional decision-making by increasing instructional options. A strong majority of teachers (61%)

perceive that MCAS tests have not positively influenced how they structure and present their classes. This finding is echoed in interview data where teachers report: "It makes me include more drill-kill," and "It's inhibiting."

With an average response level of 2.97, however, it is clear that at least some teachers think the tests have improved their class structure and presentation, with most of those reporting an improvement teaching at low-scoring schools. Open-response data also indicate that it is mostly low-scoring-school teachers who appreciate the MCAS influence on structure. They praise the fact that "It provides some structure where there was none," and "...brings unity to what is being taught Statewide." Still, 36 of 59 teachers, well over half, responded in the negative on this statement, and only two teachers strongly agreed, while 17 strongly disagreed, that class structure and presentation had improved under MCAS.

Teachers' responses on this item may reflect the need for inclusion of test review and test preparation work in their classes, a change welcomed by a few but viewed as a disruption of instructional intentions by many. Speaking to the disruption of instructional intentions, and consequently limiting instructional decision-making, two teachers wrote, "The MCAS limits your elaborating on any topics because there are a lot of topics that must be covered, and you can't spend a lot of time on any one topic," and "...it takes up a lot of class time preparing for the tests." Also, teachers may have perceived that their classes were structured and presented adequately prior to MCAS and as a consequence made little effort to change instruction to accommodate MCAS. To wit, one teacher wrote, "MCAS does not dictate to me how to instruct." Regardless of underlying reasons for perceiving so, the majority of teachers do not believe that

MCAS has helped them improve instructional structure or presentation, which signifies that their instructional decision-making has not improved as a result of the tests.

Item 4 Findings. MCAS has had a negative impact on teachers' sequencing and pacing in their classrooms and therefore reduced their autonomy to make instruction-related decisions. The vast majority of teachers, a remarkable 54 of 58 respondents, think they have less "say over the sequencing and pacing" of classes because of MCAS, making this finding particularly robust. During interviews and in open-response data, teachers articulated the loss of instructional time to testing and the need to rearrange instructional sequences for coverage of MCAS topics before testing, and the need to move on to test-related topics for "exposure" as opposed to understanding as key effects on instructional pacing and sequencing. One teacher described the situation this way, "We must address info we 'know' will be on the MCAS. I feel it interrupts the rhythm of the classes and thematic flow of the course." Another expressed concern that MCAS "requires certain material be covered in sophomore year when an excellent curriculum might actually teach that topic a later year."

Teachers from high-scoring schools seem to perceive the erosion of instructional decision-making autonomy impact more dramatically than do teachers from low-scoring schools. Nearly 90 percent of teachers from high-scoring schools marked "4" on this item, while only 50 percent of teachers from low-scoring schools indicated a similar maximum disagreement. Teachers clearly perceive the MCAS tests and preparation for the tests as infringing on their autonomy to set the instructional pace and sequence in their local classrooms. The following quotes sum up general feelings. From a low-scoring-school teacher: "I must include what the test will cover. My 'autonomy' is

negatively affected,” and from a high-scoring-school teacher: “Time is such an issue that my pacing is out of my hands.”

Research from other states supports this finding, as well, strengthening it further. (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Haney, 2000; Johnson & Johnson; 2002; McNeil, 2000). Teachers feel the push and pull of high-stakes testing on a daily basis. They must ensure coverage of all MCAS material before test dates. They must emphasize MCAS topics deemed troublesome for students at their schools, but be careful not to linger too long on any one topic that precludes coverage of other test-essential topics. They must mix in MCAS test practice activities with their ongoing instruction. Such influences undoubtedly help form teachers’ perception that MCAS has not positively influenced their instructional sequencing and pacing and so has reduced their instructional decision-making autonomy.

Item 7 Findings. MCAS has had a negative impact on teachers’ autonomy to make instruction-related decisions by pressing them to instruct in ways specifically designed to influence MCAS scores. Item 7 shows the highest agreement level of any survey item with 43 of 59 teachers marking a “1” or “2” on the item, indicating that teachers now devote more class time to instruction in “ways designed to improve test scores.” The tests likely drive instruction. Through its mandated standardized MCAS test, the state has reduced teachers’ instructional decision-making by creating conditions that compel teachers to “teach to the test,” regardless of how well their students perform on the test. In fact, 85% of low-scoring school participants and 56% of high-scoring school participants agree that this is happening in their local classrooms. Furthermore, one-third of low-scoring school participants, and nearly a quarter of all participants,

strongly agree that because of MCAS they now more often teach to improve test scores. Such a shift in practice is not uncommon, as Jones, Jones, and Hargrove (2003) indicate.

Open-response and interview data support this robust finding. As one teacher from a high-scoring school explained, "Teaching test-taking strategies is not meaningful toward the achievement of my real responsibility – teaching students how to read, write, speak, listen, and think critically." Massachusetts teachers are not alone in developing this instructional response to state tests. Teachers across the nation find themselves coaching students in ways to prepare for certain types of test questions, test formats, and test vocabularies (Grant, 2000; Haney, 2000; Jones & Egley, 2002; Schorr, et al., 2003; Smith, 1991).

The impact is perceived by teachers from both high- and low-scoring schools. However, those from low-scoring schools sense the push from the external force of the tests more profoundly, as implied by their response average of 1.91 (high-scoring-school responses averaged 2.48). This difference may, in part, reflect an already existing push to prepare students for SATs and other college entrance exams at the high-scoring schools. As teachers at one high-scoring school explained, "I actually use SATs as more of a goal," and "I think the SAT is a more of a driver." Low-scoring-school teachers operating under the threats of state takeover of local schools and imposition of sanctions against chronically low-scoring schools may feel a greater force to push and prompt students to learn the ins and outs of MCAS test taking. However, the majority of teachers, regardless of teaching environment, are likely to teach more often in ways designed to improve test scores, therefore limiting their autonomy to

make instruction-related decisions in local classrooms. Given the high-stakes attached to the MCAS, such an outcome is not surprising.

Item 8 Findings. MCAS has had a negative impact on teachers' instructional decision-making autonomy by limiting their capacity for addressing emerging interests within local classrooms. A significant exercise in teachers' instructional decision-making relates to responding to the emerging interests of students as expressed in daily classes.

Call it what you will, the teachable moment, the bird in the window, at the core of being a teacher is the ability to listen when children speak, to understand and act on their sometimes obvious but often very subtle messages. ... To make the decisions about classroom events ever-swarming around us, we have to rely on our own educated intuition. (Ohanian, 1999, p. 23)

A remarkable 58 of 59 respondents disagreed with the Item 8 statement. A full 98% of teachers in this study do not see MCAS causing them to becoming more instructionally sensitive to students' interests. These results make evident the fact that teachers' decision-making within the ongoing culture of the classroom is curtailed. Part of the problem, say some teachers, is the need to "justify if you do something off the Standards."

The overall average response being 3.6 on a four-point scale speaks to the issues that surfaced during interviews— teachers feeling compelled to cover the wide scope of test-related material prior to the exams and to avoid deviation from the curriculum script. These same issues, naturally, influence pacing and sequencing decisions, so it comes as no surprise that the item related directly to those issues resulted in an identical average response. As one teacher summarized, "We are not free to explore special interests or things that students find particularly interesting."

The stability of responses on Item 8 indicates that teachers, regardless of environment, are clearly feeling less able to address emerging interests in class, and, therefore, to exercise autonomous, professional decision-making. Teachers feel the pinch of time here as well, and the cause may reflect, once more, local policy more than state policy. That it is important for teachers to address students' interests in classes has been demonstrated by a variety of researchers and educators (Dewey, 1938; Egan-Robertson & Bloome, 1998; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Voss, 1996). MCAS, according to teachers in this study, is not helping them address students' emerging interests; rather, as one teacher explained in an interview, MCAS is "handcuffing" teachers, diminishing their ability to exercise professional decision-making about instructional matters.

Summary of Instruction-Related Survey Item Data

All four instruction-related survey items revealed negative impacts on teachers' autonomy to make professional instructional decisions in local classrooms. Mean response values for the survey's four instruction-related items were as follows: Item 2 – 2.97; Item 4 – 3.6; Item 7 – 2.15; and Item 8 – 3.6. With the exception of Item 7, all response values indicated teachers perceive as decidedly negative the MCAS impact on autonomy to make instruction decisions in local classrooms. While the majority of teachers perceived a negative impact related to Item 7 (see Table 7 above), the response value for Item 7 indicated only a slight tilt toward a negative MCAS impact on autonomy to make instruction decisions. As discussed above, this appearance results from the relatively large group (44%) of high-scoring school teachers who disagreed

that they more often instruct in ways designed to improve test scores due to MCAS. The majority of teachers, 43 of 59, agreed that because of MCAS they are more likely to instruct in ways designed to improve test scores. Thus, all instruction-related survey item responses support the conclusion that as result of the high-stakes MCAS tests teachers' perceive a loss of autonomy to make professional instruction-related decisions in local classrooms. Open-response and interview data support this conclusion.

Meeting Individual Differences-Related Survey Items

Survey items 3, 6, 9, and 12 were determined in a field test to be identifiable as related to teaching to meet individual differences of students. An analysis of each of these items follows. All items correspond to Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their teaching to meet individual needs of students in their local classrooms? Tables 16, 17, 18, and 19 shown below summarize the data related to survey items about teaching to meet individual differences or needs. For each item discussed, the table with response frequencies and means is presented first then followed by an analysis of the results. The teaching to meet individual differences-related section closes with a summary of findings from the four-related survey items.

Item 3 Findings. The MCAS high-stakes tests have had a negative impact on teaching to meet individual differences in local classrooms. The vast majority of teachers (92%) perceive that MCAS is not helping them better meet individual needs of learners. Eighty-eight percent of teachers from low-scoring schools and 96 percent of

Table 16. Item 3: Institution of the MCAS tests has helped me better meet the individual learning needs of my students.

Survey Values	1 Agree	2	3	4 Disagree	Total Means
Participant Categories					
Total n = 59	1	4	23	31	3.4
English n = 23	1	2	9	11	3.3
Mathematics n = 31	0	2	12	17	3.48
Unknown n = 5	0	0	2	3	
High-Scoring n = 25	1	0	7	17	3.6
Low-Scoring n = 34	0	4	16	14	3.29
Large n = 35	0	1	10	24	3.66
Small n = 24	1	3	13	7	3.08

Table 17. Item 6: MCAS has positively influenced me to teach each student's 'multiple intelligence' strengths.

Survey Values	1 Agree	2	3	4 Disagree	Total Means
Participant Categories					
Total n = 58	0	8	20	30	3.32
English n = 23	0	4	7	11	3.17
Mathematics n = 31	0	3	11	18	3.58
Unknown n = 5	0	1	2	2	
High-Scoring n = 25	0	2	6	17	3.6
Low-Scoring n = 34	0	6	14	14	3.24
Large n = 35	0	4	11	20	3.46
Small n = 24	0	4	9	11	3.29

Table 18. Item 9: MCAS encourages me to consider each student's learning style.

Survey Values	1 Agree	2	3	4 Disagree	Total Means
Participant Categories					
Total n = 59	1	8	21	29	3.31
English n = 23	1	5	6	11	3.17
Mathematics n = 31	0	2	13	16	3.45
Unknown n = 5	0	1	2	2	
High-Scoring n = 25	1	1	6	17	3.56
Low-Scoring n = 34	0	7	15	12	3.15
Large n = 35	0	2	12	21	3.54
Small n = 24	1	6	9	8	3.0

Table 19. Item 12: MCAS helps me better work from each student's prior knowledge.

Survey Values	1 Agree	2	3	4 Disagree	Total Means
Participant Categories					
Total n = 59	0	10	20	29	3.32
English n = 23	0	5	6	12	3.3
Mathematics n = 31	0	5	13	13	3.26
Unknown n = 5	0	0	1	4	
High-Scoring n = 25	0	2	7	16	3.56
Low-Scoring n = 34	0	8	13	13	3.15
Large n = 35	0	2	10	23	3.6
Small n = 24	0	8	10	6	2.92

teachers from high-scoring schools disagreed at some level with the perception that MCAS tests prove beneficial in meeting individual students' needs or differences. More than half (68 percent) of teachers from high-scoring schools and nearly half (41 percent) of teachers from low scoring schools disagreed strongly with this item statement. Only one high-scoring-school teacher strongly agreed that MCAS has helped him/her better meet individual learning needs, while a small group of four low-scoring school teachers agreed somewhat that it has helped. As one teacher wrote in the open-response portion

of the survey, "There is no recognition of individual needs." The findings for Item 3 suggest that the MCAS phenomenon contradicts what has been the growing movement in education to address individual learning differences on a local level. That movement necessitates that teachers exercise professional autonomy in decision-making in order to address the individual differences they encounter among their students. MCAS, teachers say in response to Item 3, is not helping them exercise that autonomous decision-making.

Teachers from large schools are less inclined to perceive the MCAS tests as having helped them "better meet the individual learning needs" of their students, though teachers from both large and small schools indicated average response rates greater than 3.0 on this item. Teachers from large schools may already be challenged to meet individual learning needs due to school size, and so any negative influence on ability to meet individual needs may be more greatly felt.

Item 6 Findings. MCAS has had negative impact on teachers' teaching to individual differences by not positively influencing them to teach to each student's multiple-intelligence strengths. The MCAS is a powerful instrument which carries with it high stakes for schools, students, and teachers that enable it to influence teaching practices by its very structure; however, 50 of 59 of teachers (85%) in this study said the tests have not "positively influenced" them to "teach to each student's 'multiple intelligence' strengths." Thirty of those teachers (just over half) disagreed strongly with the item. None agreed strongly. The MCAS focus on paper-and-pencil testing and verbal and mathematical 'intelligences' seems to have posed barriers for teachers who might, for instance, use more 'hands on' methods in mathematics or more media-related

content if MCAS were not in place and saddled with such high stakes. Teachers who might teach to the various multiple intelligences if allowed to address students' needs as they see fit rather than fitting students to the test requirements, cannot. The test, as one teacher noted, "Drives everything we do." Such sentiments strongly suggest that teachers' autonomy to meet individual differences in local classrooms has been weakened by the MCAS.

MCAS clearly links academic achievement with logical-mathematical and linguistic intelligences, as is common in school-related settings. Teachers who operate within schools do not argue the primacy accorded these intelligences. Rather, they imply that, in the drive to achieve particular levels of tested competency in these intelligences, it has been useful in the past to employ other intelligences – musical, kinesthetic, spatial – but that 'test' preparation requirements often preclude the introduction of alternative ways of introducing and learning ideas and assessing learning. In an interview, one teacher explained how the state tests have affected his/her assessment practices:

The only thing I do see is that where oral presentations used to be good ways to assess, I find I'm getting away from those because the MCAS has no room for oral presentations. So kids who have good oral skills, but don't possess good writing or good reading skills, to me the MCAS fails them.

It may be that the time required to prepare lessons that draw upon multiple intelligences might simply be diverted by the need to read over test results, locate and incorporate 'old' test problems and prompts, record lesson plans that indicate how each lesson element connects to tested Framework strands, etc. The limits and demands of the MCAS tests add to a teacher's work, thus other activities must be subtracted. Also, the

state terms 'successful' those teachers who raise MCAS scores. The test does not measure musical, kinesthetic, spatial, or natural intelligences, or even verbal linguistic intelligence, so the 'successful' teacher experiences no encouragement to address these other intelligences in his or her local classroom. As another teacher pointed out during an interview, the perceived need to score high as a school on MCAS can lead to professional dilemmas, when a school system devotes valuable professional development resources to increasing teachers' use and awareness of multiple intelligence theory, which must then be ignored when drilling for high test scores. The contradiction here speaks directly to the negative MCAS impact on teaching to meet individual differences.

Item 9 Findings. The MCAS has had a negative impact on teachers' meeting individual differences because high-stakes attach to the tests, which do not positively influence teachers to address individual student's learning styles in local classrooms. Fifty of 59 teachers (85%) indicate that, as a result of MCAS, they feel hampered in their professional efforts to "consider each student's learning style," with well over half of teachers from high-scoring schools and nearly a third of teachers from low-scoring schools marking this item "4" on a four-point scale. These findings support charges that high-stakes testing 'de-skills' teachers by reducing their ability to exercise professional knowledge within the classroom. Several researchers have commented on the de-skilling of teachers due to high-stakes testing, among them Cimbricz, 2002; McNeil, 2000; Ohanian, 1999; and Smith, 1991.

Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for special needs students often outline specific learning-style accommodations necessary to meet the individual needs of

students. It remains for teachers to decide how to interweave those accommodations within their classrooms. However, teachers also consider the learning-styles of students not on IEPs, as well, as results comparing high- and low-scoring school participants make clear. High-scoring-school teachers (92%) expressed more disagreement with Item 9 than did low-scoring-school teachers (77%). This means teachers from high-scoring schools perceive a greater influence from MCAS on their ability to meet individual differences by considering each student's "learning style." This may result from a greater pre-MCAS effort made by high-scoring, wealthy schools to address learning styles, which can relate to all students, not just those with special needs. Because approximately 20% of low-scoring-school teachers somewhat agreed that MCAS has encouraged them to "consider each student's learning style," it may also be possible that state Frameworks and the MCAS produce a small measure of pedagogical growth in some educational environments.

Teachers from large schools more strongly disagree that MCAS has encouraged them "to consider each student's learning style," though teachers from both large and small schools indicated average responses to this item at rates greater than 3.0. The existing conditions in large schools may desensitize teachers to any further influence on ability to address individual learning needs and styles of students.

Item 12 Findings. The MCAS tests have had a negative impact on teaching to meet individual differences because they do not help teachers better work from each student's prior knowledge. The high-stakes attached to the MCAS make it a highly influential instrument, but despite its potential for improving teachers' ability to teach to meet individual differences, more than 80% of all teachers disagreed with Item 12, with

close to 50% strongly disagreeing that MCAS has helped them tap into students' existing content knowledge. The strength of disagreement expressed by both high- and low-scoring school participants appears to support the claim that MCAS has negatively influenced the exercise of this practice designed to meet individual differences, a practice that requires teachers to exercise their professional skills in assessing students' prior knowledge and designing lessons to accommodate students' varying levels of prior knowledge and experience with a topic or skill. For acknowledged educational leader Maria Montessori (1997), access to prior knowledge is essential. "Thus, beginning to give a lesson in something unknown (and) new to the child, one begins by talking of something known. One holds the interest and then one brings in the unknown thing" (p. 236). It may be that the need to ensure "exposure" to all MCAS test topics reduces a teacher's ability to work from existing levels of knowledge. Interview data, in particular, address this concern for "coverage" over understanding.

Teachers in interviews discuss being influenced to teach the current year's curriculum (as outlined in the state Frameworks and defined, most often, by their departments), regardless of students' base of prior knowledge. The most dramatic example of this is the advancement of students into geometry classes, whether or not they failed Algebra I. The use of formulas and other algebra-related tools and concepts previously led nearly all mathematics departments to introduce basic algebra before introducing formal geometry to students. It was assumed, as is true for most English courses, that students would pass Grade 9 subjects before advancing to learn Grade 10 subjects. Now, the drive for 'exposure' has resulted in at least several schools in the study's sample choosing to advance students to geometry, regardless of how much

algebra they have learned. It appears that the external force of the MCAS tests has caused not only individual teachers but entire departments to forego decisions made autonomously for years in favor of “exposing” students to enough knowledge, so they might at least make it past the MCAS ‘needs improvement’ marker, and the school can be viewed as performing adequately. Once again, MCAS “drives everything we do.”

The discrepancy between large- and small-school averages strikes the author as notable. Perhaps in smaller schools one is more able to attend to individual students and, therefore, MCAS is less of a negative influence on meeting individual needs in this way. One teacher from a small, high-scoring school remarked that faculty “know all the students,” indicating that school size influences teachers’ ability to personalize education. The capacity for personalization, coupled with possibly increased inter-departmental communication, due to small faculty size, makes it easier for teachers to perceive that they understand students’ background knowledge in a subject.

Summary of Teaching to Meet Individual Differences-Related Survey Item Data

All four individual differences-related survey items revealed negative impacts on teachers’ teaching to meet individual differences or needs in local classrooms. Mean response values for the survey’s four individual differences-related items were as follows: Item 3 – 3.4; Item 6 – 3.32; Item 9 – 3.31; and Item 12 – 3.32. Thus, all individual differences-related survey item responses support the conclusion that teachers’ perceive an MCAS-induced reduction in ability to teach to meet individual differences in their local classrooms. Open-response and interview data support this conclusion.

Any barriers teachers encounter as they try to teach to meet individual differences in local classrooms likely result in the marginalizing of some individual students and perhaps groups of students as well. Educational marginalization of students occurs when learning environments do not address individual learning differences and needs. (Sinclair & Ghory, 1987) "Decentralization is an essential foundation of reforms to reduce marginality," (p. 7) according to Sinclair & Ghory. MCAS, as a highly centralized assessment instrument, appears to curtail teachers' ability to teach to meet individual differences and may, therefore, result in increased marginalization of certain students.

Summary of Survey Item Findings

Teachers perceived MCAS as having negative impacts on their autonomous decision-making about curriculum, instruction, and meeting individual differences in their local classrooms, as even a quick study of the item response tables (Tables 8-19) reveals. Table 7 (above) shows that, for each item, a majority of teachers perceived the MCAS has having a negative impact on autonomy to make professional curriculum and instructional decisions and to teach to meet individual differences. All items received mean response scores in the direction indicating perception of negative impact. Of the 10 items in which a position of disagreement indicated negative impacts, nine received average responses exceeding a '3' on the survey scale. Of those nine, eight received average responses exceeding 3.25, with four of those items receiving response averages greater than 3.5. The one item that did not exceed 3.0 received a response mean of 2.97. See the item-by-item analysis above for a discussion of this anomaly. Item 5 (mean

2.36) and Item 7 (mean 2.15), related to an increase in test-related curriculum and instruction, showed slight perception in the direction of positive impact; however, the majority of respondents chose response values in the negative impact direction. Open-response and interview data supported numeric survey results and elaborated upon several of the item themes. (See Table 20 below for item response means.)

Findings by Item

- MCAS has decreased independent curriculum decision-making.
- Most teachers have increased the amount of test-related content they offer, especially those in low-scoring schools.
- MCAS has not improved curriculum content.
- Teachers are less free to share personal expertise in their curricula.
- MCAS has not positively influenced teachers' class structure and presentation.
- Teachers have less say over sequencing and pacing in their classrooms.
- Most teachers devote more time to teaching test-taking skills, especially those in low-scoring schools.
- Teachers are less likely to address emerging interests in class due to MCAS.
- MCAS impedes teachers' ability to meet individual learning needs of students.
- MCAS does not encourage teaching to students' "multiple intelligences".

Table 20. Response Averages By Survey Item

Survey Item	Item Type*	Mean Response** on a Four-Point Scale 1-agree; 4-disagree
1. As a result of MCAS, I have increased my independent decision-making about what curriculum content to offer.	C	3.5
2. The MCAS tests positively influence how I structure and present my classes.	I	2.97
3. Institution of the MCAS tests has helped me better meet the individual learning needs of my students.	N	3.4
4. I have more say over the sequencing and pacing of my classroom because of MCAS.	I	3.6
5. I have increased the amount of test-related content I include in my curriculum because of MCAS.	C	2.36
6. MCAS has positively influenced me to teach to each student's 'multiple intelligence' strengths.	N	3.32
7. Because of MCAS I more often instruct in ways designed to improve test scores, such as telling how to do certain problems or how to write particular responses.	I	2.15
8. Due to MCAS, I more readily address emerging interests within each class.	I	3.6
9. MCAS encourages me to consider each student's learning style.	N	3.31
10. The curriculum content I offer my students has improved due to MCAS.	C	3.11
11. MCAS has freed me to include special topics of interest to me in my curriculum.	C	3.76
12. MCAS helps me better work from each student's prior knowledge.	N	3.32

* "C" stands for Curriculum-related item; "I" stands for Instruction-related item; and "D" stands for individual differences-related item.

**n = 59 for most items

- MCAS does not encourage teaching to students' individual learning styles.
- MCAS does not help teachers work from students' prior knowledge.

In conclusion, teachers perceive themselves as having less autonomy to make professional decisions about curriculum and instruction in local classrooms because of the MCAS. The exercise of professional skill in teaching to meet individual differences has suffered under MCAS as well. A small cohort of teachers perceives the tests as beneficial to their practice, but the overwhelming majority of teachers do not. Reasons forwarded by teachers in an effort to explain why and how the MCAS tests fail to improve their decision-making autonomy about curriculum and instruction and their teaching to meet individual differences or needs are explored in the open-response and interview data analyzed below.

Open-Response Findings

Open-response written data from Part II of the MCAS Impact Survey are introduced in this section. An item-by-item analysis is presented first and includes tables summarizing results for positive, negative, and neutral responses to the three open-response items. This section closes with a summary of open-response findings.

Open-Response Item-by-Item Analysis

Three sub-sections below detail responses for each of the three open-response items, which correspond to each of the three research questions. The first sub-section addresses findings related to autonomy to make professional decisions about curriculum; the second addresses findings related to autonomy to make instructional

decisions; and the third sub-section addresses data findings related to teaching to meet individual differences. All sub-sections discuss positive, negative, and neutral or other responses using categorized data, and each sub-section closes with a summary of findings. The section closes with an overview of open-response data findings.

Table 21 summarizes open-response results and indicates the number of responses coded positive, negative, and neutral with a breakdown by school type (high- and low-scoring) and by teachers' academic concentration (mathematics or English). The number of respondents to each item is listed and varies from a high of 55 on Open-response Item 1 to a low of 48 on Open-response Item 3. The number of responses exceeds the number of respondents because some teachers wrote more than one statement in response to an item. For example, one teacher wrote about the MCAS impact on curriculum: "The test covers worthwhile material. The test does bring unity to what is taught statewide." These statements were coded as positive, but considered as two separate responses. Analysis is based on number of responses to an item.

