

RESOLUTION TO HOLD HARMLESS CLASS OF 2021 ELA COMPETENCY  
DETERMINATION (10th Grade MCAS) DUE TO RACIST QUESTION

**WHEREAS**, the graduation requirement makes the tenth grade MCAS exam one of the highest stakes exams most Massachusetts students take; and

**WHEREAS**, teachers, families, and schools all invest time and resources to give students the best possible chance at success on the exam; and

**WHEREAS**, students have a right to be able to demonstrate their full knowledge, skills, and understanding on the MCAS; and

**WHEREAS**, the 2019 10th grade MCAS English exam contained a question that required students to write, in response to an excerpt from a novel, a journal entry from the perspective of an openly racist character; and

**WHEREAS**, DESE quickly moved to not have it count in student scores, and

**WHEREAS**, we only discovered this because students had the courage to violate the rules about discussing specific MCAS questions, and

**WHEREAS**, research shows that exposure to negative stereotypes can have a negative impact on student performance, and

**WHEREAS**, the impact of the racist question on performance cannot be quantified;

**NOW, THEREFORE**, be it:

**RESOLVED:** That, the Somerville School Committee calls on the MA Board of Education and/or MA Legislators to exempt students who took the test with the rejected question of the ELA component from Competency Determination (required by M.G.L. c. 69, § 1D); AND FURTHER

**RESOLVED:** That the Somerville School Committee calls for DESE to thoroughly examine the process for developing and reviewing test items, in particular the training and oversight of the Bias & Sensitivity Committee; AND

**THAT:** a copy of this resolution be delivered to DESE, the Governor and the Somerville state and local legislative delegations, and otherwise widely distributed.

VOTED: Yes – 7, No – 2

DATE: May 20, 2019

BY THE: Somerville School Committee