

**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