Open-Response Survey Item 1 Findings

Teacher participants were asked to briefly respond in writing to the following statement (Open-Response Survey Item 1): Please comment on the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on your autonomy to make curriculum decisions. This statement directly mirrors Research Question 1. Fifty-five of fifty-nine survey

Table 21. Survey Open-response Data Results By Item

Open-response Survey Item	Positive-Impact Responses	Negative-Impact Responses	Neutral- or Other- Responses
1. Please comment on the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on your autonomy to make curriculum decisions. (55 respondents; 79 responses)	23 responses 14 L 9 H 15 (n)* 8 (q)** 10 English 9 Mathematics	34 responses 22 L 12 H 15 (p) 1 (q) 13 English 19 Mathematics	22 responses 10 L 12 H 3 (p) 1 (n) 10 English 8 Mathematics
	29% of responses♦	43% of responses	28% of responses
2. Please comment on the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on your autonomy to make instructional decisions. (50 respondents; 51 responses)	12 responses 9 L 3 H 8(n) 1(q) 4 English 7 Mathematics	31 responses 21 L 10 H 8(p) 2(q) 14 English 15 Mathematics	18 responses 9 L 9 H 1(n) 1(q) 6 English 12 Mathematics
	20% of responses	51% of responses	30% of responses
3. Please comment on the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on your teaching to meet individual students' needs. (48 respondents; 68 responses)	19 responses 10L 9H 13(n) 8(q) 12 English 7 Mathematics	29 responses 18 L 11H 13(p) 2(q) 10 English 14 Mathematics	20 responses 9 L 11 H 2(p) 1(q) 7 English 9 Mathematics
	28% of responses	43% of responses	29% of responses

L = Low-scoring-school responses

H = High-scoring-school responses

* (n) or (p) denotes number of participants who provided concurrent negative (n) or positive (p) responses

** (q) means this statement appears to be qualified, or not fully positive. Qualification surfaces most generally in word choice (i.e. "hopefully, "if there were time and money"). However, when teachers' statements mention a benefit for someone other than themselves (i.e. a tutor), or consider the benefit as relevant only to test taking, for instance, the statements are also listed as having a qualification.

♦ Percent figures are rounded, so totals may exceed 100%.

participants responded to Open-Response Item 1, and a total of 79 responses were coded.

In each sub-section, first positive, then negative, then neutral responses are analyzed. Each sub-section opens with a listing of response totals and a table summarizing response totals and responses by school type (see Tables 22, 23, and 24). Each table is followed by interpretative analysis. Each analysis set (positive, negative, and neutral responses) is followed by a summary.

Slightly more than one-quarter of the total Item 1 responses (23) voiced positive perceptions about the MCAS impact on autonomous curriculum decision-making. Of that 29%, more than half of the positive responses were accompanied by negative-impact statements, and more than a quarter were qualified in some way. So while a small number of teachers perceive that MCAS has had unqualified, and/or solely positive effects on their autonomous curriculum decision-making, most do not.

The most significant number of positive responses fell into two categories: improved curriculum content and improved curriculum structuring. As Corbett and Wilson (1991) noted, the more the results of tests are viewed as benchmarks of success (which happens universally in Massachusetts) and the more strategies are "focused to improve test scores" (p. 77) (which happens most commonly in low-scoring schools), the more curriculum and instruction changes will occur. So it is not surprising that these two categories included the greatest number of responses. Ten positive responses, representing nearly half the total of positive responses on Item 1, remarked that the tests

Table 22. Question 1 Open-response Codes: Positive

Code Categories for Open-response Item 1: Positive	Responses T = total responses L = low-scoring school responses H = high-scoring school responses
Improved curriculum content	T=10; L=5; H=5
Improved curriculum structure	T=6; L=5; H=1
Motivated students	T=3; L=2; H=1
Improved assessment	T=1; L=1; H=0
Increased accountability	T=1; L=0; H=1
Improved curriculum equality	T =1; L=0; T=1
Allows for curriculum autonomy	T=1; L=1; H=0

Open-response Item 1: Positive Responses

Total Participants: 12

Total Responses: 23

Low-scoring school responses: 14

High-scoring school responses: 9

positively influenced curriculum decision-making, though several of these responses were qualified in some way. “MCAS may have the influence to ‘remind’ teachers to cover areas that may be perceived as less attractive, interesting, or necessary,” wrote one high-scoring-school teacher, while another wrote, “MCAS reinforces the writing instruction on analytical essays that I already do.” MCAS, it appears, is not driving positive changes in teachers’ decision-making about curriculum; rather, these teachers say, it can possibly serve as a reminder or reinforcing task for some teachers.

Table 23. Question 1 Open-response Codes: Negative

Coded Categories for Open-response Item 1: Negative	Responses T = total responses L = low-scoring school responses H = high-scoring school responses
Narrowing the curriculum/teaching to the test	T=20; L=13; H=7
Loss of autonomy to make curriculum decisions	T=8; L=7; H=1
Timing and scheduling issues	T=4; L=2; H=2
Hurts students	T=2; L=1; H=1
Ineffective assessment tool	T=1; L=0; H=1

Open-response Item 1: Negative Responses
 Total Participants: 31
 Total Responses: 35
 Low-scoring school responses: 23
 High-scoring school responses: 12

Table 24. Question 1 Open-response Codes: Neutral

Coded Categories for Open-response Item 1: Neutral or 'Other'	Responses T = total responses L = low-scoring school responses H = high-scoring school responses
No impact/Frameworks drives, not test	T=21; L=9; H=12
Acceptance of state authority	T=1; L=1; H=0

Open-response Item 1: Neutral or Other Response
 Total Participants: 18
 Total Responses: 22
 Low-scoring school responses: 10
 High-scoring school responses: 12

Several responses testified to direct positive MCAS impact on curriculum decisions. Two mathematics teachers said they had changed their curriculum specifically to include “more probability” while two others noted more general changes. Two English teachers remarked on an increase in the “expository writing focus” and an “Incremental review of grammar; better understanding of the ‘blueprint’ of clear 5-paragraph writing.” Though these ten responses represent less than 20% of all responses to Item 1, they hint that there may be, in some cases, positive impacts on teachers’ curriculum choices resulting from institution of MCAS, though the impacts are limited in scope and hardly perceived by the general teacher population.

An improvement in decision-making about curriculum structure was described as a positive outcome of MCAS in six responses. However, these six, representing about 10 percent of total Item 1 responses, evoked the deepest conviction expressed by any of the positive voices. “It provides some structure where there was none before.” “Knowing what is expected of students, regarding the questions, helps to plan curriculum.” Of note here is the fact that five of the six responses come from low-scoring schools, which may offer some insight into the curriculum issues underlying teaching and learning difficulties at these schools. One of the teachers expressed relief that “The test does bring unity to what is being taught statewide.”

Interestingly, while some high-stakes testing proponents contend that such tests can guide curriculum decision-making through an assessment loop, providing valuable feedback to teachers about weak content areas (Simmons & Resnick, 1993), only one respondent mentioned that “A teacher can go directly to test data from previous tests to develop student and group specific approaches to teaching.” During interviews, teachers

talked of using test results to inform instruction, both for individual students and for entire departments most commonly; however, for test preparation improvement, rather than general curriculum enhancement. Thus it appears that the positive impacts on autonomy to make curriculum decisions are weakly perceived by teachers in general.

Teachers perceive many negative impacts on their curriculum decision-making and autonomy. In fact, negative comments on Open-response Item 1 exceed positive comments by more than 50%. Teachers' primary concerns related to narrowing the curriculum and teaching to the test. Both of these themes surfaced in Jones & Egley's 2002 survey of 708 teachers, which stated:

One of the teachers' major concerns regarding high-stakes testing was that it 'narrowed the curriculum' by forcing teachers to teach only the subjects that were tested to the exclusion of the non-tested subjects.... A related concern was that the testing caused teachers to teach to the test by organizing their instruction around illustrative items that were the same, or look like, actual test items. (Jones & Egley, 2002, p.1)

The teachers represented in this study spoke out clearly about these identical issues.

Unlike the positive responses, the negative responses are not equally divided between high and low-scoring school participants; low-scoring school participants wrote nearly twice as many negative responses as did high-scoring school participants, reflecting Corbett and Wilson's (1991) finding that the more teachers felt pressure to achieve on tests, the more adjustments they made in curriculum. Three categories represented 31 of 34 negative responses to Item 1: teaching to the test /narrowing the curriculum (20 responses), timing and scheduling issues (4 responses), and loss of autonomy (8 responses). Interview data reflect these results.

Narrowing curriculum and teaching to the test concerns prompted nearly 60% of the negative responses to Item 1. Smith (1991) observed similar phenomena,

...it was concluded that testing programs substantially reduce the time available for instruction, narrow curricular offers and modes of instruction, and potentially reduce the capacities of teachers to teach content and to use methods and materials that are incompatible with standardized testing formats. (p. 10)

Teaching to the test results in myriad difficulties such as failing to address students' learning needs or compromising ability to meet those needs, providing teaching that is "a mile wide and an inch deep," and the loss of ability to teach other content teachers feel is valuable or useful. Examples of responses concerning the negative impact of MCAS on curriculum decision-making include the following:

- "We need to make sure all students are exposed to all that material before 10th grade, even when some students may not be ready for it until 11th."
- "It makes me include more drill-kill."
- "MCAS does make us 'teach to test,' influencing/determining how we structure the order of skills taught."
- "So much is geared toward the MCAS that other important information is put on sidelines even though the areas are needed for the next mathematics class."

Responses such as these, and there are many more examples, suggest that teachers view the MCAS as a force that compromises teachers' ability to choose and present an effective curriculum.

Teachers perceive that they are not free to create curriculum, nor do they perceive that they maintain the professional power to decide what content students need to cover in order to succeed at learning. One teacher noted an inability to meet student

needs other than passing the MCAS, writing that there is now “less student preparation for SAT exam or college level mathematics.” Another wrote in broader strokes, “...(MCAS) makes for a more rigid academic schedule. We are not free to explore special interests or things that students find particularly interesting.” The strength (more than one-third of responses testified to these impacts – the single largest category of responses related to Item 1) and the certainty of these negative responses, directs attention to the issues at stake. Teachers are experiencing more drilling, less varied and less student-centered curricula, as they sometimes ignore content components or sequences they perceive to be of higher value than test preparation. As a result, they compromise their professional decision-making. The number of negative perceptions expressed indicates that, for many teachers, the high-stakes MCAS test clearly drives local curriculum decision-making and impinges on their autonomy to make decisions related to curriculum in local classrooms.

The timing and scheduling issues that negatively impact teachers’ curriculum decision-making were explained in straightforward terms by two low- and two high-scoring-school responses. “MCAS imposes itself in the calendar each year as to what to focus on when,” said one, while another added,

At certain times of the year, no matter what is going on, we have to stop everything and do test prep. Also, what I plan for the month of May is hugely impacted by test days and the after affects on students. It is a very difficult month to have learning happen.

Teachers apparently sense that they are losing control of the curriculum as MCAS demands insert themselves into the academic schedule. But it is not just the time away from the curriculum that teachers consider truly academic that bothers them. As one high-scoring-school teacher wrote, “There is too much to cover by sophomore year to

be reasonable.” The breadth of material subject to MCAS testing apparently poses its own pressures on teachers’ curricula. These time and schedule issues also surfaced in interviews where teachers shared more details and frustrations, and are well represented in research conducted by Jones, Jones, and Hargrove (2003).

Narrowing of curriculum, teaching to the test, and timing and scheduling constraints imposed by the high-stakes MCAS tests likely cause teachers to perceive they have lost autonomy to make effective professional decisions about curriculum. As one teacher wrote, “If I feel certain topics should not be addressed (whether in my professional opinion it’s too advanced or not necessary for the students’ education at that time), I have no say.” Another teacher detailed loss that drove her to conclude her professional decision-making had been clearly diminished by the MCAS:

There is no independence – no autonomy – the state dictates. I now base my curriculum on drilling for the test. There is no time to get off on a tangent of interest to the students. There is no time for creative assignments. At one time I had the students design a newspaper on WWII, so the students could better understand the characters in A Separate Peace – not anymore.

Others were less objective in their statements. One teacher raged that,

I have no autonomy. What a joke. The DOE (Department of Education) is going to dictate curriculum, types of test, in fact, nearly everything. The DOE (staff members) think they know something about education. I have probably taught longer than the total experience of the administrators in the DOE.

A teacher from a high-scoring school was equally blunt: “There is no autonomy other than in style of presentation.” Teachers see the test as directing their decision making, and sometimes bitterly question the competency of the authorities overseeing the testing program or express resentment about the loss of autonomy, especially at low-scoring schools. Similar perceptions were detailed in research by Cimbricz (2002), Johnson and

Johnson (2002), Haney (2000), Grant (2000), and McNeil (2000). As McNeil wrote, "...as a system becomes so 'aligned' that professionals in the system are locked into compliance if they are to stay in the system, the wise and professional voices of teachers are silenced" (p. 263). Consequently, teachers lose their professional status and powers as educators and, as Grant contended, begin to consider themselves "merely pawns in a game that is being transacted all around them"(2000, p. 10). These teachers have lost their professional power to effectively manage what they teach through their decision-making processes. Curriculum decisions are being determined by the state at a far distance from local classrooms. Many of the teachers who expressed these perceptions appear to fall into the category Zancanella (1992) termed "Teacher with no power but strong alignment." These are teachers who teach in ways that match state tests, but who say, as one in his Missouri case study did, that the tests are

...a fearful thing because you feel like the curriculum is being dictated not by teachers but by...lawmakers, you know, people who aren't that up on what's going on in the classroom. Bureaucrats and administrators, not teachers. (p. 289)

One Massachusetts teacher summed up the apparent perceptions of many others in these words: "I do not have autonomy over what curriculum is presented to students. MCAS directs your curriculum. The MCAS dictates what the curriculum is."

While the number of negative responses regarding autonomy to make curriculum decisions clearly favors low-scoring schools, it is impossible to ignore the number of high-scoring responses that also articulated negative perceptions. In general, teachers appear to sense a movement toward state control of curriculum decision-making and a subsequent loss of their own professional capacity to render such decisions. These losses surface in several ways, and are often articulated passionately.

Among the ways teachers' professional decision-making capacity is negatively affected by the MCAS are the narrowing of curriculum to accommodate test subjects, the emerging need to teach to the test in order to raise scores, and the infringement on curricula due to timing and scheduling issues related to the tests.

Less than one-third of responses indicated teachers experience no impact of MCAS on their curriculum decision-making. Most of the open-response statements seem to indicate that respondents' teaching already aligns with state Frameworks, on which the MCAS is meant to be based, or curricula are already sufficient to help students pass the MCAS. It is important to note, however, that high-scoring-school teachers appear more likely to perceive the MCAS has having no impact on their curriculum (12 versus 10 responses, despite higher numbers of low-scoring-school teachers represented in the survey). In interviews, high-scoring-school teachers attributed the lack of impact to several causes, one being that faculties at high-scoring schools are busy preparing students for the SATs and AP exams, so the MCAS is no more than a blip on the screen of teacher consciousness. They also pointed out that their students come from homes with highly educated and academically motivated parents. Some teachers at high-scoring schools noted, however, that MCAS will become more of an issue if or when these schools confront more special needs students who cannot meet the MCAS standards.

Nine of the responses revealed that teachers perceive either that their curricula already covered material on the MCAS prior to its institution or that their departments had earlier aligned curricula with the state Frameworks, and so the Frameworks, not MCAS was driving their curriculum choices:

I have always adhered to the curriculum and MA Frameworks, and in so doing, I have always utilized the standards and strands within them, which is what MCAS is based upon. Therefore, teaching to MCAS is what I've always done.

"MCAS hasn't changed anything. Prior to MCAS I consulted the standards in developing curriculum, and still do. Standards are what matter to me, not MCAS."

Many others simply stated, "MCAS has not impacted my curriculum decisions," leaving to speculation the reason for the lack of impact. One teacher voiced acceptance of state authority over local curriculum decisions, "the MCAS dictates the curriculum. That's what it was created to do, and that's what it does;" however, the teacher maintained that, "After the MCAS curriculum is completed, then you can teach whatever you want." Like Zancanella's (1992) "teacher with power, but no alignment" this teacher seems to indicate that whether or not he/she agrees with the test-driven curriculum is irrelevant, he/she remains in control of local curriculum choices.

Neutral responses indicating that the MCAS high-stakes tests have had no impact on autonomy to make curriculum decisions comprise slightly more than one quarter of all Open-Response Item 1 responses, far below the number of negative responses. These perceptions of "no impact" most often stem from teachers beliefs that their curricula already aligned with the frameworks on which MCAS is based, so no changes or adjustments were necessitated.

Open-Response Item 1 Summary of Findings

Teachers are more likely to perceive that the high-stakes MCAS tests yield negative, rather than positive or neutral, effects on their autonomy to make decisions about curriculum in their local classrooms. Low-scoring-school teachers appear to

perceive the effects more acutely. Most of the negative effects are perceived as constrictions on curriculum, whereby teachers feel forced to teach test-related material, whether or not they believe it to be appropriate or useful for students in their local classrooms. Teachers also express concern about the narrowing of curriculum and the impact of timing and scheduling restrictions placed on curricula. A smaller group of teachers see some benefit to their curriculum decision-making arising from the State's imposition of the MCAS tests, primarily resulting from improved curriculum standards and expectations. Also, a small group of teachers indicates "no impact" on curriculum decision-making deriving from the MCAS tests. These are mostly, but not exclusively, teachers from high-scoring schools.

Open-Response Survey Item 2 Findings

Teacher participants were asked to briefly respond in writing to the following statement (Open-response Survey Item 2): Please comment on the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on your autonomy to make instructional decisions.

This statement directly mirrors Research Question 2. Fifty of 59 participants responded to this item, and a total of 51 responses were coded.

In each sub-section, first positive, then negative, then neutral responses are analyzed. Each sub-section opens with a listing of response totals and a table summarizing response totals and responses by school type (see Tables 25, 26, and 27). Each table is followed by interpretative analysis. Each analysis set (positive, negative, and neutral responses) is followed by a summary.

Table 25. Question 2 Open-response Codes: Positive

Coded Categories for Open-response Item 2: Positive	Responses T = total responses L = low-scoring school responses H = high-scoring school responses
Expands repertoire and resources	T=5; L=3; H=2
Improves focus	T=4; L=3; H=1
Applies to other tests	T=1; L=1; H=0
Motivates students to set priorities	T=1; L=1; H=0
Supports Frameworks	T=1; L=1; H=0

Open-response Item 2: Positive Responses

Total Participants; 12

Total Responses: 12

Low-scoring school responses: 9

High-scoring school responses: 3

Only 20% of the total responses related to autonomy to make instructional decisions were coded positive. Teachers listed about half as many positive statements (12) about the impact of MCAS on their instructional decision-making as they listed under the ‘curriculum’ item. In addition, two-thirds of respondents qualified their positive responses by articulating negative responses, as well. The number of theme categories under which the 12 positive statements fall – five – with three of those categories garnering a single response, develops a picture of weak support for MCAS as a positive vehicle for empowering teachers’ instructional decision-making. The only code categories receiving multiple statements were “improving structure” (4) and expanded instructional repertoire and materials” (5). One teacher mentioned that the MCAS

Table 26. Question 2 Open-response Codes: Negative

Coded Categories for Open-response Item 2: Negative	Responses T = total responses L = low-scoring school responses H = high-scoring school responses
Instructional autonomy infringed	T=9; L=8; H=1
Reduced instruction time	T=9; L=2; H=7
Overextension (time)	T=4; L=4; H=0
Decreased attention to learning needs and conditions	T=8; L=6; H=2
Competing Realities	T=1; L=1; H=0

Open-response Item 2: Negative Responses

Total Participants: 31

Total Responses: 31

Low-scoring school responses: 21

High-scoring school responses: 10

influence on his/her instruction might result in a positive impact on “other tests.” A second teacher mentioned the MCAS “alignment with the Frameworks,” which, though generally considered a curriculum guide, apparently was viewed as having a positive instructional impact by this one teacher. These two, like the others who wrote favorably about the MCAS-instruction connection, failed to directly address the impact on their autonomy to make instructional decisions.

The five responses commenting on the positive power of MCAS to help expand their instructional repertoires, or materials, voiced appreciation for the instructional doors opened by MCAS. Three of the five said that MCAS had encouraged the addition of more question types, specifically ‘open-ended’ questions, to instructional repertoires.

Table 27. Question 2 Open-response Codes: Neutral

Coded Categories for Open-response Item 2: Neutral	Responses
No impact	T = total responses L = low-scoring school responses H = high-scoring school responses T=12; L=5; H=7
Not applicable	T=6; L=4; H=2

Open-response Item 2: Neutral Responses

Total Participants: 17

Total Responses: 18

Low-scoring school responses: 9

High-scoring school responses: 9

The other two positive comments praised the tests for offering more “good practical applications” and encouraging more emphasis on “real-world meaning of concepts.”

However, three of the five teachers included remarks on the negative impact of MCAS on instructional decision-making, weakening the argument that MCAS positively affected teachers’ autonomy to make instructional decisions. Three of four responses applauding MCAS because it “Makes us focus,” or because it has “...made me more aware of what I need to stress in class” also included statements about the negative impact of the tests on teachers’ autonomy to make decisions about instruction.

The majority of positive influence statements derive from low-scoring schools, indicating that there may be underlying instructional problems in those schools that MCAS helps to address. However, the paucity of responses – nine out of 34 low-scoring school responses and three out of 25 high-scoring school responses voiced positive

perceptions – supports the conclusion that MCAS has resulted in few positive effects on instructional decision-making, nor does it enhance teacher autonomy to make instructional decisions.

Teachers voiced nearly three times as many negative MCAS impact responses as positive impact responses on Open-response Item 2 related to instructional decision-making and autonomy to make such decisions. And while positive statements included no direct reference to impacts on “autonomy,” negative responses to Open-Response Item 2 did. Not surprisingly, low-scoring-school participants vocalized more concerns about the infringements on autonomy than did high-scoring participants (8 versus 1 response). The state has come down hard on the low-scoring schools, sending out Department of Education “experts” to find out “what’s wrong” with these schools and in many cases instituting changes with which teachers disagree. Three main issues surfaced in the negative response data for Question 2: time pressures (13, with 9 related to reduced instruction time and four related to perceptions of overextension), decreased attention to student learning needs and conditions (8), and loss of autonomy (9). As in the case of positive statements, the researcher inferred teachers’ comments about negative effects on their daily instructional practices reflected upon their autonomy, in this case by decreasing their choices. Jones and Egley (2002) report that nearly six times as many teachers (215 versus 37) reported, “negative effects on teaching and learning” in their study. While this more limited study did not reveal such a strong tilt to the negative as regards impact on instructional decision-making and autonomy, the tilt is obviously similar.

Time issues concern both high- and low-scoring-school teachers, though the emphasis of those concerns varies somewhat. Low-scoring-school participants are more likely to be concerned with overextension, feeling pressure to cover topics whether or not that coverage makes sense for their students (4 low, 0 high) while high-scoring-school teachers more frequently lament the loss of or diversion of instructional time for testing and test preparation (2 low, 7 high).

Low-scoring-school teachers described their perceived time pressures in the following ways:

- “I sometimes feel my pacing is determined by the MCAS. In some classes I feel pressure to make a decision between covering enough material and ensuring full student understanding.”
- “The MCAS limits your elaborating on topics because there are a lot of topics that must be covered and you can’t spend a lot of time on any one topic.”
- “Need to push on even if students are not ready.”
- “Because of MCAS, there are many topics that must be covered. Sometimes each topic does not get the necessary attention because of time constraints.”

The time constraints outlined by the high-scoring-school teachers, primarily, were as follows:

- “I spend more time instructing for the exam.”
- “Teaching test-taking strategies is not meaningful toward the achievement of my real responsibility – teaching students how to read, write, speak, listen, and think critically.”

- “I have added time to practice taking MCAS with sample tests. Lost instructional time to giving practice tests.”
- “Takes away considerable class time during testing.”

Regardless of the emphasis, though, 13 responses, nearly half of all negative responses to Item 2: Instruction, perceived MCAS to be an intrusion on instructional practices. Interview data support this open-response data and elaborate on the frustrations teachers experience as an external authority's decisions impact their instructional decision-making. Decisions made at a distance, it seems, do not always support the conditions and needs of local classrooms.

A third frequently mentioned criticism relates to decreased attention to student learning needs and interests. Eight teachers mentioned this as an issue, six from low-scoring schools and two from high-scoring schools. The test takes precedence over all. Teachers summarize the situation: “I tend to gear instruction toward what MCAS wants and less about what students want.” “Underclassmen are subjected to instructional decisions based solely on a standardized test.” Such comments, made by teachers from low-scoring schools, speak to the imposition of state will over teacher decision-making. Teachers under threat of losing jobs, or having their school taken over by the state, know what they must do to retain even a small unit of autonomy: They must raise MCAS test scores. Their own thoughts and ideas about how to best instruct and what to focus on when instructing, fall prey to the need for higher test scores to prove they are effective teachers, worthy of operating in a school that operates under local, not centralized, control. But high-scoring-school teachers also have concerns about the direction test pressures force teachers to follow. Wrote one, “It's difficult to translate

material for a pen and paper test to accommodate/facilitate different learning styles.” This teacher had been trained to consider multiple ways to present material, but was beginning to feel the clamp of test pressures tightening instructional options. Again, Part I survey item responses and interview data support this open-response observation. These instruction-related responses also connect to autonomy for making decisions related to meeting students’ individual differences

Nine responses, nearly a third of the negative response total, spoke directly to autonomy issues. “I must do whatever the tests tell me,” wrote one teacher in a sad commentary on the loss of professional decision-making power. “What autonomy?” asked another, “This is what’s on the test. Teach it. If your students do poorly, it’s your fault.” Schools where students score low on MCAS tests, regardless of the mitigating conditions, seem to despair.

This whole concept of teacher empowerment is bogus and laughable. I have no more power now than I did before ed. (education) reform. People who could not do my job think they know better than I how to teach. I find that very ironic.”

The one teacher from a high-scoring school environment who addressed the issue of autonomy took a more philosophical stance, most likely in part because the threats associated with the MCAS hold no power over his/her school system, “A standardized test, created outside of the class room is (to me) suspect in so far as its ability to enhance any autonomy on the teacher’s part.” As Smith (1991) discovered, “...the methods that teachers have in their arsenal become reduced, and teaching work is deskilled” (p. 10).

Negative responses to Item 2 formed by far the largest group of responses to the instruction-related item. Teachers perceive the high-stakes MCAS tests as infringing on

their instructional time and purposes, limiting their autonomy, and diminishing their professional instructional decision-making in local classrooms. The infringements make it difficult for teachers to optimize learning conditions in their schools. Those most affected, primarily teachers from low-scoring schools, write forcefully about the State's increasing control over their decision-making autonomy.

"I have always had the autonomy to make instructional decisions," wrote one teacher, indicating that MCAS has had no impact on one local classroom. Eleven other responses supported this claim, noting, "The MCAS does not impact my autonomy to instruct." The preponderance of responses from high-scoring-school teachers (fewer of whom participated in the survey) indicating that MCAS has had no influence on their instructional decision-making or autonomy reflects the supportive conditions experienced by these teachers who, in interviews, talked of students barely needing help with Standard American English grammar because the students had absorbed proper grammar phrasing and use from their highly-educated parents. Because they are declared 'successful,' high-scoring schools, located within highly educated and well-to-do communities where nearly all students go to college, teachers feel little or no pressure to alter their teaching practices or curricula in response to the MCAS. It is the cadre of teachers facing the challenges of teaching non-native-English speaking students to pass an English-based exam, or of teaching students from impoverished homes where literacy levels are often low or non-existent, who feel prodded by the high-stakes tests. It is these teachers, in low-scoring schools, who sense that the state challenges their autonomy and professionalism. "People who could not do my job think they know better than I how to teach." The appearance, however, of comments from

high-scoring school teachers, such as: "I focus on investigations and unusual questions, mindbenders, to sharpen my students' minds. MCAS improvement is incidental," hint not only at differences between student populations and how those may affect responses to external authorities' mandates, but also to differences among teachers. It may be that some personalities are less prone to submission, less prone to relinquish their autonomy and so perceive no impact on their instruction when external pressures mount. Still the fact is that in high-scoring schools where parents are often professionals with substantial years of education beyond high school, where guards do not monitor the front door, where every student has a textbook and every school a well-stocked library, it may be that the pinch of MCAS is less noticeable.

Taken together, the twelve responses indicating that MCAS has had "no impact" on teachers' instructional decision-making power, represent just under a quarter of the total Item 2 responses, a much smaller portion of responses than those indicating no impact on curriculum. It may be that "instruction" is a much broader concept than "curriculum," so teachers addressed a larger number of issues under the instruction umbrella.

The larger number of mathematics teachers (12) versus English teachers (6) who indicated no impact on autonomy for instructional decision-making in the classroom is noteworthy. This may result from the fact that, as mathematics teachers reported in interviews, the much earlier introduction of instructional reforms suggested by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics minimized the impact of MCAS reforms on teachers' instructional practices because the tests reflect, to some degree, the problem-solving focus of the NCTM principles and standards.

Teachers who explained that MCAS has had “no impact” on their curriculum composed less than a third of all responses to Open-Response Item 2, suggesting that, while some teachers perceive that the tests have impinged little if at all on their autonomy to make decisions related to instruction in local classrooms, that number does not represent the majority responding to this item. Those who relate that they sense no impact on their instructional decision-making are primarily, but not exclusively, from high-scoring schools which offer teachers supported, well-resourced environments in which to work, resulting in reduced needs to adjust instructional decision-making to accommodate the MCAS demands.

Open-Response Item 2 Summary of Findings

Teachers’ autonomy to make instructional decisions in local classrooms has suffered from the State’s imposition of the high-stakes MCAS tests. More than 50% of the responses in this study’s Open-Response survey Item 2 highlight negative impacts of MCAS on teachers’ autonomy to make professional decisions regarding instruction, with approximately one-fourth of responses expressing positive perceptions and less than one-third indicating no impact or a neutral response to Item 2. Teachers from low- and high-scoring schools perceived MCAS as constraining instructional time and their ability to attend adequately to learning needs and conditions in their classrooms. Teachers who addressed directly in their statements issues of loss of autonomy to make instructional decisions were primarily, but not exclusively, from low-scoring schools.

Open-Response Survey Item 3 Findings

Teacher participants were asked to briefly respond in writing to the following statement (Open-Response Survey Item 3): Please comment on the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on your teaching to meet individual students' needs. This statement directly mirrors Research Question 3. Forty-eight of 59 participants responded to this item, and a total of 68 responses were coded.

In each sub-section, first positive, then negative then neutral responses are analyzed. Each sub-section opens with a listing of response totals and a table summarizing response totals and responses by school type (see Tables 28, 29, and 30). Each table is followed by interpretative analysis. Each analysis set (positive, negative, and neutral responses) is followed by a summary.

Of the 68 written comments regarding the effect of MCAS on teachers' ability to meet students' individual needs, only 19, or 28%, were positive, and nearly half of these statements contained qualifiers. Few teachers see MCAS as improving their ability to meet individual needs in the classroom. Much has been made of the movement to address learning differences within the traditional classroom structures, and teachers routinely report pressure from administrative forces at the local and state levels to include notes on individual accommodations in daily lesson plans. However, the results of this survey indicate that MCAS is not supporting that drive, nor is it supporting the more general movement towards addressing 'learning-styles' or 'multiple intelligences.'

Table 28. Question 3 Open-response Codes: Positive

Coded Categories for Open-response Item 3: Positive	Responses
Assessment benefits Assessment of learning Assessment of testing capacity Assessment potential, but impossible	T = total responses L = low-scoring school responses H = high-scoring school responses T=11; L=6; H=5 T=5; L=4; H=1 T=5; L=1; H=4 T=1; L=1; H=0
Promotes appropriate teaching methods	T=5; L=2; H=3
Motivates students	T=3; L=2; H=1

Open-response Item 3: Positive Responses

Total Participants: 18

Total Responses: 19

Low-scoring school responses: 10

High-scoring school responses: 9

Still, pockets of potential benefit appeared during analysis. Most notably, teachers mentioned various assessment uses of MCAS as positive impacts on meeting individual needs. Eleven out of 18 positive responses to Question 3 related to assessment. Teachers believe that the tests can provide some useful information to guide decision-making about students' individual needs; however, support for the tests as aids to forming better decisions for individual students was weak. Negative statements accompanied 80% of the positive responses. Teachers were likely to qualify what they wrote. Test results "help me see where some students are in their learning.

Table 29. Question 3 Open-response Codes: Negative

Coded Categories for Open-response Item 3, Negative	Responses
Student needs opposed to testing needs	T = total responses L = low-scoring school responses H = high-scoring school responses T=21; L=14; H=7
Time pressure affects	T=8; L=4; H=4

Open-response Item 3: Negative Responses

Total Participants: 28

Total Responses: 29

Low-scoring school responses: 18

High-scoring school responses: 11

Table 30. Question 3 Open-response Codes: Neutral

Coded Categories for Open-response Item 3: Neutral	Responses
No impact	T = total responses L = low-scoring school responses H = high-scoring school responses T=12; L=2; H=10
No impact plus defense of self	T=5; L=5; H=0
No impact – other issues central	T=1; L=1; H=0
Not applicable	T=2; L=1; H=1

Open-Response Item 3: Neutral Responses

Total Participants: 20

Total Responses: 20

Low-scoring school responses: 9

High-scoring school responses: 11

When opportunities arise, this helps me direct some instruction.” “Students who have not passed have received individual tutoring to bolster their knowledge of the types of problems on the test and their test-taking strategies.” Teachers seemed almost to stretch their reasoning to think of ways the tests help them meet individual needs: “Since some students do struggle with standardized tests, the attention I give to test-taking skills is helpful for those students,” wrote one high-scoring-school teacher.

Only one low-scoring-school teacher wrote a response that appeared wholeheartedly to support the positive value of the tests to aid in meeting individual students’ learning needs: “Because of MCAS, you can see first hand from students’ test scores what are their academic needs.” However, even this teacher voiced a negative response to Open-Response Item 3, explaining that, “MCAS unfairly makes the assumption that all students should be at a certain developmental level. This assumption makes it extremely difficult to help a student with their specific learning needs.” This teacher perceives that children develop understanding of various topics at different points in their lives, but that the tests assume all children should be achieving at “normal” levels to which their MCAS test scores testify. So while the tests can provide useful information, the high-stakes attached to them may counterbalance that usefulness; the teacher can “see” students’ individual needs, but may not be free to address them as she/he strives to cover material and prepare students for the MCAS.

Several teachers indicated that the test results provide useful assessment data for tutors, though they made no mention of themselves. Overall, they divided into two camps, mostly along school-scoring lines. Low-scoring-school teachers were more likely to view assessment feedback as helping to “direct some instruction,” while high-

scoring-school teachers more frequently mentioned the feedback as useful for tutors. School dynamics may play a role here. High-scoring schools accommodate fewer special needs or non-native English speakers and fewer poor children. Their systems generally have greater resources available, as well. Therefore, mathematics and English teachers from high-scoring schools may be less likely to tap into MCAS data to assess needs for students in their classes.

MCAS may motivate some students, thereby helping teachers help them, according to three teachers. The teachers do not see the test as a positive or negative influence on their decision-making, but rather on the climate for learning that is presumed to support them as they try to meet individual learning needs. Still, two of the three statements in this category seemed hesitant: "It hopefully will encourage students to expand their ability," wrote one low-scoring-school teacher while a high-scoring-school teacher posited that "Some students may learn better when practicing for standardized tests." And the one teacher whose estimation of the test as a motivator seemed clearly positive ("It gives a clear goal or objective for the students to reach") felt compelled to balance this positive statement with a negative: "but there is little or no sympathy for students who improve but do not meet the MCAS level of acceptability." The tests, for this teacher, can help motivate individual students to reach a learning goal, but if these students do not improve sufficiently, or in ways MCAS deems important, they still are stamped as failures.

Four responses, three from high-scoring schools and one from a low-scoring school, indicating that MCAS in some way might promote appropriate teaching methods for individual students also included negative comments about the tests'

usefulness in meeting individual needs. Two teachers made clear statements of support: “Learning-challenged students need the lock-step delivery that helps meet the MCAS challenge,” and “Must plan to have all students have success on the test, so research, design and implement a variety of learning strategies and teaching methodologies.” The two other teachers used words like “seems to have promoted initiatives,” or “sometimes it has led ...,” indicating reservations about the overall benefit of the tests for decision-making to meet individual differences.

In general, data describing MCAS as positively benefiting capacity to meet individual needs is weak. With only 11 responses articulating a positive impact from the high-stakes tests on teachers’ ability to meet individual differences, it is likely that the tests fail to help teachers address this goal, a goal that has gained increasing saliency in American public education.

Nearly half of the total Item 3 responses articulated negative impacts that MCAS has had on teachers’ ability to meet students’ individual needs. Some went so far as to claim, “MCAS testing does not cater to individual student needs, so to better prepare them, we cater less to their needs.” All 29 responses fell into two categories of complaint: time-related issues, or test needs contradicting student needs, with the majority of responses in the latter category.

Eight teachers discussed time pressures that affect schedules and their ability to use their professional skills to meet individual instructional needs. “Sometimes I feel there is so much these kids need to cover before the test that I fear I don’t always have the luxury to meet every individual need,” apologized one teacher. Another maintained, “(MCAS) takes away class time. The irony is that we lose remediation time in testing to

tell us what we already know.” Several were specific in their comments, highlighting the loss of “time for choice assignments, learning-styles based assignments, etc.” or the way “Absolutely absurd things are emphasized at times (stem and leaf, box and whiskers) on the MCAS test,” adding that “to do well on the SATs for college this (MCAS) wastes valuable time.” Frequent mention of the time inhibitions MCAS places on teachers surfaced in interviews, as well. Time spent preparing for tests that, as one teacher claimed, “unfairly make the assumption that all students should be at a certain developmental level. ...Makes it extremely difficult to help a student with their specific learning needs.” The MCAS tests, designed in part to ensure equality in teaching and learning, make it difficult for teachers to achieve that equality, according to these eight responses, and those of the 21 responses describing perceptions of the tests as oppositional to meeting individual needs.

Teachers perceive direct contradictions between the test needs and requirements and individual students' needs. In fact, 72% of negative responses concerned these contradictions. “The test casts a long shadow; preparing for it sometimes supercedes meeting some individual needs,” summarized one teacher. Twenty-one responses, nearly one-third of the Item 3 total for all three categories, elaborated in some way on that “long shadow.” The comments, some more impassioned than others, are represented below:

- “Students often ‘rent the information’ for successful test taking and then promptly forget it. I strive for my classes to ‘own’ their knowledge and then be able to apply it. MCAS gets in the way/interrupts this.”

- “I feel the MCAS test doesn’t take into consideration individual needs. Some students know the material and orally can recite info, but can’t write well.”
- “MCAS has probably dissuaded me from spending more time on individual students’ needs because I spend more time on test preparation.”
- “Regardless of what family, a student, a counselor, and/or a teacher feels is the best curriculum to meet a student’s needs, this will be it: At least Algebra I completed by the end of 10th grade.”
- “There is no recognition of individual needs. LD (learning disabled) students are being ‘left behind.’ It’s a sin that we now must insist that SPED (special education) 14-year-olds master algebra.”
- “My emphasis cannot be on the individual student, but on the Standards. I have to expose students to concepts whether they’re ready for them or not.”

High-stakes testing, by its very nature, poses problems for some students.

Teachers express conflict between preparing for the test and causing students to “suffer.” The high numbers of special needs and non-English native speakers in low-scoring schools likely contributes significantly to the high numbers of teachers from the schools (14), as opposed to those from high-scoring schools (7), who chose to comment on these issues. Clearly, though, some teachers commiserate at a deep level with students who encounter “a massive experience of failure that makes it hard to keep them motivated for the next two years.” The question surfaces as to how these teachers stay motivated in the face of such internal conflicts and barriers to teaching the way they believe and have been told they ought to teach.

Negative responses exceed by more than 50% the positive responses to Open-Response Item 3 about the MCAS impact on teachers meeting individual students' needs in local classrooms. The responses indicate that teachers perceive the MCAS as contradicting their pedagogical emphases on different learning styles and developmental processes. Furthermore, the timing of the tests and the pressures to prepare students to meet the tests' timeframes challenge teachers' ability to meet individual differences. Teachers infer the test, not the students, determines local classroom agendas.

Less than one-third of the total responses to Item 3 indicated that MCAS has had neither a negative nor a positive impact or influence on teachers' meeting individual needs in local classrooms. High-scoring-school teachers, whose classrooms tend to be populated with fewer special needs students, appear slightly over-represented in the neutral response category. When teachers elaborated on statements about the lack of impact on meeting individual needs of students, most indicated that they were already doing that and that it was the teachers' job to meet individual needs "regardless of the MCAS test." Stating it simply, one teacher wrote, "The MCAS itself does not inform my teaching to the extent of assessing and meeting individual student needs."

Of interest in these responses is the number of low-scoring-school teachers who included a defense of their existing practice in meeting individual needs while acknowledging that MCAS has had little impact on it. Five teachers from low-scoring schools explained,

MCAS has nothing to do with my desire to meet each individual student's needs or on how I try to do this. I offer extra help, and I come up with unconventional ways to teach all in an effort to meet individual needs. I would do this with or without MCAS . . .

and “I have done my best in 30 years of teaching to meet individual students’ needs – a Herculean task in and of itself! MCAS has played no part in this.” One teacher went further, saying:

Some students have difficulty learning. The bell curve will always exist. Some students will excel, most will do well, and a few will have difficulty learning. Lack of motivation and apathy are the biggest problems I face. Despite what the bureaucrats say, some children will be left behind. I don’t need the MCAS to validate my teaching style or my commitment to my students. The money being spent on MCAS could be spent better.

Open-Response Item 3 Summary of Findings

The number of responses indicating “no impact” on meeting individual needs resulting from the MCAS tests was nearly equal to the number reporting positive impacts. However, both of these categories yielded far fewer responses than did the negative impact category of responses, with the vast majority voicing concerns that students’ needs oppose test needs. Many of the teachers perceiving no MCAS impact on their ability to meet individual differences in their classrooms point to the inescapable requirement to address individual needs, regardless of state testing mandates, as the reason MCAS does not impact their efforts in this direction.

Summary of Open-Response Findings

Teachers perceive far more negative than positive impacts from the MCAS on their autonomy to make decisions about curriculum and instruction, and their teaching to meet individual students’ differences. In general, teachers are as likely to perceive the

MCAS has having “no impact” as they are to perceive positive impacts from the tests.

Overall, the open-response data show that teachers perceive:

- Their autonomy to make decisions related to curriculum has been diminished because of the MCAS pressures.
- The MCAS narrows curriculum choices, as teachers strive primarily to cover what is represented on the test.
- The MCAS encourages teaching to the test, particularly in low-scoring schools, and this has become widespread practice.
- The MCAS shapes and limits instructional decision-making.
- Test preparation practices have become an essential part of the education instructional process in public schools.
- Institution of testing procedures has shortened the instructional year.
- Efforts to meet individual student needs are contradicted by the MCAS.
- In communities with high socio-economic status and high-scoring schools, the MCAS has less impact on curriculum or instruction.
- In communities with low socio-economic status and low-scoring schools, some benefits to curriculum and instruction may accrue as a result of the MCAS.

A quick glance at the response frequencies in Table 21 (above) reveals more negative than positive or neutral responses to each of the three items. The data show that negative responses, comprising nearly half of all responses to the items about the impact of high-stakes testing on autonomy to make curriculum and instruction decisions and to meet individual needs in local classrooms, heavily outweigh either positive or

neutral responses, which are often close in number. The weight of negative open-responses supports the numeric data from Part I of the survey, indicating that teachers perceive a preponderance of negative impacts on both their curricular and instructional decision-making. Approximately one-quarter of comments show that teachers feel a measure of benefit from the MCAS on their curriculum and instructional decision-making or on their ability to meet individual needs, with slightly larger percentages of neutral or "other" comments being registered. These numbers are well below the figures for negative responses. As Jones and Egley (2002) acknowledged, "The effects of testing on teachers' teaching practices has been mixed" (p. 4). Cimbricz (2002) and Jones, Jones, and Hargrove, (2003) concur. However, the data in this study fully support the conclusions of Jones and Egley (2002) that testing is perceived to be taking schools in the wrong direction. From a survey of 708 teachers they discovered that "The positive effects cited were much fewer in number...." (p. 1). The data in this study testify to similar results.

Also transparent as one examines the data in Table 21 (above) is the diminishing interest teachers displayed towards writing responses. While 59 of 60 study participants completed the numeric portion of the survey, only 55 shared their thoughts on Item 1 in the Open-response section. That number was further reduced on Open-response Item 2 (50) and then again on Item 3 (48). The researcher took note of the hectic daily schedules and myriad demands experienced by public high school teachers. These conditions, perhaps more than disinterest, played a role in the reduction of responses. Also, while surveys had been distributed prior to the interview sessions, many teachers waited to fill them out until called for an interview. This led to a time crunch and

obviously hurried responses by many of the teachers, and no doubt, a sense of 'running out of time' that interrupted responses for Items 2 and 3.

Interview Findings

Interview data from 60 participants representing eight Massachusetts secondary schools in this study are introduced in this section. Three sub-sections below detail transcribed responses for each of the three primary interview questions, which correspond to each of the three research questions. The first sub-section shares findings related to autonomy to make professional decisions about curriculum; the second shares findings related to autonomy to make instructional decisions; and the third sub-section shares data findings related to teaching to meet individual differences in local classrooms. All sub-sections discuss positive, negative, and neutral responses using categorized data, and each sub-section closes with a summary. The section closes with a summary of interview findings.

Responses to Interview Question 4, added after the first two sets of interviews, are woven into the analysis of the three primary interview questions. Interview Question 4 asks teachers if there is anything more they want to say about the MCAS impact on their autonomy to make curriculum and instruction decisions and to meet individual differences in local classrooms, or if there is anything they wished to say about the MCAS tests in general.

Interview Question-by-Question Analysis

The interview data findings provided below mirror the outline of the three research questions. Teachers' perceptions of the MCAS impact on autonomy to make curriculum decisions are discussed first; secondly, their perceptions of the MCAS impact on autonomy to make instructional decisions are discussed; and, finally, their perceptions of the MCAS impact on teaching to meet instructional differences are discussed. The presentation method in each sub-section parallels that used with the Open-Response data, so first shared are positive responses, then negative responses, then neutral responses to the interview questions.

Table 31 provides an introduction to the interview data, as well as a general sense of what teachers' held to be important, a sense that informed the analysis. The coding process used to establish categories and themes is discussed in Chapter 3. In this table, the numbers in parentheses, i.e., (1), (2), (3), etc. refer to schools participating in this current study. The numbers not in parentheses refer to the number of responses from a school related to the code within the category and theme.

Interview Question 1: Curriculum Decision-Making Findings

Interview Question 1 asked: How have the MCAS tests influenced your professional decision-making about curriculum? Teacher participants' responses to this question are provided below in separate sub-sections related to positive, negative, and neutral findings. Responses to Interview Question 4, which emphasized the MCAS

Table 31. Interview Data Coded Responses by Theme
 SITES: High-Scoring Schools (3); (4); (5); (6) Low-Scoring Schools (1); (2); (7); (8)

Theme	Code A	Code B	Code C	Code D	Code E	Code F	Code G
-1- Autonomy	Infringements 1 Making curriculum decisions High (5) 2 (6) 2 Low (2) 2 (7) 2 (8) 6	*Comparing schools High (3) 8 (4) 2 (5) 2 (6) 2 Low (7) 1 (8) 3	Accountability for results beyond control	Acceptance of state authority High (5) 1 (6) 1 Low (1) 2 (2) 3 (7) 1	Assertion of existing autonomy High (3) 12 (4) 3 (5) 2 (6) 3 Low (1) 1 (2) 2 (7) 3 (8) 4	1.Prof.Disrespect/Distrust High (3) 1 Low (2) 2 (7) 1 (8) 5	Misuses High Low (7) 2
	2 - Meeting individual needs High (5) 3 (3) 1 Low (2) 2 (7) 3 (8) 8					2. Respect/Trust High (4) 3 (6) 2 Low	
	3 - Making instructional decisions High (5) 4 Low (2) 3 (7) 5 (8) 14						
	4. General High (5) 4 (6) 1 Low (2) 1 (8) 20						
	5. Other sources High (6) 1 Low (2) 1 (7) 5						

Continued, next page.

Table 31, cont'd.:

Theme	Code A	Code B	Code C	Code D	Code E	Code F
-2- Motivator	Focuses student attention on studies	Helps students set priorities	De-motivator	Establishes Need to Learn	Not used	
	High (3) 1 Low (2) 3 (5) 3 (8) 1	High (5) 1 Low (2) 1	High (3) 1 Low (8) 1	High (5) 1 Low (2) 1	High (6) 2 Low (8) 1	

Continued, next page.

Table 31, cont'd.:

Theme	Code A	Code B	Code C	Code D	Code E	Code F	Code G
- 3 - Changing Instruction	1. Improved focus	Pressures	Pacing	BENEFITS	Opposes Pedagogy	Reduces Options	Other Influences
	High (5) 1	High (3) 1 (2) 4 (5) 2 (7) 1 (8) 5	High (5) 4 (1) 1 (6) 2 (2) 4 (8) 4	1 -Assessment of learning High (8) 1 Low 2- Assessment of testing capacity 3- Assessment potential, but impossible 4. Appropriate teaching methods	High (3) 5 (1) 2 (4) 1 (2) 2 (5) 6 (7) 5 (6) 3 (8) 5	High (3) 1 (7) 4 (5) 2 (8) 6	High (3) 1 (8) 1
	2.Improved repertoire & resources						
	High Low (2) 1 (7) 1 (8) 3						

Continued, next page.

Table 31, cont'd.:

Theme	Code A	Code B	Code C	Code D	Code E	Code F
- 4 - Changing curriculum	1.Improved content	Focus on topics	Adding/deleting	1.Narrowed due to MCAS (see add/delete)	Sequence	Books
	High (5) 1	High (3) 1	High (3) 2	High (5) 2	High (3) 7	High (3) 1
	Low (1) 2	Low (7) 1	Low (1) 4	Low (2) 1	Low (2) 4	Low (1) 1
	(6) 1	(8) 1	(2) 6	(7) 2	(8) 1	(6) 1
	2.Improved structure/focus		(7) 3	(8) 14		
	High		(8) 6			
	Low (2) 2			2.Narrowed by other causes		
	(7) 1			High (3) 1		
	3.Improved assessment			Low (7) 2		
	High					
Low (2) 1			3. Broadened			
4.Improved alignment			High			
High			Low (2) 1			
Low (1) 1			(8) 1			
(2) 2						

Continued, next page.

Table 31, cont'd.:

Theme	Code A	Code B	Code C	Code D	Code E	Code F
- 5 - Shortening of the instructional year	Timing/ scheduling of tests	Reduced Instructional Time (See 5A3).	Overextension to cover-include (See 5A3)	Time pressures affecting meeting of individual needs	Unintended Consequences	
	1 - Sequencing	High (5) 2 Low (1) 1 (7) 7 (8) 3	High (3) 1 Low (1) 5		High (5) 3 Low (8) 1	
	2 - Pacing	High (5) 2 Low (1) 2				
	3- *Accommodating the test schedule and logistics					
	High (3) 9 (5) 4 (6) 3					
	Low (2) 4 (7) 4 (8) 8					

Continued, next page.

Table 31, cont'd.:

Theme	Code A	Code B	Code C	Code D	Code E	Code F
- 6 - Preparing for the tests	Teaching to the test High (3) 6* (4) 1 (5) 7 Low (1) 4 (2) 4 (7) 4 (8) 25 *just low level	Presenting test-related materials High (3) 10 (4) 1 (5) 8 (6) 7 Low (1) 2 (2) 3 (7) 9 (8) 4	Remedial Instruction High (3) 8 (4) 1 (5) 4 (6) 2 Low (1) 4 (2) 2 (7) 5 (8) 4	Reminders High (3) 4 (4) 1 (5) 1 (6) 2 No reminders High (6) 1 Low	Not Just MCAS High (3) 1 (4) 1 (5) 1 (6) 1 Low (7) 2 (8) 1	Reviewing scores & tests High (3) 2 (6) 1 Low (7) 4 (8) 2
- 7 - Decreased attention to learning needs and conditions	General instruction High (3) 2 (4) 2 (5) 2 Low (1) 1 (2) 1 (7) 3 (8) 3	Students' needs opposed to testing needs High (3) 2 (5) 4 (6) 1 Low (1) 2 (2) 3 (7) 5 (8) 5	Ineffective tool High (3) 2 Low (8) 1	Farmed Out High (3) 2 Low	Other factors, not MCAS High Low (2) 3	Focus on needs High (6) 1 Low

Continued, next page.

Table 31, cont'd:

Theme	Code A	Code B	Code C	Code D	Code E	Code F
- 8 - Test Concerns	<p>Test purposes – 1. Ineffective assessment tool High (3) 5 Low (7) 1 (4) 2 (8) 2</p> <p>2. Single evaluation/ High stakes High (3) 2 Low (7) 2 (5) 1 (8) 1</p> <p>3. General High (3) 2 Low (7) 1 (4) 1 (8) 1 (5) 4 (6) 3</p> <p>4. Unnecessary tool High Low (7) 2</p> <p>5. Scholarships High Low (8) 1</p>	<p>Hurts students High (3) 6 Low (1) 2 (4) 1 (2) 3 (5) 8 (8) 2</p>	<p>Test Document 1. Material High (3) 1 Low (7) 2 (6) 2 (8) 3</p> <p>2. Test style High (5) 1 Low (7) 4</p> <p>3. Scoring High Low (7) 3 (8) 1</p>	<p>Impact on teachers and systems High (3) 1 Low (2) 1 (5) 2 (7) 1 (8) 3</p>	<p>Kids pass who shouldn't-test prep High (3) 3 Low (8) 3</p>	<p>Problem Extends Beyond Test High Low (2) 2 (8) 7</p>

Continued, next page.

Table 31, cont'd.:

Theme	Code A	Code B	Code C	Code D	Code E	Code F
Usefulness of tests	Supports frameworks	Applies to other tests High (3) 1 Low (2) 3	Strengthens thinking High (3) 1 Low (2) 3	Promotes Positive Educational Values High (3) 1 (5) 1 (6) 2 Low (2) 3	Accountability High (5) 1 (6) 1 Low (2) 3	
- 10 - No impact	1. Effective curriculum in place High (3) 18 (4) 3 (5) 4 (6) 7 2. Good faculty High (3) 2 (4) 2 (5) 1 3. Good Instruction High (2) 2 Low (2) 2	Meeting individual needs High (3) 2 (4) 3 Low (2) 3	Frameworks drive, not MCAS High (3) 6 (4) 3 Low (1) 1 (2) 3	But defense of practice	Other issues driving program High (3) 8 (4) 3 Low (2) 2	Community/ students High (3) 11 (4) 5 (5) 12 (6) 7 Low (1) 2* (2) 1** *(negative impact) **(bright students)

impact on autonomy to make curriculum-related decisions, are woven into the subsections, as well. The section closes with a summary of findings relevant to Interview Question 1.

Interview Question 1: Positive Perceptions. Positive perceptions of the MCAS impact on curriculum decision-making surfaced at four of the eight schools where interviews were conducted, though the number of positive comments trailed the number of negative comments consistently. Teachers at low-scoring schools voiced most of the positive comments. However, several teachers from both high- and low-scoring schools mentioned ways in which MCAS has supported their decision-making and, therefore, bolstered their autonomy. Among the reasons teachers articulated for perceiving MCAS as a positive influence on their decision-making autonomy were its improvement of curriculum structure and focus and improvement of curriculum content.

The few teachers who testified to the MCAS-influenced improvement of curriculum structure and focus commented upon the raising of classroom standards and the unification of curriculum. They maintained that these changes helped them establish better curriculum, which resulted from a wiser decision-making process. One teacher from a low-scoring school described the change this way: "Students don't read, they don't have the necessary tools, and the MCAS came along and said, 'Hey, you've got to get it together.' The rigor, the bar was raised." The high-stakes test helped with the implementation of a more demanding curriculum in this school and reinforced the teacher's decisions and drive to offer it. Another response from a high-scoring school teacher supported the MCAS as a positive influence on decision-making: "Definitely, it does make me focus on skills I might otherwise not put as much time into. I think of it

as a critical thinking test.” Both these statements offer evidence of a positive MCAS influence on curriculum decision-making.

In addition to “raising the bar,” MCAS has helped some teachers feel supported in their curriculum decision-making because they are assured that their students “are expected to take what everyone else is taking.” MCAS supports a unified curriculum, this teacher asserts, and this in turn helps support local curriculum decision-making. As another teacher shared,

There were things that were emphasized (on the MCAS) that weren't showing up in the traditional (math) sequence, that didn't get emphasized very much. These things were in the IMP (Interactive Math Program) curriculum, and so in some sense I felt... that means this is important. It wasn't just my personal sense of what's important.

This teacher perceived the external validation of curriculum decisions made in local classrooms as a positive MCAS impact. In a low-scoring school where one teacher appeared to perceive few academic goals and expectations for the poor children attending classes, a sense of relief was expressed with the words, “It's nice to have something to align with the rest of the world.” MCAS has helped this teacher feel less isolated in the local curriculum decision-making process. According to another teacher dealing with a highly transient student population, MCAS also offers the potential for curriculum alignment across schools. However, this teacher observed, “We still don't see that.” In this case, MCAS has the potential to benefit curriculum decision-making, but that benefit remains unrealized.

Teachers also mentioned several specific positive curriculum changes implemented as a result of MCAS. In particular, the introduction of “writing across the curriculum” received note. However, this example highlights the contradictory nature of

imposed changes in some situations. For, while one teacher praised as liberating or raising standards the curriculum decisions that resulted in these changes:

Every teacher's been instructed on how to do it (incorporate writing when teaching their content specialty); and they get corrected and we (in the English department) submit them to the vice principal, and he reviews it and hands it back to us, and we hand it back to them,

those on the receiving end of such changes share mixed responses. According to one mathematics teacher, the constraints imposed by requiring mathematics teachers to assign the ubiquitous MCAS famous five-paragraph essay in their classes, "That's not my choice. Let me tell you, it's definitely not my choice." This teacher objected to being expected to act as an English teacher, a position neither trained for nor desired.

Such conflicts, regarding potentially positive influences that carry with them negative results, form part of the negative response to the MCAS impact on teachers' autonomy to make curriculum decisions in their local classrooms.

Interview Question 1: Negative Perceptions. The majority of interview responses to Question 1 indicated teachers perceive many negative MCAS impacts on curriculum decision-making. As one teacher stated, "I don't think it's done a whole lot of good things for the curriculum." MCAS has resulted in numerous constraints on teachers' decision-making as regards curriculum in local classrooms. Among the impingements most often mentioned are the narrowing (and in some cases excessive broadening) of curriculum and the increased emphasis on test-preparation within classes and within school systems. These impingements have resulted in a directly articulated loss of decision-making autonomy and de-skilling of teachers.

Many teachers explained how the MCAS tests have forced them to add or delete curriculum topics based on the test requirements rather than their own perceptions of

what is important or necessary for their students and how these additions and deletions can lead to narrowing or broadening the curriculum in ways teachers do not agree are valuable. In addition, several teachers addressed concerns about an overall narrowing of the curriculum that is leading to destruction of public school education programs. Furthermore, as schools push towards a "one size fits all" (Ohanian, 1999) curriculum where "everyone is college prep now," individual differences are ignored (see more about this topic below). In addition, teachers express deep concerns about a curriculum that is "a mile wide and an inch deep," where teachers are forced to "ensure coverage" to the detriment, in many cases, of authentic learning. Teachers from low-scoring schools made most of the comments about negative impacts on curriculum. However, teachers from high-scoring schools were not silent on the topic.

For many teachers, the MCAS has become the bellwether that guides decisions about what to include or drop from the curriculum.

I've only been teaching two years, but I know I went to my supervisor the other day and asked, 'Is this on the MCAS, or can we leave it off?' Time is such a factor. You can only get so many topics in a year, and for different reasons we might leave it off; but if was going to be on MCAS, we'd say, 'No.'

The State, not department heads, not teachers, appears to drive curriculum choices.

Teachers make decisions not on those "different reasons," but on the one reason that trumps all others: Is it on MCAS? Said one mathematics teacher:

I think that it really mandates what we have to teach for topics. There are topics I pull out now, that used to be sort of fun topics that I don't cover because I know students won't get tested on them. As a mathematics teacher I feel we're pressured to get all this curriculum covered that will be on the big MCAS test. I feel I've had to alter it in a sense where I have to pick and choose topics that I know will definitely be covered.

One English teacher called curriculum decision-making under the MCAS influence a game: "You can figure the game out. You look at the Standards, and there are a number that they can't possibly put on the test, like media, so you immediately block that out." It matters not that this teacher or any other may consider media awareness to be absolutely essential for today's youngsters. If it will not be on the test, it is dropped from the curriculum. Another English teacher described curriculum focused on the "set format" of the five-paragraph essay, indicating that, "I keep the writing structured because they tend to write inappropriately, not colorfully, when doing creative writing. So I don't let them off on their own to be creative." However, this teacher said that if MCAS tested creative writing "because it's setting that high standard, I would follow that," the inference being that the external authority's decision-making is trusted more than the teacher's own, or the department's collective decision-making. Such comments may be the reason other teachers say, "With ed (education) reform teachers were supposed to feel more empowered. I don't feel any more empowered than I ever was. I think that was just window dressing."

The comments about the negative influence of MCAS on teachers' curriculum decision-making were common. Another teacher talked of having to "sacrifice" a week-long unit on rap music as poetry "if we're short on time and I feel they can't write a good, strong response or five-paragraphs." This teacher acknowledged that students often benefited from the engagement in school learning sparked by unconventional classes on topics to which often marginalized children relate; however, adding and deleting curriculum decisions must, he informed the interviewer, be measured against MCAS' demands, not necessarily students' needs. Freedman (1994) cited the

elimination of engaging curriculum as a problem endemic to learning environments focused on testing goals. She wrote in her paper "School Reform through Examination: Lessons from the British Experience," "... when exams take control of something as personal as writing, the teacher and students no longer work together to own the writing; rather the writing is owned by a distant examiner" (pp. 6-7). Freedman, who observed the teaching of writing in Great Britain, claimed, furthermore,

... my observations in British classrooms were depressing. Unlike the U.S. classrooms I studied (prior to institution of high-stakes standardized tests) and unlike the British classrooms for younger students who were not preparing for exams, the exam classrooms had to adhere to requirements that inhibited the teachers' abilities to build a coherent curriculum with their students and inhibited the amounts and kinds of writing the students did. (p. 3)

Mathematics teachers, like English teachers feel the press of the MCAS on their curriculum decision-making

... because they (students) need to meet this standard, not even half way through their high school process, they have to have checked off all these topics. So, it's really driven us to eliminate some geometry and algebra topics that we would have done in more depth because we have to do probability and all this stat work and on and on.

The ability of teachers to "build a coherent curriculum" was directly addressed by teachers at one school who mentioned that they had to break the sequence of their mathematics curriculum in order to cover square roots in time for the MCAS exam.

It's really a negative of the MCAS because it forces all the curricula to follow this one mold when you have a laudable curriculum, like the IMP program, which does it differently; and those kids see a lot of that content in the junior year, or maybe their senior year. Or, they've seen it, but not at the level because it's a circular curriculum; it keeps coming back to those topics. So they're exposed to it one year, not at the depth they might be in some classes; then they're exposed to it in the following year at a greater depth, and there are advantages to doing it that way, but the MCAS sort of goes against that.

The statement above echoes the open-response statements about sacrificing high-quality curricula in order to cover the MCAS test material. It more than hints at a loss of autonomy to make reasoned, professional choices about what to teach. Teachers added the topic of square roots despite the fact that it was unrelated to the rest of the curriculum to ensure “exposure” before the test.

In the MCAS-dominated world of Massachusetts’ public education, “exposure” seems to be an operative word in mathematics and English curricula. Several schools have gone so far as to alter their traditional mathematics curriculum sequence, passing along students who fail Algebra I, so they can take a geometry course before facing the MCAS.

One big change that we made when we were initially thinking about the MCAS was that we switched and made sure all sophomores would have geometry by the time they took the exam because some of our levels, particularly the lower levels took Algebra I then Algebra II and didn’t get geometry until junior year. We made some curriculum changes like that just to make sure that, even if a student fails freshman algebra, they still take geometry as a sophomore.

“Sometimes we can’t slow down for someone who doesn’t get it. I know exactly where I need to be by the time the MCAS test comes. I know exactly where I have to be; I know exactly what I have to cover.” When this teacher speaks, s/he describes a situation where the teacher has become technician, not professional. It is a situation observed by various researchers, among them Jones, Jones, and Hargrove (2003), Johnson and Johnson (2002), Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000), McNeil (2000), and Corbett and Wilson (1991). Bound by the constraints imposed by the State-mandated exams, this teacher turns aside from knowledge of the students and how to carry out the curriculum within that local environment. The test must be prepared for, regardless of

local conditions. Test material must be covered, or added, and other material, regardless of how engaging, relevant, or instructively useful, must be dropped. The loss is extensive.

The losses, according to teachers, prove more substantial for lower-level students. One teacher provided this overview of the situation in which the issue of different, unequal education for students of differing achievement levels is revealed:

I think certain enrichment activities have been dropped, especially with the lower level where you have to take more time to cover a topic. You can't do the enrichment at the end of the topic because you have to keep moving on... I definitely think you lose out on those... outside the box kinds of things or connecting it to other topics – historical, artistic, any of that, you really have to just go for the solid meat of it (the test topics).

An English teacher described a specific problem related to level differences:

Now they're (students in a speech elective) working on a variety of editorials, and working on their manuscript for that, and it's a whole different way of looking at word choice and argument – looking at pathos, logos. They look at that kind of thing, and I think that sometimes that can be addressed in electives, but unfortunately you cannot address it in most college level classes because of the high-stakes tests these students will be taking all the time soon, and they won't have any time to learn.

Preparing for the tests alters sequencing, changes the structure, and limits curriculum, often “to the detriment of other things,” according to one teacher who talked of preparing

them crazily for MCAS ... because I said, ‘you are going to do well on the MCAS.’ As XXX says, I didn't do things I should have, or wanted to do, because when all is said and done, all that counts is the MCAS score that comes out in November.

What teachers think should be presented to students, what they want to present because they feel it is important to students as learners, is irrelevant because all that matters is that

they can re-state the question and copy out of the text exactly directly... and that's how inner city kids pass the test is just learning how to parrot it right back, knowing someone's going to scan their paper for 20 seconds and look for three key things.

The infringements on autonomy to make curriculum decisions in local classrooms, which result in the adding and deleting of content in reflex to test schedules and content targets and thus the narrowing of curriculum toward test-centered curriculum, surface system-wide as well. Teachers in the discussion that follows heatedly speak of MCAS-induced curriculum narrowing in one low-scoring school system:

We have limited funds, and our budget is going to be level-funded again this year; they don't have money for fluff. It's the standard English classes and it's MCAS. They want to bring up the MCAS scores because that's the only thing they (the State) are judging us by, and they're just waiting to come in and take over the school system.

And it really is true with all this education reform, they forget the gifted kids. My XXX had to pull out her children from XXX, and it caused her a real conflict because she has a real loyalty to XXX; she went through this system. She finally had to pull them out because they're getting nothing.

They're pulling them from the elementary schools because they're dropping music and things. My XXX is really lucky to be at a school here where they still have instrumental music, but I'm concerned.

Some are all right at the elementary level, but not at the middle school. There's no music. There's kind of a reform school thing, and yet kids are getting away with things. There's nothing. There are not advanced classes at the middle school level either.

The narrowing of curriculum described in this dialogue can be devastating to a system and makes teachers feel disenfranchised and disheartened. Following an interview, one teacher dashed back to tell the interviewer that many students were "choosing out" of the local school because of diminished course offerings related to reallocation of resources to raise MCAS scores. The teacher was heartbroken to think that the school's

best students were leaving because the school was using every available resource to raise MCAS scores, rather than offer a full, enriched curriculum that addresses the talents of all students. It is a situation described as well by Eisner (1982). "Testing programs", he writes, "not only describe, they prescribe"(p. 14), and what they prescribe for schools, he warns, is an "unbalanced curriculum" (p. 11).

Teachers viewed the use of their professional resources and school financial resources for direct test preparation as a specific way that the MCAS negatively affects teachers' autonomy to make curriculum decisions. "I could come here and lie to you, but the only thing that counts, would you agree (agreement from fellow interviewees indicated) is MCAS, MCAS, and MCAS some more." This teacher's comment started a discussion about direct instruction to the test:

And those people (who parrot prescribed test responses) succeed. And the person who might be trying to actually answer would fail, or could fail.

It makes me think that a course like Stanley Kaplan doesn't make you a smarter person. It teaches you how to take the LSAT or the SAT, and you know that's a way to go about this, to teach the kids, 'This is what they want; this is how to give them what they want.'

It's the very opposite of what we try to do.

In fact, it appears to be the very opposite of what most teachers try to do. In discussions with the 60 teachers who participated in this study, it became clear that many teachers are teaching in remarkable ways, yet the imposition of the tests as arbiters of skill and knowledge implies that they are incompetent and so require constant monitoring. That may not have been the intent of the test designers or policy makers, but it has become the perception of far too many teachers. Said one teacher,

When something comes up, I do teach to the test. ...I tend to focus on everything that's on the MCAS. Has it affected my teaching? It has

definitely cut down on the amount of limited freedoms that teachers have, especially at the lower levels.

Another teacher speaking in a separate interview concurred, providing a specific supporting example:

It affects my curriculum in that I have stopped doing so many of the creative pieces where I'd let them go and explore on the Net, and I used to have them, for instance, read A Separate Peace, and I used to have them do a newspaper, and we would do research on World War II "Homefront News" and news over the war crimes. I'd let them get a feel for what the characters must have been experiencing in the book, and we would talk about how that affected their decision-making. There's no time for that now. It's drill and talk about writing and do open-response type questions, and we do a lot of grammar. ... It's really a very test-oriented curriculum....

With little time for creativity and reduced time for in-depth coverage, teaching time seems for many teachers to exist primarily to prepare students for MCAS. These losses are part of "what's at stake in high-stakes testing," according to Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) who found that even though unasked, 75% of the 59 teachers they interviewed offered examples of "kinds of activities that had been discontinued in favor of test preparation" (p. 391). As teachers have been clear to state, these losses are felt more acutely in low-level classes where passing the test can become the main focus of the curriculum. Honors students and teachers of honors students, it seems, are still somewhat immune to impacts from high-stakes testing.

We know that MCAS looks for the formulaic answer in its long essay; we teach them to answer that formula way, that they revamp the question. That's not how we teach honors people to do it. We don't want them to be homogeneous in their responses. We want them to be inventive and artful and juggle the language and massage verbs. MCAS isn't really interested in that. So, we make sure that we go over the prompts when they say, 'Use specific examples,' that they know that that means reach in and re-use a quote.

However, as Shirley Brice Heath so poignantly showed in Ways With Words (1983),

Straightforward accounts which are not personalized often do not stay with them (children from "Trackton") and they either do not answer questions about these materials, or they give answers which seem to the teacher (or a test reader) to bear little relevance to the account given. (p. 298)

For the impoverished children of Trackton, who communicate in ways quite different from their white neighbors in "Roadville," Heath and her co-researcher teachers found that leaving the standardized curriculum behind and responding to children made a significant difference in real learning. As one child wrote, "The teacher got away from the books for a change; all of this made me and others happy"(p. 342). Teachers drilling and asking for 'parroting' back, it seems would not make these 'non-honors' students happy. By departing from scripted curricula, teachers in Heath's study noticed children taking an interest in learning from school-based activities. When states institute high-stakes tests like MCAS, deviation from the books, or test content apparently becomes difficult, if not impossible, according to most teachers in this study. This leaves open the question of the impact on students' learning when those students do not match the developmental or academic profile tested for in the MCAS. Despite the questions raised, however, teachers appear to feel compelled to adhere to the MCAS test curriculum.

Adhering to a test-oriented curriculum may assist students with passing the test, but it does not necessarily help students learn in ways supportive of future learning and growth. An example of this contradiction was provided in this conversation between two high-scoring school teachers. As one teacher talked of how successful the MCAS

preparation mathematics classes were at the local school, another teacher interrupted, “I feel like – are you basing that on the fact that they passed the test, or the fact of what their skills were at the end of the class?” The first teacher answered, “Oh, no, no, for beating the test. I agree with what you said before about your giving them tricks to beat the test.” In such cases, the test has become the curriculum. Teachers in these situations become test preparation technicians, not professionals determining content of long-lasting value for students. Teachers, then, perceive problems with an “MCAS-driven” curriculum that affects changes in what they offer from their traditional content areas and when and how they offer it, and simultaneously creates a test-based curriculum that serves the MCAS, but not necessarily students.

Because the state mandates only that students pass its tests (local communities can establish additional graduation criteria, but the state test is the inescapable graduation hurdle students must master to receive a high-school diploma), millions of dollars are dedicated to test preparation classes and programs at schools as well.

Schools may not be able to offer art, or music, or home economics, but:

We’ve programs up the wazoo, if I may say, for students who are at risk of failing or who have failed. We have built into the school day MCAS prep for students who are at risk of failing or who have failed; we have after school classes; we have classes in the different housing projects around the school; we have colleges do enrichment programs; you name it, we have it; we have many, many things.

Whether in the suburbs or in the urban “projects,” schools offer “actual MCAS mathematics (and English) classes.” “They target the kids that failed the 8th grade MCAS, or anyone else the teachers are concerned about,” and this group includes ELL (English Language Learners) and those who failed the 10th grade exams. The more children at risk of not passing in a school, and usually that means the poorer the school,

the more resources are dedicated to test preparation courses. For some students, MCAS English becomes their English class. "We're narrowing our curriculum in the sense that we're not offering six electives anymore. We're only offering it if relates to MCAS." Nichols and Berliner (2005), Popham (2001), Kohn (2000), Berliner and Biddle (1995), and others have warned strenuously about the corrupting influence of "teaching to the test," corruption of both the learning process and test results. But when a school's reputation, a student's graduation and career plans, and a teacher's job are on the line, the threat of corrupting influences fails to outweigh the compulsion to offer test-centered courses. And teachers anticipate the situation will worsen.

I suspect that next year when we get back, they're going to determine more of our lesson plans. They're going to require certain things; we're going to have more detailed lesson plans. There is no autonomy, and I think we're going to have less next year.

Data from this study show that teachers' perceptions of the negative impact of MCAS on autonomy to make decisions related to curriculum are numerous. The tests constrain decision-making by creating a situational environment in which teachers often feel forced to alter their classroom curriculum to accommodate test content and where valuable, and often scarce, resources are dedicated to test preparation classes and programs that reduce availability of other curricula.

Interview Question 1: Neutral Perceptions. Teachers who perceived "no impact" on their curriculum taught almost exclusively at high-scoring, high socio-economic status schools and constituted a group larger than those voicing positive MCAS impacts on curriculum decision-making, but considerably smaller than those reporting negative impacts. They attributed their situation ("neither constrained nor liberated") to a variety of factors, among them community conditions, student profiles,

effective curricula and able faculty. A few teachers also mentioned the sense of respect and trust accorded faculty by community members. Conversely, those who voiced negative impacts on autonomy and curriculum decision-making remarked upon conditions where teachers are not respected or trusted.

“The feeling that pervades my classes is it’s (MCAS) not a threat at all. It’s like a bump. We pass by and ‘oops’ we’ll step by. It’s almost a joke to us because if, I may say, the students understand that they learned this stuff.” When students “are very well prepared,” when they “are very aware of and care about their grades,” attend class regularly, are “responsible” about doing homework, and live with highly literate families, teachers feel confident that those students will pass. Though they may believe students are “not learning anything from the test. The day they take the test doesn’t teach anything,” they also perceive the tests as “a non-threatening hurdle.” “We have a very high percentage statistically who pass,” say teachers at high-scoring, mostly wealthy schools, and so for now they “don’t think of it at all.” “We’ve been really lucky because we have such a high pass rate. I personally have not felt any pressure because each year we’ve done really well.”

Many neutral-response teachers insist their curricula “already do a good enough job” to prepare students for the MCAS, implying they have made appropriate curriculum decisions all along and so perceive no need to readjust to accommodate MCAS. In part, they attribute this ‘good job’ to the alignment of the schools’ curricula with the state standards or national standards. “Standards influenced me more than MCAS. ... MCAS is a way of assessing the Standards, that’s all,” said several teachers. In addition, many “think the MCAS tests feel like a low baseline of comprehension”

and “think that the demands of our curriculum go far beyond that low baseline.”

However, as one teacher fairly new to a high-scoring school said, “I don’t get the impression that MCAS has impacted the curriculum choices every much. I think I can figure out what the reason might be – a school like this is pretty advanced academically and people do pretty well so most people are going to pass the MCAS anyway.” The test becomes for these teachers and students “just an annoyance” because “the school has always been very strong preparing kids for writing (or mathematics), for ages before MCAS came along. The results have always confirmed this.”

Helping these teachers maintain their sense of autonomy, their sense that the tests offer “verification” of what they have been doing all along, is an understanding that “parents are very supportive of us – overall,” that there is “a lot of trust in our teaching.... There’s none of this, ‘Oh, gee, the school’s not doing its job.’” Also, these same parents contribute greatly to their children’s education, helping with homework, and setting “high expectations and goals” for students that match the teachers’ goals and expectations. The same is not true at all schools. At one low-scoring school, teachers estimated that approximately one-third of students completed homework assignments on any given day. Even dedicated teachers at these schools stop assigning homework because the students are “non-readers,” and so “We have to read everything in class; they won’t read anything at home. We can’t ever, ever, ever have outside reading assigned because it would be a monologue the next day.” Teachers at high-scoring schools are well aware that for other teachers “in other schools ... it is, it is a dread.” The presence and degree of teachers’ autonomy to make curriculum decisions, therefore, likely reflects the conditions under which they labor. The privileged know

that MCAS “impacts a school like this (in a wealthy community with a highly educated population) a lot less than it would a school that generally has lower tests scores for other sorts of things.” The privileged can say with certainty, “There is no emphasis on MCAS in this town. We get our numbers every year.” Kohn (2001), among others, cites research from several sources that concludes that socioeconomic status of parents is the key factor that determines variance of test performance. The interview data in this study strongly support that finding.

Interview Question 1: Summary of Findings

The MCAS shapes and focuses curricula to meet its standards. And, though a small number of teachers in this current study say they are glad for the “structure” and the “unifying” of curriculum across the State, which they see as beneficial to and supportive of curriculum decision-making in their local classrooms, most teachers view the MCAS as an eroding force acting on their autonomy to make appropriate professional decisions regarding curriculum. They find themselves adding to and deleting course topics to match what they expect to be covered on the state tests because “the only thing that counts is MCAS.” They know they need to offer students “exposure” to topics, even if the content gets crammed, even if they have to forego enrichment activities, project-based learning, and their own professional understanding about the best sequence for curricula and the most important content for students to understand in order to lay a foundation for later learning. The negative effects of the MCAS on teachers’ autonomy to make curriculum decisions show most harshly on the landscapes at low-scoring schools where “teaching to the test” often becomes a daily

occurrence and where the narrowing of curriculum extends from the teachers' classrooms to the entire school system, as funds are poured into test preparation and test remediation programming and art, music, family consumer science (home economics), and physical education programs are cut.

Teachers at high-scoring schools speak of being spared the need to succumb to MCAS pressures. They "don't think of it all"; they do not need to. They acknowledge the privilege they enjoy working with students who come prepared for school each day and within systems where they are "respected" and where they seldom worry about outdated, insufficient supplies of textbooks. However, at both high- and low-scoring schools, teachers find their autonomy to make curriculum decisions curtailed.

Interview Question 2: Instructional Decision-Making Findings

Interview Question 2 asked: How have the MCAS tests influenced your professional decision-making about instruction? Teacher participants' responses to this question are provided below in separate sub-sections related to positive, negative, and neutral findings. Responses to Interview Question 4, which emphasized the MCAS impact on autonomy to make instruction-related decisions, are woven into the sub-sections, as well. The section closes with a summary of findings relevant to Interview Question 2.

Interview Question 2: Positive Perceptions

Interviewed teachers shared remarkably few statements indicating they found benefits accruing from the MCAS impact on instructional decision-making in local

classrooms. Teachers at low-scoring schools made all but one of the positive statements, suggesting that ongoing problems at those schools might have made teachers receptive to any authoritative intervention. Primarily, the teachers praised the tests for improving instructional focus and improving instructional repertoires and resources, which in turn help with instructional decision-making in local schools.

“We became more organized about presenting how and why questions,” said one teacher who further praised the tests because they “emphasize higher order thinking... (which) has helped kids to think outside the box. The open-responses get them thinking about how, why, when to take certain steps in solving a problem.” An English teacher said,

Definitely, the writing I present is shaped by the MCAS five-paragraph format. That comes down through the system. We’ve had workshop after workshop on that, and I don’t have an objection to that – it provides a structure for them.

Another teacher spoke in broader terms, “Positively, I think it’s good that we’re holding kids to standards. I think that’s important. You’ve got to put the bar somewhere. There’s got to be a measuring stick.” Once again, as in the Open-Response data, it becomes clear that such improved focus carries a price:

I do feel that it kind of focuses me a little more; I don’t get to necessarily have fun with geometry if there is such a thing. Like I wanted to measure the Earth with the kids and that takes a couple of days of going outside and working with the shadows and calling other schools to do the same thing, but I don’t know if I’ll ever get free time to do that because I’m supposed to be covering something else to prepare for the MCAS.

An English teacher’s statements paralleled the sentiment expressed above:

I have to add on the positive side that it’s focused me more on writing, which is good; and it’s not an area that I emphasized nearly as much as I do now, but it has taken the spontaneity out to some degree. I do less project-based stuff. I almost feel that when I gave my kids projects at the

end of Romeo and Juliet and Lord of the Flies that it was like a recess because I felt like they were going to take a day off from writing.

The improved resources and repertoires mentioned by teachers involved the giving of “more open-response” questions on tests – “I’m incorporating that into a lot of what we do, and I’m not objecting to that. I think that’s fine.” Also, teachers mentioned, “we do a bit more writing in the mathematics curriculum.”

MCAS appears to have opened up decision-making possibilities for some and helped others better direct their decision making, thereby showing a limited positive impact on some teachers’ autonomy to make instruction-related decisions in local classrooms. However, these positive impacts are registered by few teachers and are sometimes qualified by the addition of information about concurrent negative MCAS impacts on instructional decision-making, which weakens the finding.

Interview Question 2: Negative Perceptions

Teachers from every school, regardless of the school’s social or educational status, articulated concerns about MCAS-induced instructional changes that opposed their personal pedagogy, raising serious questions about the long-term MCAS effects on professional integrity and perceived self-worth. The reduction in options related to instructional decision-making suggests teachers perceive that their professional world is shrinking, and that they can do less and less of the type of instruction they value. Under such constraining conditions, teachers risk becoming test technicians rather than professionals (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Corbett & Wilson, 1991; Johnson & Johnson, 2002; Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003; McNeil, 2000). The effects on

students are equally disturbing. And while some of the instructional impacts seem minor, others appear major.

Perhaps the most minor MCAS impact on instruction related by teachers involves the introduction of test-related materials. Mathematics teachers talk of putting up an MCAS problem “as the problem-of-the week,” or “dragging out old MCAS problems” for students to work on prior to the test. English teachers talk of presenting “MCAS prompts” for students to see and write about in order to “become familiar” with the test.

Just when we get into MCAS time is when I pull out the practice thing and go over how to answer the multiple choice or address the essays a little bit. ...I do this just so they'll be comfortable with the format, so there wouldn't be any surprises about how it looks because the content I don't think is surprising to them in any way.

However, this minor impact becomes major at schools where many students do poorly on the MCAS. School faculties and administrators develop “preparation booklets” that cover only old MCAS questions. Teachers, who may not have been involved in the creation of such booklets, nonetheless hand them out to students and correct them as directed. In fact, teachers at one school spoke of the “quarterly assessments (‘quarterlies’) that are basically little mock, sort of mini, MCAS’s that are happening three times a year” and which were “mandated” by the superintendent. Teachers must give these preparation tests to all students in order to track MCAS progress. For the teachers, this becomes one more ‘must do’ imposed from without, one more ‘add on’ that may or may not coincide with classroom activity.

I didn't even know to plan for (the quarterlies) because this all just was kind of thrown at us in October, so it has meant that no matter what curriculum I had planned it just had to be thrown over repeatedly throughout the year for these repeated, and I mean repeated, I mean like

sometimes the same questions are repeated over and over again in the quarterlies; and that's three days, three class periods of time each time we do a quarterly.

These clear examples of the erosion of professional autonomy to make instructional decisions show that the drive to succeed on MCAS continuously infringes on teachers' professional decision-making, whether or not teachers take note of it, though many do. One teacher struggled to understand exactly what has happened to teachers' decision-making autonomy in local classrooms before concluding,

There's much less autonomy now; though still, when you close your door you're sort of your own teacher. But because we know what we have to get our kids ready for, you can't kid yourself into thinking you're doing what you're not. It's going to be obvious to all of them that it wasn't done this way before.

The infringement on autonomy may be masked by a sense of control in the classroom, but teachers seem to perceive that that control is a mask for a deeper change in who controls the classroom.

Pressure to cover everything and to accommodate the testing schedule weighs heavily on teachers and becomes another constricting clamp on their instructional decision-making. Teachers report,

The test itself is a horrible interruption for me and for them (students). It's terribly time consuming; the kids are wiped even if you happen to have them for a class or the day; they've just about had it. ... They have given it everything they have, so it really kills the week.

Some teachers pass off the testing interruptions as "just another day," but many more term it "a hassle, just a hassle," or "a nightmare," and they call the loss of a week or two of instruction time "significant." Consider this detailed description of what happens in one school:

The whole school changes during the weeklong test, even during the long comp (composition) period, because we have to have a quiet quadrant of the school; so we have one-fourth of the school actively involved in a long comp. Because it's un-timed, many of our students take an entire morning to do it; they can take as long as they want for the long comp. That means we have to relocate huge numbers of classes and teachers and things like that. We have to train proctors. Kids can't go to their lockers. It's all shut off. Announcements are different. Bells aren't rung. It invites chaos and ramps up stress. I've heard of schools that shut down for the morning and that students only come in and take the MCAS in the morning, but we'd have three quarters of the families here asking why they're being shortchanged for education. So I don't think that's going to happen here. And we really try to be humane and figure out how to make the best of a bad situation. I wish there was a testing place they could go, but there's not. There's no funding; it's all done with people giving time, staying till six o'clock at night packing up things.

As the instructional year is shortchanged, pacing changes.

I absolutely see that speeding up to cover material to make sure students have exposures to it before the MCAS, and the thing is that last year I saw with my 10th graders, my kids after MCAS, were kind of done. And it's in April. It's hard to keep the motivation going.

As another said, the pressures to pass "tend to overwhelm the education process."

Teachers are left to scramble to keep afloat a boat rammed by outside influences.

What's really frustrating, and again it may be because I'm a new teacher, is that we're going at a really good pace, we're really moving along and then crchhhhhh, we have to put the brakes on because we have to go cover this, this, this, and the other thing for the MCAS. You're just getting them to a really good level of dialectic and you say, 'Now we're going to stop, and I'm going to lecture you about gerunds.' Or 'we're going to play a game about gerunds.' I also get frustrated as a teacher having to get creative about these things that students are just going to keep until they take the test and then promptly forget.

Teachers perceive the MCAS impact on instruction as powerful and detrimental.

They compromise their pedagogy by teaching material students "keep until they take the test and then promptly forget." Furthermore, the testing focus results in teachers turning away from teachable moments in the classroom, as this teacher describes:

“You’re taking away a lot of spontaneous projects that you might do with kids if they have interests that might lead to a lot of good learning, but there’s so much emphasis on the school system’s test scores that teachers shy away from that.” Time pressure was an overriding concern for several teachers. On several occasions during a brief interview one veteran teacher exclaimed, “Time is a big issue.” Of great concern to this teacher was the perceived pressure from MCAS to rush through curriculum and to curtail good instruction for students who need “more hands-on and less content.” The teacher explained, “I feel like I’m rushed all the time to give everything that’s given (five topics per year for 9th and 10th grade students). I feel I can’t go into as much depth as I’d want to.” Comparing current teaching with teaching in the past, the teacher further commented, “We don’t go into topics in as much depth as we used to.” Another teacher said,

There’s not been any impact on sequence, but, yes, on pacing. You have to get through that book. Hands are tied with what to do during that semester. We’re really pushing kids in the second semester because the MCAS test is taken before the close of the semester.

The test appears to control teachers’ instructional decision-making by forcing a pace they indicate would not be kept if MCAS high-stakes were not bearing down on them.

Racing through curriculum “whether they master it or not” emerged as only one part of the instructional problem for teachers. They also described the constraints on decision-making and creativity, hallmarks of effective teachers, that result in what McNeill (2000) and others term the de-skilling of teachers. Teachers lose the opportunity to benefit students through the exercise of their professional creativity as they rush to instruct for the tests:

I used to integrate art into transformational geometry. It does have its appreciation in art; but it was something that took time. And another thing I would do that I no longer do that took time and was very, very valuable was we would apply right angle trigonometry and right angle geometry to the outside world. We would literally go, 'Let's walk right outside and let's find the height of his flagpole based on this shadow, let's....' And I used to take about three days to do that, but I can't take three days to do that now, yet that's how it's used (the math). And we still have the word problems that talk about it, but it doesn't have the same impact as... 'Imagine we are midgets and this puddle here is our lake, and we can't swim across it because we'd drown. How are we going to figure out how big and how long and how wide it is – and we can't walk around it and we can't walk over it – you're going to use some interesting geometry to get there. You can still do it on paper, but it loses its impact. The time it takes to drag yourself out there, teach them measuring techniques, this is no longer a valid use of time. You've got to get to the next thing.

Furthermore, teachers perceive the squeeze to teach material in ways they consider educationally unproductive:

... But certainly going back to the gerund, the grammar ...I love to teach grammar, vocabulary, and things from the writing that the students are doing because I actually pull pieces from the writing and use those as examples, and we see 'how's this correct and how's this incorrect; why' and you learn about the grammar rule with real usage. Everyone looks back on their paper and sees if they did this. But because they just have to learn about gerunds, or they just have to learn about past participles, too, you get into direct instruction. 'Here, let's learn this; let's do some exercise, and keep in mind you'll need this for the MCAS.' And you can do some fun stuff, but at this level, at this stage of my career it's more difficult (to teach in a way opposed to her pedagogy); I want to make sure they own the information. I like to take what they're having issues with in their papers and teach around that rather than say, 'Okay, it's time to do past participles because it's the twelfth week of the first term.' But, for instance, I know we haven't addressed gerunds, and gerunds are always on the MCAS, so in the next couple of weeks I'm going to be addressing gerunds, and to me this is unfortunate because then they just rent the information in order to do the test; they don't own it.

Teachers make choices every hour of every day and an increasing number of them are informed by MCAS. It clearly pains these professional educators to decide to teach in ways they consider less useful: "I've seen a diminishing of project work;

there's no time. It was great, though, kids could feed off each other's approaches and responses." Or, as another teacher says, "I feel like I'm always trying to mitigate the trend towards thinking the only writing that exists is the five-paragraph essay, that everything must fit into the format of the five-paragraph essay. It makes me a little crazy." This teacher wanted students to get "some pleasure from writing" before they focused on writing to please test scorers. Said another veteran of years of teaching in a parochial school, "I feel a lot more restricted here (in public school). (There) it was fun. I did imaginative things. Now I just play by the book." A mathematics teacher lamented:

There's a whole unit on Escher (mathematician/artist) that I'd like to do. I'd like to spend three weeks on that kind of stuff. It's just a very rich topic, and I love solid geometry, and there's a lot there that I find really compelling. And it's exiting for the kids, not just exercises that don't seem to have any meaning. I don't get to teach it because I can't finish XXX's curriculum in the time that I have, and it's partly because, even if I could, the MCAS handcuffs me a little bit on that.

Teachers perceive that students are shortchanged as they are forced to focus on the tests continuously. Teachers find themselves forced into a situation where they play into a test mentality and end up instructing in ways they view as counterproductive. "I think you're more concerned with giving them ways to answer questions, to find the right answers. You're definitely teaching to the test," declared one teacher. Said another teacher:

I find myself going faster than I should at times with my regular-level kids, my college prep kids, just because there's this looming deadline in May. It's good intentions; you want to get there so the kids have the same tools as the kids in past years, but when you step back and think about it, you feel sort of guilty that you're shortchanging them if there's a topic you need to go, or you'd like to go, more in depth in. But I just can't because of the need to hit everything.

A teacher at a high-scoring school offered, "It may be the culture here that the students may be looking to give you what you want and to follow the 'Will this be on the test; is this the right way to answer this' mentality," but teachers at other high-scoring schools noted the same problems. Students, they say, are highly competitive "about grades and things like that." These teachers would rather "nurture the love of learning as opposed to the love of percentile," but the existence of a highly publicized test that all take simultaneously makes it difficult for teachers to foster the love of learning. The problem one teacher explained is that MCAS should not be a motivating force in teaching.

If you think about it, the goal here has to be further out than something that happens for a brief period in tenth grade. Say, OK, the reason you should be learning something is because it's on MCAS. It's shortsighted. I'd feel like it was a waste of time if the learning they took away was finished after they were half-way through the tenth grade.

Unfortunately, teachers perceive this effect in many students, especially in low-level students, and they are unhappy with having to take part in pushing such a shortsighted view of academic achievement.

Teachers, many of them remarkably capable, creative, and responsive to students' needs, sense that "the whole nation and this school in the name of accountability slammed teacher autonomy. I feel like I see it sort of everywhere, everywhere I look." As an example, the teacher explained:

Where we were doing something different, something a little out of the ordinary (teaching mixed grade 9 and grade 10- classes) (which) I think is excellent, it's hard to find enough of a cohort to measure kids. So, the kid who's doing an appeal in a nine-ten mix found it much harder. That kid found it much harder to appeal (an MCAS determination of failure), so we're not doing it anymore.

Instructional arrangements teachers found pedagogically sound were eliminated because of MCAS regulations, making a clear link to the finding of erosion of teacher autonomy to make decisions about instruction in local classrooms. Moreover, the lack of respect for teachers reflected in the institution of a state-mandated assessment that evaluates teacher performance further undermines teacher autonomy and “trickles down into the classroom.” Teachers at low-scoring schools in particular see the tests as “all political... and my students and I are the pawns.” Said another,

I think it's been to bash the teachers. And I think now we get less respect. It's OK in our culture to bash the teacher, to blame it on the teacher. The respect is lacking for a number of reasons, but this is a main one.

A colleague added, “Students are said to not be passing MCAS because we teachers aren't teaching, but you've got to look at society.” And one teacher from a high-scoring school warned, “You're four steps away from teachers having a report card,” then added, “You can't tell me all this data isn't being collected for something.” The grading of teachers for test results that do not primarily reflect their efforts (Kohn, 2001) caused this teacher to speculate,

I think that's when the hue and cry is going to say, ‘You cannot judge the outcome of learning on one test.’ There's ethnicity; there's demographics; there is just the physical environment of the school, and yet it does, it absolutely flies in the face of any kind of empirical wisdom about what it is that makes good learning good.

As it stands, teachers have been noticeably quiet about the state and its policymakers' trespass against their ability to exercise professional decision-making in their local classrooms with students they know better than does any distant authority.

Further exacerbating the problem of teaching to the tests for many teachers is the fact that the tests themselves contradict pedagogical beliefs about what constitutes

good assessment. Teaching students how to tackle multiple choice questions about literature bothers some – “It’s not something that I would ever, ever use as part of my curriculum.” Moreover, the materials presented in the tests are, according to some, developmentally inappropriate.

They’re going way beyond the 10th grade level a lot of the time. Typically in high school you’re not reading The Scarlet Letter or Grapes of Wrath or Truman Capote before 11th or 12th grade, ... yet that’s what’s showing up on the MCAS.

Mathematics teachers talked of teaching curricula where you “work toward abstraction.” Students, according to one teacher, are not accustomed to “dealing with abstraction right away without some sort of buildup.” However, the nature of the tests requires that “we need to do this in preparation (for MCAS),” and this teacher for one, is not “really sure it serves the overall goal of teaching mathematics; it’s more the preparation for the test.” Despite the influences of MCAS on teacher autonomy and decision-making, some retain a sense of capability. “I’ve got ways of assessing standards, too, they’re called essays, and tests and quizzes and class participation.” However, it appears that more and more often, according to the teachers who are closest to the action, their ways of assessing are shaped to fit the MCAS mold, and this disturbs teachers. “I don’t want to fill their heads with a lot of factoids and formulas,” claimed one teacher who might have spoken for all those who perceived MCAS as a force directing teachers’ skills away from creative, in-depth, pleasurable, connected learning and towards a standardized, test preparation-oriented method of instruction.

A review of the interview responses relating the negative impact of the MCAS on teachers’ autonomy to make instruction decisions in local classrooms clearly supports the finding that the high-stakes tests are eroding that autonomy. Furthermore,

the constrictions placed on teachers' instructional decision-making likely result in teachers instructing in ways they find pedagogically incompatible with professional standards and training and, in some cases, harmful to student learning.

Interview Question 2: Neutral Perceptions

"I would not say my style has changed a lot due to MCAS," declared one teacher, who like several other teachers noted that how they interact with students in the classroom remains unaffected by the MCAS tests. However, as another teacher explained, "it hasn't changed the how I teach; it's more the what of what I teach." That is, the content and form of instruction and assessment has suffered change, not the teacher's presentation style. Most of those who said they felt their autonomy to make instruction decisions in local classrooms had not been affected by the MCAS, interpreted instruction more as rapport with students than with pacing or assessment and content presentation choices. They also represented a much smaller group than those who described a negative MCAS impact on instructional decision-making.

Interview Question 2: Summary of Findings

As with curriculum, MCAS impact on instructional decision-making appeared stronger in low- than in high-scoring high schools, but this current study found that teachers from both types of schools felt the tightening force of the MCAS on their instructional choices. They perceive they have less freedom to tailor classes to meet students' needs because they are "rushed all the time" to meet the "looming deadline" of the high-stakes tests. As they offer administratively designed "quarterlies... little

MCAS's" and they struggle to make de-contextualized grammar lessons and unadorned mathematics lessons interesting to students who they know will "not own" what they are taught in such ways, the teachers appear frustrated, and in some cases, demoralized. They sense that their programs become more constrained, with less creative offerings mixed in with "the basics" as defined by the MCAS tests. And already strained to teach all they had considered valuable, teachers operating under the influence of the MCAS find their academic schedules further diminished, and they are well aware they do not control the situation. At some time in the school year, nearly every secondary teacher reports feeling the press of MCAS, pushing them to "cover everything" in time for tests, especially for low-level students. They recycle old MCAS test questions and essay prompts, some more regularly than others; and many teachers tell of engaging in direct test preparation "drill and kill" exercises on a continuous basis, as they strive not to instill a love of learning, or an appreciation of English literature or mathematics, but to raise students' test scores. The teachers do not make instructional decisions, such as those just described, freely; these decisions result from the threats to student graduation status and to school independence as well as teachers' professional status associated with MCAS score levels. Teachers' "hands are tied," and there is not one thing they can do to untie them.

Teachers report lost instructional time as they deal with the "nightmare" of MCAS testing days. They perceive that in the "name of accountability," teacher autonomy to control instructional decisions in their local classrooms has been "slammed." Granted there are those few who feel untouched by the MCAS pressures, but they form a small minority of teachers. However, some of these teachers readily

recognize that school conditions can greatly affect the perception of the MCAS impact on both curriculum and instruction. "When I worked in an urban school," said one teacher at a high-scoring suburban school (before high-stakes were attached to the tests), "I was a little more conscious of it (MCAS), and a lot more of our reading time was spent talking about MCAS and how to prepare." Of the suburban school, this teacher notes, "An important thing to know about this school is that generally the kids pass it by attending to the regular instruction, so there hasn't been a big feeling that the instruction needs to change to make sure kids pass it...." In general, however, most teachers acknowledged in interviews some negative impact on their instructional decision-making resulting from the high-stakes MCAS tests. Even at high-scoring schools, teachers feel the press of time, the press of introducing MCAS-related materials, and the press of instructional directives related to MCAS. This study found that teachers everywhere are sensitive to the MCAS influence on instructional decision-making, and most them in this study find the impact unwelcome.

Interview Question 3: Teaching to Meet Individual Differences Findings

Interview Question 3 asked: How have the MCAS tests influenced your ability to teach to meet individual differences of students? Teacher participants' responses to Interview Question 3 are provided below in separate sub-sections related to positive, negative, and neutral findings. The section closes with a summary of findings relevant to Interview Question 3.

Interview Question 3: Positive Perceptions

As in the Open-Response data, scarcely a voice was heard lauding the MCAS as tool that positively influences teachers' ability to meet individual needs. Interview data show only three teachers offered praise without reservation of the MCAS as a vehicle that improves ability to meet individual differences in local classrooms. Some noted that the MCAS data have the potential for directing instruction to areas of weakness for students. For some the potential for help is there, but the time constraints imposed by the test schedule and breadth of material cause difficulties.

I teach an MCAS prep course, and I have until January to cover all the material to get students ready for the MCAS. I have to keep the pace up. Some will do the work once, understand it and get exposed to it, but with others I could have spent more time because they need the extra time, extra practice.

This study found little support for MCAS as a positive influence on teachers teaching to meet individual differences.

Interview Question 3: Negative Perceptions

Repeatedly in this study, teachers declared that MCAS "is more of an issue for low-level groups." These students, according to the professional teachers, need more time and different instruction than do higher-level students. "I don't see MCAS as a problem for high-level students. They can understand everything quickly. They seem OK if I say we must move on." But for low-level students "The amount of material's too much for them to have to learn in two years. How do you do justice? They need more hands-on, less content." But everyone wants to help those at risk of not passing because "One kid can make a huge difference both in the class and in the score

rankings. If one student in your class doesn't try at all, it pulls everybody's average down."

Students may, in fact, suffer educationally as result of the MCAS, according to teachers in the study. The loss results from too much hurrying to cover content and from narrowing of curriculum and instruction. The rushing, in particular, creates barriers to teaching developmentally appropriate curriculum to students. Instead, teachers say, "I have to move on, whether they get it or not." One teacher at a low-scoring school offered this description of the MCAS impact on meeting individual differences:

As far as individual needs go, before the MCAS I felt the freedom to teach kids, to fill in the missing parts, the skills that they don't have and stuff like that; but now with the MCAS, I just keep going, even if I run over them. I have to keep going. I have to address the Standards, so I don't have time. I have a class of 32, of which six are SPED (special education) students. I have to leave them behind because I don't have time to go over and again explain the rules of fractions, or explain something in the real number system or things like that because there is just no time because I have to get through all these other topics with the other members of the class.

In another interview a teacher said,

I had a fairly low-level group last year that really needed to practice analytical writing, and they did very little fun stuff because of that, because they really need to practice thesis writing...and it's unfortunate because those are the students who might benefit most from letting their imaginations go.

Added another teacher, "I think certain enrichment activities have been dropped, especially with the lower levels where you have to take more time to cover a topic. You can't do that enrichment at the end of the topic because you have to keep moving on."

Teachers end up caught in the middle.

It feels like we serve a lot of different masters because one of our district initiatives is differentiated instruction and matching a learning style with a delivery method, and that is applauded at a district level. We have

professional development that focuses on that, and then MCAS comes along, armed as a bandit, and robs students of the very thing the district is saying worth professional development, time, money, and makes sense.

Teachers get caught in the middle because they need to meet external standards, external assessment goals. Here a high-scoring-school teacher describes the dilemma:

I think it's hard knowing that you are supposed to get a student to a particular point (ready for the MCAS tests), considering that student might learn differently or have a disability or a particular hang-up on mathematics. Last year I taught a lower level Algebra I course. Those kids could have benefited from a much, much, much, much slower paced course than we were able to provide because of what they're going to be held accountable for on MCAS. ...I can see, personally, this school much more willing to teach at a slower pace were it not for MCAS. Things like a consumer mathematics course, we don't offer anymore, which they used to. There aren't too many kids here who won't go to college, but it just seems there are some students who have important individual needs, who would benefit from that (consumer mathematics) course. And part of that's MCAS driven.

One of the biggest breakthroughs in education has been the awareness of developmental differences in learning, as described by researcher/educators Piaget, Vygotsky, and others. Faced with standardized tests that set "high expectations" and on which significant "high stakes" determinations are made, teachers must choose which master to serve: students or policymakers. According to the data in this study, teachers often respond to state pressure and push for "exposure" to college preparatory academic material, even when such a curriculum and the fast-paced instruction required to cover it mean that some children cannot be served appropriately. Perhaps hardest of all to hear, was that "Until two years ago we were really focusing on what the test needed them to do." Fortunately, at this school, they "are back to thinking we have to do what's best for the kids." It has become difficult for teachers to do their jobs – teach. But as

Ohanian writes in One Size Fits Few, "Standardistos (standards' proponents) don't give a damn about how their plans and panaceas might work in classrooms" (p. 34).

The test itself poses problems for teachers striving to help all children learn. As one teacher explained:

I do see that where oral presentations used to be good ways to assess, I find I'm getting away from those because the MCAS has no room for oral presentations. So kids who have good oral skills, but don't possess good writing or good reading skills, to me the MCAS fails them. Because if you can read a question and you rewording it for them orally can help them understand it, without you giving any help, and they can recite back what they mean that shows they know the stuff... but the test leaves no room for that.

Another teacher criticized the tests because "It's really biased against students with learning disabilities who don't know how to pick out a concept out of the blue, who have memory problems." This teacher explained that many low-level students benefit from the use of "buzzwords" that trigger memory and alert them to the type of problem they are working on, allowing them then to solve the problem and demonstrate their mathematics knowledge. But with the MCAS, where "every question, for the most part, has a little trick to it," students get distracted and do poorly. "I just don't think that's fair." As one teacher summarized, "There's one test for almost everyone, so the test is not meeting individual needs."

However, addressing individual differences in order to pass the test raised its own set of concerns. "When the results came out in September, October, and November for the junior class this year, we went over it, and we were surprised at some of the kids who passed with the very, very few skills that they had," reported one teacher. A colleague added, "Then there are the kids that have failed and you think, 'No way. They

can do this stuff.' It doesn't make any sense." At another school a teacher described a situation that provoked feelings of professional discomfort:

It did influence me with my remedial class in that I tried to think about ways to help them pass, knowing that they were really borderline, and that many of the kids shouldn't pass. But I have some strong feelings, most teachers do, about MCAS not being a productive tool. The reality was all of those kids passed the test when some of them shouldn't have, and I don't think it's because of preparation but because of assistance students get, which sort of shows the meaninglessness of the test.

The feelings this teacher expressed are not unique. Another teacher told a related story:

In a community like XXX, where the MCAS is really not an issue, except maybe for a small token percentage, in terms of remediation, and the whole effect of the MCAS seems to be to affect remediation, I just don't know how good a job we're doing with that. It's nothing like we're teaching forever...because we get that number of them passing. I feel like I do a lot of hard work, and I know there's so much stuff that happens in mathematics. But when I saw that there were kids whose literacy skills were so poor and who passed, I felt sad because I felt that was being dishonest about their abilities.

One teacher concluded,

I think it's kind of funny and incongruous to be talking about autonomy and individual students' needs and learning styles in the context of the MCAS. I don't really see how they go together. This is something that's handed down from the powers-that-be.

This study revealed that many teachers find it more difficult, if not impossible, to teach to meet individual differences with MCAS driving classroom decision-making. Low-level students pay an especially high educational price, as teachers "hurry" to cover curriculum material targeted by MCAS and change instructional presentations to ensure coverage. This study found teachers distressed by the pressure of MCAS which they perceive as forcing them to teach in developmentally inappropriate ways and in ways that deny lower-level students enriching, engaging learning experiences.

Moreover, some teachers perceive individual differences being addressed in ways that

create temporary learning to achieve adequate test scores for students who in truth lack the literacy and numeracy skills tested.

Interview Question 3: Neutral Perceptions

How have the MCAS tests affected your ability to teach to meet individual differences? "I would say not at all." Teachers who perceived no MCAS impact on their ability to meet individual differences provided two explanations for the lack of impact on teaching to meet individual differences. One explanation posited that the need to address individual differences is being met despite the MCAS pressures, the other explanation for "no impact" implied that compartmentalization of the problem—having special education teachers or specially designated MCAS teachers handle students at risk of failing MCAS—relieved regular mathematics and English teachers from the need to address individual differences related to MCAS in their classrooms. These groups of teachers represented a noticeably smaller number of teachers than the number perceiving negative impacts from MCAS on teaching to meet individual differences in local classrooms.

Those who perceive individual differences as being met despite MCAS pressures note, "every teacher feels that all the time (the need to address individual differences), and we do what we think is best to remedy that situation because we want the kids to learn the material." Another teacher phrased it this way:

I think we all try to address the needs of our students in our class, whether there's an MCAS test or not. The MCAS isn't looming over my head when I make decisions at all; it may not even be at the back of my head. I'm hoping that what I'm teaching is essential for them to understand, whether it's for at test or for when they graduate from high school. I guess I know that they have resources in other areas if they need help

specifically for the MCAS test, so I guess I don't feel like I need to worry about that so much.

One teacher summed up, "I don't think that MCAS is a vehicle for assessing or planning to address individuals' learning styles. I can't even fathom how it would, except for test-taking skills, which have a place." For many teachers then, the MCAS is irrelevant to meeting individual learning differences in their local classrooms; they teach to individual differences regardless of how MCAS may press on them.

In many schools, and particularly mentioned at high-scoring schools, teachers feel that special education specialists, not regular classroom teachers, are the ones who contend with MCAS failure problems. The specialists either become involved in the direct training of students with learning differences, or provide the classroom teacher with any necessary information.

I rely on the information I get from the special education people to help guide my meeting of the needs of individual students. That is the most helpful to me. They know the kids who will not respond well or perform well with a straight-ahead, generalized curriculum, whatever that is, and who need some kind of alternative methods, or some kind of other approach in addition to whatever I'm offering to the rest of the class. I don't get any data or feedback on my students from MCAS. I have to go search their results and even then I'd find this bar graph that had 'proficiency' and whatever; and what does that mean to me – nothing.

This teacher was assured by a mathematics teacher, "the (MCAS) data is meaningless because there are so few people involved." In school systems where there are few special needs students and where most students are expected to go to college because "there's a college for everyone," teachers can feel they do not need to "put my effort there," 'there' being on special test preparation for students at risk of failing. Said one teacher "They do have, with their SPED (special education) people, they do have preparation for that test taking and they take sample tests," explained one teacher.

Teachers from high-scoring schools were quick to note that they had few children faced with the prospect of not passing the MCAS. Those who counselors flag as unlikely to pass within the academic structure of the traditional high school are according to one teacher, “farmed out” to vocational schools. Other teachers describe special MCAS classes designed for students at risk of failing. Regardless, the problem of addressing individual differences in relation to MCAS is handled outside the regular classroom.

Interview Question 3: Summary of Findings

Meeting individual students’ learning differences becomes more difficult for teachers operating in the MCAS-driven classroom and teachers’ ability to address those differences clearly suffers under the pressures exerted by the high-stakes MCAS test series. Interview data suggest that the structure of the tests, the iron-clad developmental schedule imposed by the tests, and the type of material on which the tests focus often cause teachers to “leave behind” students who cannot keep the pace and work in traditional ways on college-preparatory academic subjects. The data further suggest that teachers experience remorse at having to eliminate teaching practices such as oral presentations at which certain students performed well, unlike their performance on the MCAS paper-and-pencil tests. Teachers perceive they are torn “between masters,” as they decide whom to serve: students or policymakers. For teachers may know that individual students will benefit from a slower pace, from more “hands-on” explorations, or from forms of writing other than the ever-present five-paragraph essay; but their professional expertise in these matters is wasted, irrelevant in an educational world

dominated by a test with such high stakes that teachers feel they must “keep going, even if I run over them (students).” Teachers point out that preparing students for the traditional, high-stakes MCAS exam and trying to meet their individual learning differences is “incongruous.” They perceive the absurdity of the system under which they operate and know it has been “handed down from on high,” and they can do little except push on in the hope that they can help students either pass the tests or secure an exemption from them. Teachers were careful to note that the negative impacts resulting from the MCAS fall most squarely on the shoulders of low-level students.

Teachers are further troubled when they see certain students pass the test after hours, days, weeks, and months of test preparation and tutoring, yet know those students lack the general literacy and mathematics skills represented on the tests. The hollowness of the learning in such cases troubles them.

A few teachers declared that the MCAS has had no affect on their ability to meet individual differences in their local classrooms. Most of this cohort felt little pressure because most of their students pass the MCAS with little difficulty. In addition, many of those feeling “no impact” on their teaching to meet individual differences talked of being able to leave management of children likely to fail MCAS in the hands of their special education departments who would do whatever was needed to help those students. Some of those feeling no impact on their teaching to meet students’ individual learning differences felt they had no choice but to meet those differences, whether or not students passed the tests.

Summary of Interview Findings

Coded interview findings align with Survey Part I Item responses and Survey Part II Open-Response data findings. Teachers report positive, negative, and neutral responses to the three research questions, with the majority reporting negative impacts on their autonomy to make curriculum and instruction decisions and their teaching to meet individual differences in local classrooms. Some teachers perceive that the tests have improved their instruction by helping them focus on higher-order thinking skills and by increasing their curriculum and instructional focus, but they represent a minority in this study. Teachers from high-scoring schools generate the majority of neutral responses, noting that supportive teaching conditions (prepared students, abundant community resources, effective curricula and faculty) mitigate any impact from the state-mandated testing program. However, teachers in general perceive that their autonomy to make decisions related to curriculum and instruction has been diminished by the MCAS tests, in large part because the content they must deliver and the time frame in which they must deliver it are now determined by the State. In addition, the majority find they are less likely to, in their professional opinion, adequately address individual differences in local classrooms.

Where teachers once experienced autonomy, either as individuals or as department members, they now feel that autonomy being impinged through the MCAS. Regardless of the educational arena – curriculum, instruction, or meeting individual differences – teachers feel the press of the MCAS, though that press may be experienced through pressures perceived to emanate from administrators, parents, students, or the state itself. While teachers from both high- and low-scoring schools

perceive the erosion of autonomy, those from low-scoring schools tend to experience that loss more acutely. Teachers from high-scoring schools are far more likely to experience the power of privilege and perceive “no impact” on their practice resulting from the MCAS. A small number of teachers describe positive outcomes on their practice, indicating that for them the MCAS has been a helpful trigger to better practice.

The net effect, as teachers exercise less and less professional autonomy and decision making, is that teachers move towards becoming technicians rather than professionals. They do what must be done to cover the test material and “expose” students to the test formats and constructions, even when they professionally determine such actions to be counterproductive to genuine learning or enculturation into the community of learners who love to read, write, and solve problems. They “sacrifice” creativity and spontaneity in order to meet the “lock-step” demands of high-stakes test preparation, and most teachers remain unsure of the benefits derived from such sacrifices. They rush to cover everything they surmise may be on the tests, “whether or not students master it,” and they endure a shortened instructional year as valuable teaching time is lost to direct test preparation and implementation. It is a “hassle” they say.

Teachers are concerned because they are unable to do what “just makes sense pedagogically.” In addition, they contend that “a lot of these students (low-level) are just memorizing the process without understanding the process to try to jump through this hoop,” as teachers feel rushed through the curriculum, change logical sequences to guarantee “exposure,” present varying volumes of test-related material, and eliminate topics and approaches they perceive as useful and effective. The impact is felt most

acutely when teachers work with low-level students, students who are speakers of a foreign language, or students with documented learning differences. The more the teachers have to push students to pass, the less professional autonomy they perceive.

One teacher summed it up this way:

You feel as though you are under pressure to meet the needs of the kids as they appear as deficits for whatever MCAS skills that they're not getting, and there are a whole other set of ...skills that I care about that aren't on the MCAS that I feel like if kids are having trouble with those things.... I think I still end up giving those kids attention for those individual needs, but I think I run the risk of not really making sure that their MCAS skills are up to snuff. ... It would be nice if skills for the MCAS were such that you still had 70 percent of your curriculum that was in common with that scope, but there was another piece of your curriculum that you have a passion for, or something you care a lot about, and you get to spend that amount of time making sure the kids are learning that material, the stuff you really care about that may not be on the MCAS scope. I kind of feel like it's too big; you've got to really work a lot more than 70 percent of the time. It's more like 90 percent of the time making sure that people are comfortable with the MCAS scope.

Teachers perceive a strong emphasis on the MCAS, especially in low-scoring schools, schools that also happen to be poor in most cases, urban, ethnically diverse, or responsible for large numbers of special education students and students from families with low literacy levels. They perceive precious resources, which might be used to enhance existing programs or teachers' skills, diverted to test preparation programs, and question the allocations.

The question of teachers' professional autonomy was directly addressed by a large number of participants during interviews conducted as part of this study. Whereas some teachers asserted the continued existence of their autonomy to make decisions and respond to local conditions in their classrooms, more teachers described the infringements on their autonomy that MCAS has caused. Again, teachers from both

high- and low-scoring schools address these issues of autonomy, but the number of coded statements from low-scoring school teachers far exceeds the number from high-scoring schools. Teachers from high-scoring schools often recognized the schism between their experience at suburban schools with high socio-economic status indicators and the experience of their colleagues at less privileged schools. Exercise of autonomy, therefore, appears to vary with local school conditions.

Not all teachers perceive all MCAS impacts as negative. According to this study's interview data, teachers from high-scoring schools, almost exclusively located in well-to-do suburban areas, are more likely to perceive "no impact" from the MCAS on their autonomy, though many articulate ways in which the tests infiltrate their practice, again most often with "low-level students." The study also found that a few teachers, more likely from low-scoring schools, perceive that their teaching practice, including professional decision-making about curriculum, instruction, and ability to meet individual differences, have benefited from institution of the MCAS. However, the conclusion that most teachers find the MCAS tests have eroded their autonomy to make professional decisions about curriculum and instruction and to meet individual students' learning differences stands supported by the extensive interview data as well as the open-response and survey item data. The interview findings from this study are also supported exhaustively in the literature (see Chapter 2).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides detailed analysis of results and findings related to data from three sources used in this study: 12 forced-choice items from the Survey Part I,

written responses to three open-response items from Survey Part II, and interviews conducted on-site with participants. Data related to each of this study's three research questions is addressed within each data source sub-section. Data from all three sources suggest the MCAS impact on teachers' autonomy to make curriculum and instructional decisions, as well as their teaching to meet individual differences is generally negative.

An item-by-item analysis of survey data related to curriculum decision-making, instructional decision-making and teaching to meet individual differences in local classrooms was provided in this chapter's first section. Table 7 summarized survey item findings, which revealed the majority of teachers perceive the MCAS impact to be negative relative to each of the 12 items. Table 20 showed that mean response values for 10 of the 12 curriculum-, instruction-, and individual differences-related items tilted in a negative direction as would be expected. The two items where mean values showed slight, but unexpected, tilts in a positive direction were shown to be skewed by the response values of a minority of teachers, all from high-scoring schools. A small group of teachers persistently indicated perceptions of positive impacts from MCAS on their curriculum- and instruction-related decision-making and on their teaching to meet individual differences. More detailed responses provided on Part II of the survey and in the interviews reveal a better-defined picture of teachers' perceptions, and these data continued to support the Survey Part I findings.

Section 2 of this chapter revealed that teachers actually fell into three camps on the research issues: those who perceived the tests as having a positive impact (20-30% of respondents, and mostly low-scoring school teachers); those who perceived the tests as having a neutral impact (28-30% of respondents, mostly high-scoring school

teachers); and the majority who perceived the high-stakes tests as having a negative impact (43-51% of respondents, from both high- and low-scoring schools). Furthermore, the analysis revealed that the majority of those recording responses about positive impact also posted negative responses and/or included qualifiers in their statements, indicating a weak support for the positive impact. Table 21 displayed a summary of results from the Open-Response data, highlighting that the “negative” impact category contained the most responses. This summary also shows that generally more low-scoring than high-scoring school participants perceive some positive impact from MCAS relative to the three research questions while generally more high-scoring than low-scoring school participants perceive “no impact” or neutral impact from MCAS relative to curriculum and instructional decision making autonomy and teaching to meet individual differences. Open-response data surfaced details about teachers’ positions vis-à-vis the MCAS, and these details were more fully explained during interviews.

Findings relative to interview data linked to the three research questions were examined in Section 3 of this chapter. Interview findings, like findings from Survey Part I and Survey Part II, indicated that most teachers perceive the MCAS as negatively influencing autonomy to make decisions about curriculum and instruction and to teach to meet individual differences in local classrooms. However, a small group of teachers showed consistently through all three data sources that they experienced a positive impact on their decision-making as a result of the MCAS renewal of academic focus and emphasis on higher-order thinking skills.

During the interviews, a multitude of stories were told about the negative impact of the MCAS on curriculum and instructional decision-making and on ability to teach to individual differences. Teachers detailed the ways in which the MCAS has infringed on their autonomy to make curriculum and instructional decisions and to meet individual differences, as the decisions are increasingly dictated from a distant locus of control. Teachers talked at length about MCAS-induced changes that have resulted in teaching to the test, narrowing of curriculum, shortening of the instructional year, and the need to continually reference the tests and to provide materials pertinent to the tests in daily classes. As well, teachers talked of the pressurized pacing in classrooms "driven" by MCAS, the sacrifice of depth for breadth in the curriculum as they strive for "exposure," the need to decrease project-based learning and to increase drills and repetitive practice of skills in an attempt to ensure students pass the MCAS, particularly for low-level students, non-native English speaking students, and students with learning differences. Interview data show teachers perceive the tests have virtually no impact on high-level students. Teachers raise concerns about students who are not literate or numerate, but who pass the MCAS because the training to the tests is so effective in their schools. Additionally, teachers describe the inability to meet individual differences when one operates under the influence of tests that reward only traditional academic intelligences (linguistic and logical-mathematical) and force a pace and breadth of instruction and curriculum that defy teachers' attempts to address individual students' needs. In the interviews, words like "handcuffed," "trapped," "restricted," appear, as teachers relate their stories about the MCAS impact on their profession.

As teachers describe the lack of impact on their practice, it becomes clear that the reason for the sense of MCAS irrelevance in certain schools relates strongly to socio-economic conditions present in those schools. Teachers explaining the lack of impact talk of the support received from community and collegial exchanges; they note the presence of adequate materials and resources, the lack of poverty-related conditions with which to contend, their students' attentiveness and consistent participation in school, and the alignment of parental goals with the goals of the school and of the MCAS – to prepare students for college. Several were quite clear that the autonomy they enjoy likely results from the privileged environment in which they labor. They note that in their high socio-economic status, high MCAS-scoring schools, MCAS becomes less “of a political issue for me” than in other, less privileged schools where they taught previously. However, the teachers from both low- and high-scoring schools who remarked on lack of impact from the MCAS also indicated that their curricula aligned strongly with the MCAS and that they were “teaching what I’m supposed to teach.” Such statements indicate a sense of acquiescence to the directives of external authorities. Many of these teachers have “mixed feelings about the MCAS” because they agree that some measure of accountability is necessary, but they question whether or not MCAS acts as a useful tool for this purpose.

In conclusion, the data in this study, collected from survey items, open-response items, and interviews, suggest that the MCAS has a negative impact on teachers' autonomy to make professional decisions about curriculum and instruction and to meet individual differences in local classrooms. Furthermore, these negative impacts raise serious questions about the effectiveness of the MCAS to bridge achievement gaps by

improving education in local schools, and they raise questions about the future of the teaching profession if teachers continue on a track that appears to shift decision-making authority to distant sources, leaving teachers to fill the role of technician more than professional. These findings were also shown to be consistent with conclusions reached in other studies related to high-stakes testing.

In Chapter 5, a summary of the study and its findings is offered prior to the presentation of recommendations for action and recommendations for further research related to this study. These recommendations are based on the study's findings.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A continued legacy, then, of the ... reforms is that the testing of students increasingly drives curriculum and proscribes both teaching and the role of students in learning. This prescriptive teaching creates a new form of discrimination as teaching to the fragmented and narrow information on the test comes to substitute for a substantive curriculum in the schools of poor and minority youth. Even more serious in its consequences is the legacy of institutionalizing the externalized authority over schools. (McNeil, 2000, p. xxvi)

The present study unveils the ways, positive and negative, that the high-stakes Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests proscribe teaching and, therefore, impact teachers. In particular, the study focuses on the ways in which the MCAS likely impacts on teachers' autonomy to make curriculum and instructional decisions and their ability to meet individual differences in their classrooms. Teachers were viewed as educational experts whose practice endured changes resulting from the institution of State-mandated assessments comprised of single-scores on high-stakes tests. Based on the study, this researcher maintains that teachers experience minimal benefit while operating under the influence of these externally-dictated exams and that the negative impact described by teachers through their responses on survey items, open response items, and in interviews is substantial. That negative impact results in both the "handcuffing" of teachers to exercise their professional expertise and in an educational environment unsupportive of learning on equal terms, especially for low-level, minority, or special needs students. This researcher, therefore, urges policymakers and administrators to renew respect for teachers' professional abilities and to encourage teacher autonomy in educational decision-making processes by lessening the stakes

attached to the MCAS tests, so that attention might be directed at the broader problems undermining educational performance of individuals at certain, mostly poor, schools.

This chapter has four main sections. First, a summary of the study is presented. Second the major findings of this study are highlighted. Third, two sets of research recommendations are forwarded, with the first set offering ways to strengthen this study and the second set proposing further research to increase understanding of issues raised during this study. Fourth, general recommendations for action in local schools and school systems, the State Department of Education and the State Legislature, and schools of education are outlined. These recommendations were forwarded to participating schools and several key Massachusetts education organizations.

Summary of Study

Under mounting attacks from 'accountability' proponents, public school teachers' professional abilities have been questioned and their autonomy undermined. It "has been going down the tubes for the last two years; partly it's MCAS, partly it's a nationwide movement to be top down rather than bottom up," said one teacher participating in the present study. Public school teachers, particularly those who struggle to teach the most marginalized students, bear the brunt of the attacks; but they are by no means bearing the full force. The institution of high-stakes tests has affected public school teachers from a wide array of environments. As Jones, Jones and Hargrove (2003) declare after reviewing extensive literature on the subject, "... (T)eachers feel less autonomy than they did prior to the introduction of high-stakes testing." (p. 141) This situation, note the researchers, means "... (T)eachers have yet

another reason to be dissatisfied with their work environment,” (p.143) and this results in increasing difficulties with recruiting and retaining highly qualified public school teachers. As this study reveals, more than teacher dissatisfaction is at stake. Teachers operating under the influence of the MCAS high-stakes tests report detrimental changes in curriculum and instruction and meeting individual differences that result from the curtailment of their autonomy to make professional education decisions in their local schools and classrooms.

A review of related literature underscores the externally activated efforts to wrest control of public schools from local citizens and educators, and points to high-stakes tests as the chief means for achieving that end. Chapter 2 of this study traces the accountability movement’s efforts, directed by business and political authorities distant from local schools, to hijack standards of public schools and take control of public school teachers through high-stakes testing programs such as MCAS. Further in Chapter 2, literature relating the impact on curriculum and instruction of such testing, as well as its impact on teacher autonomy, is explored.

This study answers three major questions. The first question attends to teachers’ perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their autonomy to make curriculum decisions in their local classrooms. Question 2 addresses teachers’ perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their autonomy to make instructional decisions in their local classrooms. Question 3 seeks to understand teachers’ perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their teaching to meet individual differences in their local classroom. Important, but

unexpected results, emerged during the study, and are reported in a separate section on “additional findings.”

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the influence of high-stakes testing on teachers’ professional practice in local classrooms. Specifically, the study seeks to shed light on teachers’ perceptions of the impact of the state’s MCAS testing program on their autonomy to make curriculum and instruction decisions and to teach to meet individual differences, all considered key elements in ensuring that the role of public schools in a democracy is realized. This study resulted in several recommendations being forwarded to key educational groups in the State and to participating schools.

Findings

Despite the aspirations articulated by education reform proponents to “level the playing field” between wealthy and poor school districts, the MCAS assessments, designed to measure and label individuals, schools, and districts, have perpetuated differences. However, in one key way, the field is leveling: teachers are perceiving a noticeable reduction in professional decision-making as external forces, such as the MCAS, constrain curriculum content, limit instructor choices, and steer teachers away from meeting individual student needs and toward raising test scores. Teachers at typically poor and usually diverse low-scoring schools declare, “I have no autonomy.” These teachers perceive tightening control over their schools and classrooms resulting from the State-mandated tests. The need to score well on the standardized tests drives their curriculum and instruction decisions as they strive to meet the State’s demands, whether or not those demands support their efforts to meet students’ individual

differences. They risk much, for the State threatens to deny them all local decision-making autonomy if they cannot raise MCAS scores to levels and within timeframes defined by the State. They are not totally alone. Many teachers at high scoring, often wealthy, schools report similar constraints and frustrations. Yet also, to the contrary, their colleagues in wealthy and usually suburban high-scoring schools are more likely to report “no impact” or minimal impact from MCAS. These teachers perceive the MCAS testing system as no more than a slight “bump” in the consciousness of faculty and students at their schools. They experience less pressure from and more freedom to disregard the State’s threats because the gap between their students’ literacy and mathematical skills and those tested by the State is small to begin with. The power and privilege enjoyed by the more highly educated and wealthy parents of their students seems to extend to the teachers themselves, as they concentrate on college preparation exams most of the poorer schools’ students will never take.

Teachers’ perceptions, as seen in survey item, open response, and interview data, revealed three perceptual variations: support for the MCAS due to perceived positive impact, conflict with the MCAS due to perceived negative impact, and immunity from the MCAS due to perceived lack of impact. Overwhelmingly, the most common perceptions were negative. Schorr et al. (2003) and Pedulla et al. (2003) reported similar findings. The three perceptual variation types were by no means distinct; much overlapping occurred, primarily between those supporting and expressing immunity to MCAS with those perceiving conflict with the State-mandated testing program. Neither were the groups homogeneous. Mathematics and English teachers from both large and small schools appeared in each. Yet some distinctions appeared.

Those few perceiving MCAS as having a positive influence on curriculum and instructional decision-making were primarily low-scoring school participants. Those immune to the MCAS impact were almost exclusively high-scoring school participants. However, teachers conflicted by the MCAS, because they witnessed a negative impact on curriculum and instruction decision-making, included voices from both low- and high-scoring schools. Moreover, the numbers represented by each of the three perceptual variations were not equal. Many more teachers perceived the MCAS as having a negative influence on their autonomy to make professional decisions about curriculum and instruction and their ability to meet individual differences in their local classrooms than perceived the effect as positive or neutral.

Most commonly heard (and written and inferred through the survey items) were the comments of teachers forced to shift their curriculum (to cut units, add test skills, change sequences, or accommodate hierarchically imposed improvement plans); alter their instruction (speed up presentations, insert test preparation reminders, stop teaching for learning or completely stop instruction); or recognize a decreased ability to address individual differences as they seek to accommodate the State's imposition of the MCAS high-stakes tests. Teachers described these tests as expensive, disruptive, and unavoidable assessments established by distant authorities unfamiliar with local situations. Similar findings surfaced in the work of by Nichols (2005), Brett and Egley (2002), Johnson and Johnson (2002), Barksley-Ladd and Thomas (2000), Haney (2000), and McNeil (2000).

Only a small group of teachers in the study champion the MCAS because they perceive the tests as high-quality instruments with valuable standards that help focus

curriculum and instruction in positive ways that improve their professional decision-making. These teachers, therefore, accept the decrease in working autonomy. Another group believe the state-mandated exams pose no threats to their students, and, therefore, themselves, their school, or community, which means they carry on as normal and feel no impact. They perceive that their autonomy remains intact, despite the authority of the state demanding that they conduct the MCAS. However, those expressing a loss of autonomy, as Friedman (1999) and Murray (1938) define it, comprise the largest group of teachers in the study. They accommodate, but question the authority and the changes its decisions inflict on their local classrooms.

Given the variations in responses and the predominance of perceived negative impacts, the researcher concludes that the majority of Massachusetts 9th and 10th grade mathematics and English teachers from small and large schools, regardless of their school's MCAS score ratings, perceive the MCAS as a negative influence on professional autonomy to make decisions about curriculum and instruction and ability to meet individual differences of students in their local classrooms. Furthermore, there are specific findings to each of the three research questions. Key findings relative to the three research questions are presented below.

Question 1: How have the MCAS tests influenced your professional decision-making about curriculum?

- Teachers' autonomy to make professional decisions related to curriculum has been eroded by the institution of the MCAS tests, and lower-scoring school teachers are more profoundly affected by this erosion than are high-scoring school teachers.

- Teaching to the test has become common practice in Massachusetts' public high schools, causing the tests, rather than teacher professionals, to "drive" curriculum decisions. This is particularly true at low-scoring schools and with low-level students at both high- and low-scoring schools.
- Curricula have been narrowed, as evidenced by the elimination of all but college-preparatory programs at most schools, the elimination of electives at schools with limited funds and a need to provide extensive, supplementary MCAS preparation, and the elimination of curriculum enrichment activities, all of which affect teachers, as well as school systems. These constraints reflect the diminished capacity of teachers to exercise professional decision-making.
- Curricula have been furthered constrained by the "handcuffing" of teachers who perceive the need to cover a vast array of test-related content and, therefore, perceive the need to cut from their curricula such practices as project-based activities and teacher-created units that do not "hit" material on the test, but that engage students in active learning and that motivate teachers by allowing them to share with students areas of personal expertise.
- A limited number of teachers, almost exclusively from low-scoring schools, perceive the tests as having benefited curriculum by improving content, structure, and assessments.
- A limited number of teachers primarily, but not exclusively, from high-scoring schools perceive the MCAS as having no impact on curriculum in local schools.

Question 2: How have the MCAS tests influenced your professional decision-making about instruction?

- Teachers' autonomy to make professional decisions related to instruction in local classrooms has been eroded by the institution of the MCAS tests, and lower-scoring school teachers are more profoundly affected by this erosion than are high-scoring school teachers.
- Testing preparation and test conduction efforts have resulted in a shortened instructional year at all schools, which places restrictions on teachers' instructional planning and effectiveness.
- Teachers perceive the need to teach in ways opposed to professional training and in ways opposed to personal as well as system-wide pedagogy in order to prepare students for the MCAS. Of particular concern here are "hurrying" through and altering the sequence of instruction to guarantee "exposure" to test-related material, offering less hands-on instruction, promoting competition for grades rather than nurturing a love of learning, and including more drills and repetitive practices that do not support full understanding of topics, but reinforce standard responses to externally proposed prompts. All of these practices surface more commonly in classes with low-level than high-level students, according to the teacher participants.
- The form of the tests is determining the function of the teachers. Teachers respond to the tests by altering their instructional focus, presentation, and assessment to produce desired results and whether or not such changes reflect

what they consider best professional practices. This is more true in low-level than in high-level classes.

- A limited number of teachers perceive the tests as having benefited instruction by renewing attention to higher-order thinking skills, improving instructional focusing, and/or enhancing instructional repertoires with new approaches to materials and assessments.
- A limited number of teachers, primarily, but not exclusively, from high-scoring schools, perceive the MCAS as having no impact on instruction in local schools.

Question 3: How have the MCAS tests affected your ability to teach to meet individual differences of students?

- Teachers' autonomy related to their ability to teach to meet individual student differences has been eroded by the institution of the MCAS tests, and lower-scoring school teachers are more profoundly affected by this erosion than are high-scoring school teachers.
- Teachers find it increasingly difficult to offer developmentally appropriate instruction designed to meet individual differences because of the pressures imposed on them by the MCAS.
- Teachers find that the standardization of instruction required to prepare for the MCAS exams limits their ability to teach to individual differences because the form of the test supports development of pencil-and-paper responses to material and focuses on skills in the linguistic and logical-mathematical domains.

- A minority of teachers perceives that the tests have had “no impact” on their autonomy to teach to meet individual differences, with most of these teachers found in high-scoring schools or teaching high-level students.
- A small minority of teachers perceives that the tests have potential for improving their ability to meet individual needs by supplying assessment feedback to inform instruction.

Because of the intra-school variations in teachers' responses to various research inquiries about the impact of the MCAS on decision-making about curriculum, instruction, and meeting individual differences, it appears that teachers' perceptions reflect personal views and considerations, not school-wide cultural beliefs. As professionals, teachers bring to their practice individual philosophies, which may or may not reflect received teaching from college training. Individual teaching experience shapes teacher responses as well. Experiences accumulated in various teaching environments, as well as those acquired teaching various levels of students, inform teacher responses to imposed practices such as administration of high-stakes tests. A school's cultural and leadership responses to high-stakes testing, therefore, influence but do not necessarily define an individual teacher's perceptions.

Additional Findings

Interview data, in particular, brought to light two issues that, while not directly related to the study's questions, pose interesting findings. The first has to do with the relationship among socio-economic status, high-stakes testing, and testing outcomes.

The second relates to leadership and its affect upon teachers' perceptions regarding professional autonomy and teaching practices.

Teachers from low- and high-scoring schools drew attention to the role that economic and social conditions play in determining outcomes of the MCAS. One mathematics teacher explained,

I teach AP statistics, and we look at MCAS scores and do a demographic analysis each year; that's one of my activities that I can do, and we just graph poverty level and graph it against MCAS scores, and it's a perfect line, every year.

Rather than revealing teaching strength, test scores seem to indicate the socio-economic conditions within which public school teachers work. Another teacher shared poignant information:

When I came here (to the high school from the middle school where this English teacher taught for 20 plus years) I had three very low ability groups.... In those three classes I had over 70 kids. Of those 70, three graduated, three. All these kids have fallen by the wayside. " 'Survey' freshman classes – when you see those kids, it's a credit to their perseverance because there are minefields all over those classes for those kids. It's tough.

I have one girl in class, who I considered a project because she has an attitude problem. She liked me and I liked her. I see that she's an unpolished jewel. This girl's got all kinds of potential. She's a mother and is really, really bright. At the beginning of the year she was reluctant to share because it wasn't cool, of course, but I got to her. Now what's really disappointing is that she's taken the last two weeks off and I'm thinking, "She's quit." I feel really badly about this because I worked really hard to keep her in school and to stay on top of it, but the guidance counselor says she's left numerous messages on the answering machine, but they haven't been returned. I don't know. The boyfriend that's the father of the child is abusive, physically abusive, but to me it's really a tragedy because this girl has 'college' written all over her. She's really, really bright, and she's probably in the track because of behavioral issues and attendance. But she's a really bright girl, and I hate to lose kids like that. That whole cycle of poverty is just going to perpetuate itself. It's like a permanent underclass.

The attendance is awful. I started the year with 17 in the class (a low-level class). I'm down to 12, and on a daily basis anywhere from seven to 10 show up. So I would say if you counted the 17 that started the class, and let's say 18 for mathematics' sake, half the class has more than 50 days out. These are kids who just take long periods of time.

We have another problem here, too; it's really an administrative problem. We carry far too many students who should have been withdrawn. By the time you're a sophomore you're 16 years old. We have kids, and this is up to and including the time that MCAS is offered, who have more than 80 days absent, and they were still counted. So they take the MCAS, and they get counted against us. All those students should have been withdrawn by the beginning of March. I can show you the attendance list – 88 days absent, 120 days absent – and that further lowers our scores. What you have to do when a kid gets like that is say, 'I'm sorry you didn't make it this year; try again next year; better luck next year.' It's no coincidence that senior absences are here, juniors a little longer, sophomores a little longer, and freshmen absences cover two pages. We have this whole group that repeats. We graduated 196 this year in a class that started with over 400. We're losing a lot of kids (home schooling, drop outs, moves, etc.). From year to year, different students are enrolled; there's a high percentage of turnover.

Related stories surfaced from teachers in other schools, as well. Even in high-scoring schools there were teachers who had experience teaching in less affluent situations and recalled similar issues. These teachers talked about working at schools “with no money (which were being expected) to do the same as a school with lots of money,” schools with “high bilingual and not speaking English populations” who are taught by “responsible people, trying their best, doing their jobs,” but whose students fail to pass the tests designed, scored, and reported publicly by distant authorities. The resulting process “felt like a top down sort of thing and felt hard” and contributed to the “humility factor of the test scores coming out, (and thinking) ‘I work at this school.’ And you look at the test scores and think, ‘I guess we don't do anything.’ ...It's just a discouraging thing....” But good teachers at low-scoring schools challenge the public perception of them as incapable.

I'll tell you this. If you took the faculty here and put us at XXX (a wealthy suburb populated by educated people) and took the faculty from there and brought them here (to a poor urban setting populated by people with little or no formal education) I don't think the MCAS scores would be alterably changed for either group. I don't think it's the teachers.

As one teacher at a low-scoring school asked, "How seriously is school perceived by the community? There's not much money for pencils, pens, anything. This school operates at the poverty level." Contrast this condition with schools that have spacious department offices outfitted with one or more copiers, group and individual work areas and operate with full-time administrative assistance. Inequities persist, despite the State testing program designed to ensure equal education opportunities for students in every town in the Commonwealth.

The problems of low-scoring students, so prevalent in low-income settings, extend far beyond the classroom walls. Data from this study indicate a need to re-examine the problem of why students in certain environments are failing to achieve academically and what can be done to ameliorate that situation. Following the Brown v. Board of Education court decision, many communities and states were examining a fuller array of causes for low achievement results. But, as Vandersall (1998) recalled "...the Reagan administration in general and the educational excellence movement in particular focused attention away from equity issues and toward achievement and standards."(p.17) This suited many parent/citizens. As Corcoran and Scovronick (1998) explain about New Jerseyans faced with inequities,

Most ...seem to accept these inequities as natural and just. Families move to the suburbs in part to find good schools for their children, and many believe that the relative advantage that their children gain is deserved, a consequence of their hard work and foresight. (p. 54)

Low academic performance reflects much more than a single test score. It seems essential to revisit the broader context of the problem. And if teachers and schools are to be judged on the basis of test scores, perhaps adjustments need to be made to reflect the reality under which they operate.

The tests are a lousy indicator of what counts in the fields involved, the tests cover a tiny portion of what makes for a good school, and tests are "peculiarly" sensitive to first of all family wealth and secondly race. It's hard to keep reminding ourselves that they may "count"--in terms of the kids we teach alas--and thus we need to attend to figuring out short-range ways to boost their scores--but that they don't count in the long term and broader sense of being "well-educated". (Deborah Meier in an email dated 3/29/05)

A second set of data beyond the study's questions reflected teachers' awareness of the complexity of autonomy-related issues. Several teachers commented on points of tension in the exercise of their autonomy. This researcher already outlined the situation where a top-down decision was made to institute a "writing across the curriculum" program that resulted in mathematics teachers being responsible for students' work on five-paragraph essays and having those pieces collected and checked by a vice principal. Such arrangements suggest that teacher autonomy concerns, while indirectly related to MCAS, are also viewed as intra-school leadership problems. At another school, teachers described a situation where "We've had different administrations coming and going through here. ...In general I feel like around here you never know what will happen next week and who will be in charge." Again, what was connected to MCAS (these teachers were describing test scheduling concerns) on the surface, appeared on closer scrutiny to also reflect internal school conditions. Teachers also discussed the important role played by their departments and department chairs, in addition to the roles played by principals and superintendents as well as

parents/community members in creating an atmosphere supportive of or counterproductive to exercise of teacher autonomy under high-stakes test situations. Obviously, teachers recognized the role of the Massachusetts Department of Education officials. Said one,

I'm offended by the fact that a lot of people at the DOE couldn't do my job. ...George Bernard Shaw said that "those who can't do, teach," and if he were alive today he'd say, 'And those who can't teach, teach teachers how to teach.' I resent that.

The MCAS produces a negative impact on teacher autonomy, but at which level(s) of authority— department, school, district, state or federal— and how does the negative impact gain strength and momentum? The data beg for an examination of those questions.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study opens the door to several new research paths. This section presents two sets of recommendations related to further research. The first set of two recommendations details suggestions for further research aimed at strengthening this study. The second set of two recommendations details suggestions for further research that would augment insights into issues surrounding high-stakes tests and their impact on teachers' autonomy to make professional decisions about curriculum and instruction and their ability to teach to individual differences in local classrooms that surfaced in this study.

This study involved 60 teachers from low- and high-scoring (on the MCAS exams) secondary schools across the Commonwealth. To strengthen this study, the pool of teachers might be expanded. Replicating the current methods and extending them to

survey and interview more teachers, especially by including Grade 9 and 10 teachers in schools with MCAS scores falling in the mid-range, would increase available data and further clarify salient findings. A multi-state study would lend strength to the findings expressed in this study.

A second viable way to strengthen the existing study would be to replicate methods with teachers in other key MCAS preparation years, such as Grades 7 and 8, or Grades 3 and 4. One teacher in the current study said that the MCAS did not affect practice at the high school level, but conversations with colleagues teaching in the eighth grade indicated that the State-mandated assessment tests were playing out quite differently at that level. It would be informative to the field to understand if the same variety of responses and areas of constriction persist in teachers' perceptions at these lower grade levels.

One way to provide additional insight into issues raised by this study would be to focus on a single aspect of autonomy – to make curriculum or to make instructional decisions under the influence of the MCAS – and to examine more closely the levels from which teachers perceive that autonomy to be constrained. This study treated autonomy as a global force; however, the study data revealed that teachers understand their autonomy to be challenged by State authorities, community expectations, district-wide practices, school-wide directives, and departmental decisions related to the MCAS. It would prove useful to understand which of these levels of authority most directly influences teachers' perceptions of autonomy regarding the MCAS impact, how they do that, and in what ways teachers perceive these methods might be changed to increase their sense of professional autonomy under the pressure of MCAS high-stakes

testing. Such a study might also lead to a more directed investigation toward one of the levels, in particular local administration.

As professors Johnson and Johnson (2002) asked after teaching for a year in a school under the gun for having low standardized test scores, "We are struck by how the decisions of teachers – those who work with the children 176 days (1,232 hours) during the course of a school year – are ignored" (p. 178). They further ask and comment:

Why don't politicians state department officials, and high-level administrators listen to the wisdom of the teachers. Teachers are with their children five days a week. They know the unnecessary stress brought about by the consequences of failing a test. They know that filling in bubbles will not help the students get through life. They know how the curriculum has been gutted of meaningful learning experiences such as art, oral expression, and other aspects of an education that can't be measured with a paper-and-pencil test. It's time these officials listen to the experts – the teachers. (p. 111)

Who, such a new study might ask, do teachers perceive as most responsible for the ignoring of teachers' voices and judgments. Who needs to change behaviors and attitudes towards teachers and how?

This study also unearthed differences between high- and low-scoring-school teachers' perceptions of the impact of the MCAS on professional autonomy to make curriculum and instructional decisions and to meet individual differences in local classrooms. Further research on the environmental and professional practice differences between these two sets of schools would offer additional insight into the impact of the MCAS on public education. Furthermore, it would help illuminate issues that impact teaching and learning that lie outside the purview of the MCAS measures.

As the National Council of Teachers of English stated at its 2000 annual convention:

The efforts to improve the quality of education, especially in underachieving schools, are laudable, and the desire for accountability is understandable. However, high stakes tests often fail to assess accurately students' knowledge, understanding and capability. Raising test scores does not improve education. (National Council of Teachers of English 2001, p. 300)

What will improve education, if not high-stakes standardized tests? A study that focuses on the differences between low- and high-scoring schools may provide insights that help to answer this question. As McNeil (2000) warns,

Standardization of educational testing and content is creating a new kind of discrimination – one based not on a blatant stratification of knowledge access through tracking, but one which uses the appearance of sameness to mask persistent inequalities. (p. 252)

A comparative study of high- and low-scoring schools could not only unmask those inequalities, but it could suggest ways to eliminate them.

These recommendations for further research share a common goal:

understanding the impact of MCAS and other high-stakes tests on teaching and learning. As high-stakes testing explodes on the public education scene, it becomes imperative to understand how it benefits and detracts from teaching and learning. Only when the public and professionals are armed with such knowledge, will they be able to make wise decisions about the uses and ways of avoiding the abuses of such tests. Only when the public and professionals see the full picture of MCAS and other high-stakes tests, with all its details of the impact on teachers and students, will they see how the tests assist and hinder efforts to reach the goal of offering equal educational opportunity for all. Only then will policymakers make truly effective decisions about how to enhance, not destroy, public education and the professional status of public school teachers in the United States.

Recommendations for Action

This study is crucial for two reasons. First, it adds to the growing body of research regarding the consequences of MCAS in particular and high-stakes testing in general on teaching and learning, which becomes increasingly salient as testing becomes the national yardstick for determining educational progress and effectiveness. Second, it provides professionals with a new lens for viewing educational conditions created by high-stakes testing environments: the lens of teacher autonomy for making professional decisions to help individual students succeed in their learning. In a country where autonomy and freedom are linked daily and where local school decision-making and teacher effectiveness are strongly connected (Jacobson, 2005; Viadero, 2002), the examination of necessary conditions for teacher leadership will prove useful as the country faces the strengths and weaknesses of an education system expected to prepare young people for constructive participation in our democracy.

On the basis of this study, the researcher forwards one central recommendation: grant teachers the power of their profession. Allow teachers to exercise professional decision-making as regards curriculum, instruction, and meeting individual differences. As part of the central recommendation, the researcher recommends that, in order to grant teachers the power of their profession, administrators and policymakers support teachers' decision-making role in curriculum and instruction and meeting individual differences in their local classrooms and schools. The researcher further recommends that administrators and policymakers acknowledge the social situation of public education in order to address the broader issues affecting student academic performance. Furthermore, schools of education, charged with the development of

teachers, must acknowledge that high-stakes testing programs diminish the value placed on teachers' ability to make professional decisions about curriculum, instruction, and meeting individual differences in the very classrooms they manage. Moreover, these college and university programs must act collectively to counteract the forces that erode teachers' professional capacities while strengthening those capacities in ways that all teachers, like physicians and engineers, recognize and uphold their professional status.

School and district administrators, as well as State policymakers interested in retaining highly qualified professionals and in presenting high-quality curriculum and instruction, would be well served by attending to the development and maintenance of teachers' professional autonomy. The frustration and concern expressed by teachers working to meet distantly determined goals and objectives, as well as sequences and schedules, can lead to job dissatisfaction that in turn produces repercussions detrimental to the public education system. Teachers talk about the press of the MCAS high-stakes tests taking the "fun" out of teaching, which appears a spurious matter. On the surface, it seems inconsequential that students not be engaged in "fun" activities; they are in school to learn, not have fun. However, as the teachers noted, it is often the "fun activity" that spurs learning, that catches the imagination of the disenfranchised learner. Taking the fun out of learning is not an inconsequential act. In fact, it may lead to teacher burnout and student disengagement. According to Haney (2000) and others, the number of dropouts from high schools has been increasing, as high-stakes tests and the requirements to meet scoring objectives become the driving force for curriculum and instructional decision-making.

Furthermore, resentment builds when teachers perceive that “We’ve gone from being idea people to being number people, (from being) people with ... a vision of what great education is to people who want to know how many people passed the MCAS as a measure of success.” The de-skilling of teachers hurts students, and as Ohanian (2000) writes, “The proliferation of standards documents results in the de-skilling and the deprofessionalizing of teachers. How else are teachers to feel except helpless in the face of being told to deliver a curriculum that is invented by external authorities?”(p.140).

She proceeds to criticize, with humor, the standards movement:

What few people acknowledge is that there is no ‘reform’ in the Standardistos’ documents: Standardistos are trying to pass off macaroni and cheese skills as Ziti con Formaggio Velveta di Alfa Romeo gourmet dining. They merely want to perpetuate the same old skill drill that kids have been resisting all this century. (p. 140)

Eisner (1982) claims educators have the power to “shape the kind of future that we want for our children, our society, and ourselves” (p.19), but increasingly teachers feel stripped of this power.

Leadership at school and district levels must restore, renew, and improve what teachers perceive as truly being lost in the drive for accountability as measured in the MCAS high-stakes standardized tests. School and school district administrators must acknowledge the inherent trade-offs that come with implementation of a massive assessment program like the MCAS. When a program of such substance is added to a school’s or district’s agenda, they must ask themselves, “What is being lost?” Moreover, such analysis, undertaken with teachers as co-researchers of the question, must be allowed to answer that the problem lies with the tests themselves.

Administrators must not make the error of assuming that, because the intent of the State assessment program appeared benign, if not beneficial, the results were also.

Involving teachers in the process of designing curriculum and instructional standards and determining effective methods for establishing accountability can help mitigate negative perceptions of State accountability measures. For instance, one math teacher who shared her story explained that being a reader for the original Frameworks had changed her from being teacher driven to being “DOE-driven.” As a result, she connected with the tests now used to determine who graduates, though acknowledging such tests had not been the original, publicly acknowledged reason for establishing the Frameworks. Unfortunately, despite her overall support for the MCAS tests and the way they inform teaching practice, this teacher remarked upon several losses incurred as a result of the MCAS. “I’ve seen diminished project work; there’s no time,” even though she found such projects “great for the kids, who could feed off each other’s approaches and responses.” Overall, she noted that “there’s sometimes less depth; sometimes less of the fun stuff like coordinate geometry; these changes are impacted by MCAS.” But because of her involvement in the Frameworks decision-making process, this teacher was reluctant to criticize the tests. Massaging teachers’ sense of autonomy may have meaningful, positive impact on school conditions and on responses to administrative directives, whether those directives are internally or externally generated. Local school and district administrators, acting as bottom-up rather than top-down leaders, might play a particularly significant role in shaping teacher responses to State-imposed mandates. They might also, by binding together, form a team capable of defending their faculties’ decision-making power and sending a strong message to distant authorities

that local systems benefit from granting teachers the professional autonomy necessary to address local conditions and individual differences. Naturally, such a recommendation assumes that the administrators perform their duties in ways conducive to collegial exchange and wise professional decision-making.

State Department of Education officials and State legislators can re-instate teachers' autonomy by including them, in an ongoing manner and as full partners, in the decision-making processes that result in State programs designed to impact capacity for local curriculum and instructional decision making. Some, like Foucault, might argue that such inclusion can become a method of co-opting teachers by working to include them in designing the system that will bind them, which the State started to do by having teachers active in the early formation of the Frameworks. However, the inclusion of teachers at the department, school-wide, district-wide and state-wide levels in the decision-making that informs construction of curricula or instructional practices will undoubtedly provide participating teachers with a sense of power and authority over the decisions that govern their work life and teaching behaviors; and it will likely result in fewer negative responses to educational conditions in local classrooms.

Most importantly, though, school and district administrators and Department of Education officials and State legislators must listen carefully when teachers tell them a test is decent, but the stakes attached to it prove counterproductive to educational efforts. No matter how often or fully officials try to include teachers in decision-making, they will fail to convince teachers of a program's worth if teachers see in their classrooms, on a daily basis, that such a program is undermining rather than supporting their efforts to teach all children. This means that administrators need to muster support

for reduction of high-stakes and policymakers need to heed the call when those closest to the educational action cry “retreat” because the battle is causing too many casualties.

Those in leadership positions have the power and authority to set up systems that include teachers in the decision-making processes about curriculum, instruction, and the meeting of individual differences. They also have the power and authority to make State testing systems operate as guidelines, not nooses. As one teacher said,

We don't need this test to tell us that kids who come from poverty, or who have English as second language aren't doing as well as kids who come from XXX and XXX (towns with highly educated populations and greater wealth) and places like that. It's useless. It's a waste of money; everybody knows that.

What these teachers call out for is more respect and support from both local communities and society at large. They call for smaller classes, more support in classes, more time to establish dialogue with colleagues and other educators, more and better professional development, more support to ease teen pregnancy, absenteeism, transience (one in five Boston school children move in and out of a school within a single year's time) and other poverty-related conditions that heavily impact on school performance, regardless of teaching performance. The researcher recommends that administrators and policymakers listen to teachers' advice and take a broader look at the problems encountered by low-scoring schools and work to address these, which, in turn, will improve education, according to teachers who make it their daily business to consider how, what, when, and why to teach children. “You cannot judge the outcome of learning on one test,” warned one department head/teacher. Learning is a larger concern than a single score can measure, as is education. Those in authority need to accept the

complexity of the problems highlighted by the Education Reform Act and work to solve them in unison with the teachers who know and manage the problems firsthand.

Schools of education can play a vital role in establishing and promoting professional autonomy for teachers in local schools and classrooms. As respected academicians, education professors can speak out about the necessity for teacher autonomy to make curriculum and instruction decisions in order to effectively meet individual differences and ensure high quality education for all school children. They can and must acknowledge that there can be no autonomous learners unless there are autonomous teachers, and then they must make that case to the public and the policymakers. They can and must acknowledge that democracy requires critical and creative thinking and that the practice of creative intelligence will fail to thrive in environments that shackle teachers' professional decision-making by requiring them to become technicians carrying out a distant authority's notions of what children need to know, how they need to learn that knowledge and when they need to demonstrate its understanding, when they need to demonstrate understanding, and under what conditions this assessment is best achieved. They must argue that no one knows better than teachers operating in local classrooms what each individual student studying in those classrooms needs to know, how each learns best, and when each is ready for evaluation and how best to evaluate that child. Also, they must argue that these teachers have the ability to determine programs of study that will meet those needs. Furthermore, they must strengthen teacher education curricula. Future teachers and school administrators must graduate fully prepared to work collaboratively, as well as independently, to design and implement inspiring, challenging, and forward thinking

elementary and secondary programs that take into account compelling knowledge about how children learn and what builds the foundation for future learning. Moreover, these programs must ensure that being autonomous never becomes confused with being autocratic. As part of this education, academics in schools of education must cultivate strong teacher leaders capable of effectively setting, maintaining, and evaluating local educational standards.

Education professors, acting as teachers, researchers and theorists, must help everyone understand the crucial and powerful nature of education in a democracy. Education hoping to prepare students for democratic decision-making benefits from a plurality of professional perspectives and approaches sensitive to local needs and conditions rather than a centralized, standardized perspective and approach that ignores local and individual differences and strips teachers of their most potent abilities. As a nation we deplore the idea of a totalitarian political system; our schools of education must make clear that denying teachers the power to make decisions related to curriculum, instruction and meeting individual differences at the local level promotes a dangerous shift towards a totalitarian educational system. In totalitarian systems curriculum and instruction decisions are made at such distance from the local schools that it appears there is only one way for all children to learn and one test that can demonstrate that learning.

Closing

Decision-making must again be entrusted to teachers rather than to state and district officials far removed from the classroom. Restore teacher dignity and autonomy by allowing teachers the freedom to teach – to plan and develop engaging and innovative instructional activities. State and

district administrators must reduce and preferably eliminate the cumbersome burdens of redundant paperwork that currently engulf much of a teacher's time. They must stop the persistent and unnecessary monitoring of teacher activities and trust them to do their job. (Johnson & Johnson, 2002, p. 205)

Without teachers, education ceases. Without professional autonomy to make decisions regarding curriculum and instruction and meeting individual differences in their local classrooms, teachers cease to be professionals and become technicians delivering the curriculum dictated by central administration officials and evaluated by student pass rates on state-designed assessments. A "proficiency-based" system, as McNeil (2000) describes it, decides, "Who's in charge," and it appears the principle decision-makers regarding local curriculum and instruction, and meeting individual differences in local classrooms and schools are no longer teachers. The power to control the classroom lies in the hands of state and federal officials.

However, the current study implies that only when teachers engage the full spectrum of their minds and professional training can society hope that its children will receive a high-quality, responsive education, where those who need concrete, hands-on, or project-based learning receive it, where teachers spend more time engaging students in creative problem solving than "prepping" them for tests, and where students who demonstrate intelligence verbally, spatially, or through active rather than passive exercises are assessed in ways that match their strengths, rather than confirm their weaknesses. Only when policymakers and political players accept the wisdom and knowledge of teachers operating within effectively administered school systems and set in place policies and systems that support, enhance, and tap into teachers' wisdom and

knowledge will they achieve what the MCAS aspires to actualize – quality education for children of all families.

Yet, as this study also shows, teachers do not act in a vacuum. They operate within a wide variety of environments, some of which prove fertile for academic learning and some of which prove barren. These barren environments need the fertilizer of attention, attention from knowledgeable professional educators close to the situation on a daily basis. The social conditions that press on children in ways opposed to academic achievement must be lightened, so conditions for learning might provide a respectful, fertile ground in which teachers can sow seeds of understanding and children can develop at appropriate paces and in ways that honor their strengths while benefiting all of society. This is not now the case, as teachers in this study tell us.

This study demonstrates that, while many teachers in high-scoring, wealthy schools perceive a minimal impact on their autonomy from the MCAS, and while a smaller number at low-scoring, often poor, schools perceive a measure of benefit accruing from the State's mandated high-stakes tests, most teachers believe and document a set of negative impacts to teaching and learning attached to the MCAS. These teachers, especially those in culturally diverse, low-income settings, or teaching low-level students, perceive that "There is no autonomy." They describe a learning environment in which "I'm not sure I'm meeting individual needs anymore; I'm meeting the needs of the MCAS test."

The reduction in teacher trust and ability to exercise professional decision-making manifests in a variety of ways (see Chapter 4). Despite the fact that teachers provide environments where "we have theater productions and they're sold out every

night” and where “Our underperforming choir sang at the Governor’s inaugural,” and where “Our As Schools Match Wits team went to the state semi-finals” and where in an international mythology exam in which “only six kids in the whole country received perfect scores, and we had two of them,” teachers are frustrated because, “anything can happen in this school system, but the only thing that’s going to count is when they publish the MCAS scores in November. Nothing else makes a bit of difference.” These teachers, and many who work with low-level, minority, non-English speaking, or poor students, perceive that their efforts, their professional capabilities are ignored unless they surface in high MCAS scores. They have always been accountable – to parents, students, and taxpayers – but not accountable only in the ways measured by the State on its standardized exams. These teachers have become “objects,” as Freire (1987) describes those who are acted upon by others. Examining educational situations in Texas, similar to those in Massachusetts, Researcher Linda McNeil (2000) concluded:

...accountability is invoked to locate the problems of schooling at the level of the lowest employees, the teachers... By implying a hierarchy, and a culpability at the bottom of the system, such calls for accountability by definition empower those who use the term. The presumption is that those who are calling for accountability feel they are in control and others (beneath them) have to answer to them.” (p. 261)

Teachers have always had their autonomy circumscribed by the need to comply with constraints imposed by parents, students, and local administrators. Now, however, they find their autonomy strenuously curtailed by the State in ways that often make it impossible to meet the needs and demands of parents, students, and administrators. With the increase in testing demands resulting from the No Child Left Behind Act, the de-skilling of teachers, resulting from imposition of high-stakes testing that assigns evaluations based on a single score, so amply documented (Johnson & Johnson, 2000;

Jones, Jones & Hargrove, 2003; Kohn, 2000; McNeil, 2002; Ohanian, 1999) will likely increase, as well. Philosopher Sidney Hook, student of John Dewey described teachers as “the kingpin(s) of the educational situation (who) make and break programs.” But, if the erosion of professional autonomy continues, it may be teachers who are broken, downgraded from professionals to technicians. In order to ensure that teachers, especially those treating the most needy students, continue to exercise and develop their professional capabilities, it is necessary to review the impact of high-stakes testing and consider where this current educational policy is leading and what it portends for teaching and learning in public schools. Furthermore, it remains essential to bear in mind what testing expert James Popham tells us: “...students’ scores on existing standardized achievement tests do not provide an accurate way of judging how well teachers are teaching” (Popham, 2001, p.125). The present study offers a beginning look at the situation in Massachusetts. The view revealed stands as a warning: teachers’ autonomy, their professional capacity to make curriculum and instruction decisions and to meet individual differences, suffers ominous erosion under the impact of the MCAS.

APPENDIX A
ORIGINAL SCHOOL SELECTION LIST

Original School Selection List

Population of Selected High and Low Performing High Schools in Massachusetts by MCAS ELA and Mathematics Average Scores

- A. High performing high schools include systems where the average of the 10th grade mathematics and English Language Arts scores was equal to or greater than 250 scaled points. This score situates the school solidly in the Proficient range (240 – 259 pts.).
- B. Low performing high schools include systems where the average of the 10th grade mathematics and English Language Arts scores was equal to or less than 235 scaled points. This score situates the school in the Needs Improvement range (220 – 239) or the Failing range (below 220). Only one school's score is reported for large districts, such as Boston and Springfield, where multiple schools scored at this level.
- C. Note: Scores were not reviewed for vocational, alternative, charter or any specially designated schools.

High Performing High Schools	ELA	Math	Math & ELA Average Score
Andover	253	253	253
Ashland	256	250	253
Belmont	256	251	253.5
Cohasset	257	250	253.5
Hadley – Hopkins Academy	250	251	250.5
Harvard – Broomfield	257	252	254.5
Hingham	257	251	254
Lexington	256	252	254
Lynnfield	256	250	253
Medfield	256	253	254.5
Needham	255	252	253.5
Newton North	256	253	254.5
Newton South	256	255	255.5
Norwell	255	250	252.5
Sharon	255	252	253.5
Wayland	257	255	256.5
Wellesley	256	253	254.5
Westborough	255	253	254
Westford	254	253	253.5
Weston	258	256	257
Westwood	255	252	253.5
Winchester	254	251	252.5
Acton-Boxborough	254	257	255.5
Berlin-Boylston – Tahanto Reg.	257	251	254
Concord-Carlisle	257	255	256
Dover-Sherborn	259	253	256
Groton-Dunstable	252	250	251

Hamilton-Wenham	255	250	252.5
Lincoln – Sudbury	254	250	252
Nashoba Regional - Bolton	256	251	253.5
Northboro – Southboro	253	253	253
Pentucket – Pentucket Reg.	254	248	251

Low Performing High Schools	ELA	Math	Math & ELA Average Score
Attleboro	233	227	230
Boston - William McKinley	219	215	217
Cambridge Rindge and Latin	234	230	232
Chelsea	233	224	228.5
Chicopee	236	229	232.5
Everett	237	232	235
Fall River	235	226	230.5
Holyoke	232	221	229.5
Lawrence	230	224	227
Lowell	235	229	232
Lynn Classical	239	231	235
Malden	235	230	232.5
New Bedford	232	229	230.5
North Adams – Drury High	238	230	234
Randolph	237	231	235
Springfield Central High	232	225	228.5
Webster – Bartlett Jr. Sr. High	235	233	234.5
West Springfield	234	231	232.5
Westport	236	231	233.5
Worcester – North High	231	226	228.5
Turners Falls	237	230	233.5
Assabet Valley Reg.	232	223	227.5
Blackstone Valley Reg.	233	232	232.5

APPENDIX B

2003 PERFORMANCE COMPARISONS BY PERCENT

2003 Performance Comparisons by Percent

- As of 2002, the Massachusetts Department of Education District Profiles listed only percentages in each scoring category, not average scores
- To ensure anonymity, names of participating schools are not listed, rather schools are listed by the subgroup to which they were assigned: high-scoring, large (high large); high-scoring small (high small); low scoring large (low large) low scoring small (low small) and by their school number used in this study.

District	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Failing
State				
English	20%	41%	28%	12%
Math	24%	27%	28%	21%
High Large #3				
English	43	47	9	1
Math	48	34	17	2
High Large #6				
English	52	40	6	2
Math	63	24	9	4
High Small #4				
English	51	41	7	0
Math	68	20	12	0
High Small #5				
English	45	47	6	1
Math	53	29	12	2
Low Large #7				
English	17	31	32	20
Math	21	23	27	29
Low Large #8				
English	4	38	35	23
Math	13	23	24	31
Low small #1				
English	12	42	35	11
Math	9	30	35	26
Low small #2				
English	10	31	39	19
Math	12	19	36	33

APPENDIX C

PRINCIPALS: INTRODUCTION LETTER

Date

Ms./Mr. _____
_____ High School
_____ St.
_____, MA 00000

Dear Ms./Mr. _____,

Educators who experience the daily realities of public schools know that teachers are key to meaningful improvement efforts. Therefore, teacher's views toward proposed changes prove important indicators of how effective and lasting improvements might be. For these reasons, we seek your help discovering secondary school teachers' perceptions regarding the impacts of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) on curriculum and instruction in their classrooms. Attached for your information is a description of the specific purpose of this research.

We would like to visit your school to meet with ninth and tenth grade English and mathematics teachers, possibly during their prep periods, so that they may complete a short survey and brief interview about their views regarding the ways MCAS has influenced their curriculum and instruction decision making. Often, however, we mail out surveys earlier, so teachers may complete them at their convenience. Together, the survey and interview would take less than an hour to complete.

It is often helpful to arrange schedules through department heads. However, if it would be helpful for me to make a brief presentation to faculty to request their participation, I am willing to do so.

Please be assured that data collected in your school will be treated with complete confidence. Teachers who respond to the survey will not be asked to provide their names, nor will the name of your school be identified. As a result of your participation, a summary of the research describing how teachers in a variety of Commonwealth public schools perceive MCAS will be sent to you and your faculty for discussion.

Attached is a response card for indicating your willingness to help with this important study. Please fill out the response card, place it in the stamped envelope, and return it to us at your earliest convenience. After receiving your response, we will telephone you to set up a visit or further logistical arrangements. We truly hope that you decide to participate in this vital research. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Sinclair
Professor of Education
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA 01002

Patricia N. Donovan
Research Associate

Teachers' Perceptions of the MCAS Impact on Ninth and Tenth Grade Curriculums

RESPONSE CARD

Yes, we look forward to participating in this study.

No, we will not participate in this study.

I need more information.

Name: _____, Principal

Telephone Number: _____

APPENDIX D

TEACHERS: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

November 4, 2003

Dear Faculty Member,

Educators who experience the daily realities of public schools know that teachers are key to any meaningful improvement effort. Without serious consideration of teachers' views toward proposed changes, it is unlikely that effective and lasting improvements can occur. Teachers' voices must be heard. For that reason, we invite you to join secondary school teachers throughout the Commonwealth in sharing your perceptions regarding the impact of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) on curriculum and instruction. We are particularly interested to hear the views of 9th and 10th grade English and math faculty. Attached for your information is a description of the specific purpose of this research.

Participation in the study involves two parts: a brief survey, completed at your convenience, and a brief interview about your views regarding the ways MCAS has influenced curriculum and instruction decision-making. Interviews, which generally require about 1/2 hour to complete, will be conducted on _____ at a time you select. No more than three people are interviewed during any period

Please be assured that data collected will be treated with complete confidence. No names are signed on surveys, nor will the name of your school be identified. As a result of your participation, a summary of the research describing how teachers in a variety of Commonwealth public schools perceive the impact of MCAS will be sent to you and your department for discussion.

A sign-up sheet for participation is being circulated. We hope you have available time to share in this important study of how policy decisions affect what is taught and how it is taught in local classrooms. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Robert L. Sinclair
Professor of Education
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA 01002

Patricia N. Donovan
Research Associate

APPENDIX E
PURPOSE STATEMENT

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE MCAS IMPACT ON NINTH AND TENTH
GRADE CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

The main purpose of this study is to examine teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on ninth and tenth grade mathematics and English curriculums in Massachusetts' public schools.

The study consists of three parts. First, teachers' views regarding the helpfulness of MCAS in defining and selecting curriculum will be explored. Second, teachers' views on how MCAS has influenced instructional practices are considered. Third, teachers' perceptions of MCAS effects on the particular instructional practice of teaching to meet individual differences will be reported. Underpinning all questions is an interest in how teachers' professional autonomy has been affected since the introduction of the MCAS tests. Three specific questions guide the research:

- A. What are teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their autonomy to make curriculum decisions in their local classrooms?
- B. What are teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their autonomy to make instructional decisions in their local classrooms?
- C. What are teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on their teaching to meet individual differences of students in their local classrooms?

APPENDIX F
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

Participant's Name: _____ Researcher's Name: _____

Dear Colleague:

You are being invited to participate in a research study regarding teachers' perceptions of the MCAS tests' positive and negative impacts on curriculum and instruction decision-making by teachers in local classrooms. Professor Robert L. Sinclair of the University of Massachusetts/Amherst School of Education and I (Tricia Donovan, Research Associate) value your participation and wish to honor your privacy. In general, pseudonyms will be used in an effort to ensure your anonymity in any published work.

The study involves a single one-hour meeting with two parts: a brief 12-item survey and a semi-structured interview. The interviewer will take notes during the interview session and submit a copy of these notes to you shortly after the meeting so that you can verify their accuracy. The interview meeting will be scheduled at your convenience.

English language arts and mathematics 9th and 10th grade teachers from eight randomly selected schools are being asked to participate in the study which will form the basis of Tricia Donovan's dissertation. The study may also be used in subsequent articles and/or books she or Professor Sinclair writes in the future.

It is hoped that participation in the research interviews will prove interesting and useful to you, but there is no remuneration for participation. You are free to withdraw from the research process at any time and to participate or not participate in the research without prejudice to you. A copy of this form will be provided for you. Thank you.

I volunteer to participate in this study and understand that:

- A. I will meet with the researcher for one hour at my convenience to complete a brief survey and respond to a semi-structured interview.
- B. The questions I am asked will relate to curriculum content and instruction decision making by me in my local classroom.
- C. The interview may be tape-recorded. Notes will be taken, and this information will be used only in the context of this current study or related academic work and will be shared with me, so I might check for accuracy. I may review material prior to Tricia Donovan's oral exam related to this study.
- D. My name will not be used unless I request it, nor will I be identified personally in any way. I understand that it will be necessary to identify participants by position and affiliation,
- E. I may withdraw from part or all of this study at any time and furthermore, I am free to participate or not without prejudice. I know I will not be paid.

I understand this consent form, and I accept the conditions as described.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX G

MCAS IMPACT SURVEY AND ADMINISTRATION INSTRUCTIONS

MCAS Impact Survey

English ___ Mathematics ___ 9th grade 10th grade both; mostly low levels mostly high levels mixed

Welcome. The purpose of this survey and the accompanying interview is to hear what teachers have to say about the positive and negative impacts of MCAS on their curriculum and instruction decision-making. Please understand that all responses are confidential, which is why we ask that you not write your name anywhere on the survey. We include open questions for you to elaborate on your views. Thank you.

Directions

- Please do not put your name on this survey.
- Please read each question carefully and circle your response on the scale provided.
- The survey ends with three open questions. Please respond to these.

Item	Scale
1. As a result of MCAS, I have increased my independent decision-making about what curriculum content to offer.	Agree Disagree 1 2 3 4
2. The MCAS tests positively influence how I structure and present my classes.	Agree Disagree 1 2 3 4
3. Institution of the MCAS tests has helped me better meet the individual learning needs of my students.	Agree Disagree 1 2 3 4
4. I have more say over sequencing and pacing in my classroom because of MCAS.	Agree Disagree 1 2 3 4
5. I have increased the amount of test-related content I include in my curriculum because of MCAS.	Agree Disagree 1 2 3 4
6. MCAS has positively influenced me to teach to each individual student's 'multiple intelligence' strengths.	Agree Disagree 1 2 3 4
7. Because of MCAS I more often instruct in ways designed to improve test scores, such as telling how to do certain problems or how to write particular responses.	Agree Disagree 1 2 3 4
8. Due to MCAS, I more readily address emerging interests within each class.	Agree Disagree 1 2 3 4
9. MCAS encourages me to consider each student's learning style.	Agree Disagree

	1	2	3	4
10. The curriculum content I offer my students has improved due to MCAS.	Agree			
	Disagree			
	1	2	3	4
11. MCAS has freed me to include special topics of interest to me in my curriculum.	Agree			
	Disagree			
	1	2	3	4
12. MCAS helps me better work from each student's prior knowledge.	Agree			
	Disagree			
	1	2	3	4

Thank you. Please continue on the next page.

Survey Continued – Open Responses

1. Please comment on the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on your autonomy to make curriculum decisions:

Positive:

Negative:

2. Please comment on the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on your autonomy to make instructional decisions:

Positive:

Negative:

3. Please comment on the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS on your teaching to meet individual students' needs:

Positive:

Negative:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS SURVEY.

Survey Administration Protocol

Each participant in the study will be asked to fill out the MCAS Impact Survey during the first part of his or her one-hour interview session. First, however, the interviewer will briefly introduce herself and the study, making every attempt to create a friendly, but professional rapport. She will then review the Informed Consent Form with the participant. A signed copy of the form will be sent as soon as possible to the participant via U.S. mail. Also, give to the participant a contact sheet or business card with the name, telephone number, and email address of the interviewer

The interviewer will introduce the survey by saying something like: "This brief survey is one part of the research for this study. It is meant to be answered as honestly as you can, but you should not struggle to discern hidden meanings in the survey items. Each item relates to one of the three research questions about the impacts of MCAS on curriculum and instruction decision-making and meeting students' individual needs. It should take no more than 10 or 15 minutes to complete the survey. If you need more time for the open questions on p.2, you may take that time at your convenience after the interview."

The interviewer will have on hand a self-addressed stamped envelope the participant may use to return the completed open question responses.

The interviewer may excuse herself from the room or remove herself from the participant's work area for the duration of the survey. She will notify the participant when a few minutes remain to complete the survey. She will then thank the participant (and provide the envelope if necessary) and collect the survey, placing it in a folder marked 'surveys' for later review.

Once the survey is completed, the interviewer will begin the interview (see MCAS Impact Teacher Interview, Appendix H).

APPENDIX H

MCAS IMPACT TEACHER INTERVIEW AND ADMINISTRATION
INSTRUCTIONS

Site # – Interview #

Mathematics _____

English _____

1. How have the MCAS tests influenced your professional decision-making about curriculum?

2. How have the MCAS tests influenced your professional decision making about instruction in your classes?

3. How have the MCAS tests affected your ability to teach to meet individual differences?

4. Is there anything more you would like to say about the positive and negative impacts of the MCAS tests on your professional autonomy for making decisions about curriculum, instruction, and meeting individual differences? (Any thoughts or comments about MCAS in general?)

Interview Administration Protocol

The interview is meant to collect teacher perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of MCAS on their curriculum and instruction decision-making and ability to meet individual needs of students. A rapport of trust is essential, and to that end, all interviews will be held in person whenever possible and scheduled at the convenience of the participant. Interviews may be conducted at any site, but preferably onsite at the participant's school.

The interview is to be preceded by a brief introduction – of the interviewer and the study and signing of the informed consent form, and by the survey as well. (See Appendix F for the survey administration protocol.) Information at the top of the interview form will also be filled out prior to the interview.

The interviewer will start by explaining that, although the survey will provide some information for the study, she is interested in hearing about the impacts of MCAS on curriculum and instruction in the teacher's own words. She will inform the participant that the interview should take about 45 minutes and that she will be taking notes during the interview. She will also tell the participant she will forward a summary of the interview notes to him/her in a timely fashion by either email or U.S. mail, and note that the participant will have an opportunity then to amend or add to the comments outlined in that summary.

The interviewer will ask all questions on the interview form and ask additional questions for clarification or elaboration purposes as the need arises, but remain aware of the time.

At the close of the interview, she will ask if there is anything more the participant would like to say about the impacts of MCAS on his/her daily teaching experiences. Lastly, she will thank the participant for his/her generous sharing of time and thoughts and remind him/her that s/he can contact her if additional comments come to mind later.

APPENDIX I

TEACHERS' LETTER OF THANKS

Date

Dear

I deeply appreciate your participation in the MCAS Impact Study. I learned much listening to your experiences and insights. Thank you.

Attached you will find a copy of the notes from the interview session we shared recently. We wish to truly represent your views, and the views of other teachers, through this study, and therefore request that you read through the attached notes for omissions and corrections.

If you read anything that you feel needs to be changed, please contact me either by phone or by email. The phone number and addresses follow:

413-369-4620

tricia_donovan@terc.edu

triciad@crocker.com

If I am not available when you call, I will return your call as soon as possible.

Gratefully yours,

Tricia Donovan, Research Associate

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