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Parents in Dozens of Schools Boycott Field Tests for High-Stakes Exams: Fed Up With Over-Testing, Parents Present Invoice to Pearson

“Will Our Children Be Compensated for Their Labor and for Lost Instructional Time and Resources?”

New York City –For the second year running, parents from throughout the city and surrounding communities are boycotting the “stand-alone” field tests scheduled for elementary and middle schools this week. Concerned parents, who wonder why it should be assumed that their children will serve as uncompensated subjects in a commercial R & D product development process, have calculated the value of their children’s free labor, together with the real costs to schools of administering field tests, and are presenting the resultant invoice to Pearson in the amount of \$34,844,769 on the steps of Tweed .

From June 3rd to June 7th, as class size grows and arts, physical education, and recess dwindle, hundreds of thousands of children across the state are being forced to give up learning time solely to serve the research purposes of billion-dollar test publisher Pearson, which has a \$32 million contract with the New York State Education Department. The stand-alone tests come not 2 months after these same children endured confusing embedded field questions in the April tests.

But parents are fighting back by refusing to allow their children to take these field tests. In support of parents and educators, many of whom feel pressured to administer the tests, the New York City Council on May 22 unanimously passed a resolution calling on NYSED to stop all stand-alone field testing immediately.

“All this testing is out of control,” says Sue Schaffner, parent of a Brooklyn third grader. “Real learning happens when children can explore and experiment and do projects, when they can read books and discuss them. The endless tests are crowding real learning out of the classroom.”

Parents’ outrage is exacerbated by the high stakes attached to state tests that the June try-out material will be used to develop. In New York City, grade promotion, school report card grades, and school closings hinge on state test score results. The new state teacher evaluation law continues to place excessive weight on those results. Parents see a narrowing of the curriculum and an increased focus on the tests as a result.

“More and more, state testing determines what children learn in school, how teachers teach, and even whether or not teachers will remain in the classroom, said Becky Walzer, a Manhattan mother of twins. “We want a rich curriculum for our children, not teaching to the test. The only solution is to get rid of high-stakes testing, which distorts any curriculum it is associated with.”

Further fueling parent anger is the fact that Pearson, a for-profit company that made close to a billion dollars in its North American Education division alone last year, is using valuable classroom time for product development purposes. NYSED does not encourage schools to inform parents of this practice, nor are they asked to give their consent to it. “Children shouldn’t be used as guinea pigs to enrich private companies,” said Sharmeela Medhiratta, a Queens parent whose daughter did not take the field test. “Our schools are being cut to the bone, but city and state education officials always manage to find staggeringly large sums of money for all these tests and test prep materials.”

Since the stand-alone field tests are not mandated by law (as opposed to April’s tests), parents see this boycott as an opportunity to communicate the widespread resentment they feel towards the untrammled growth of high-stakes standardized testing, which under the new teacher evaluation law will extend even to kindergarten, arts, and physical education, to devastating effect.

Organizations who contributed to our list of 2013 field test opt outs include: Change the Stakes, ParentVoicesNY, Restore Education Funding – Nyack/Valley Cottage, Time Out From Testing, Long Island Opt Out (list in formation)

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*Schools Where Parents are Participating in the Field Test Boycott

This list is growing, as not all schools have administered tests yet and we are not in touch with all schools where opt outs are happening. At this point there are 37 in NYC and at least 21 outside of the city. (Long Island submitted the names of districts rather than individual schools, so multiple schools may have opted out within a district.)

Schools in New York City

East Village Community School
Neighborhood School
Earth School
PS 40/Augustus Saint-Gaudens
Ella Baker School
Institute for Collaborative Education
PS 75/Emily Dickinson
PS 87/William Sherman
Central Park East I
PS 173
3 schools in District 3 who wish to remain anonymous
PS 8
PS 9 - Teunis G Bergen
PS 11 -Purvis J Behan
PS 132 - The Conselyea School
PS 257 - John F Hylan
PS 15 - Patrick F Daly
PS 29 - John M Harrigan
PS 39 - Henry Bristow
PS 58 - The Carroll School
MS 88 - Peter Rouget
PS 107 - John W Kimball
The Brooklyn New School
PS 154 - Magnet School for Science and Technology
PS 230 - Doris L Cohen
PS 261 - Philip Livingston
PS 295 - Studio School of Arts and Culture
PS 321 - William Penn
The Children's School

New Voices Middle School
MS 447 - The Math and Science Exploratory School
MS 448 - Brooklyn School for Collaborative Studies
PS 139 - Rego Park

JHS 157 - Stephen A Halsey

PS 122 - Mamie Fay

Outside New York City

Lenape Elementary, New Paltz, NY
New Paltz Middle School
Nyack Middle School
Upper Nyack Elementary School
Long Island Schools or Districts:

North Merrick

East Meadow

Bayport Blue Point

Middle Country

Hauppauge
Miller Place
Valley Stream Central High District 1

East Meadow

Seaford

Riverhead

Lynbrook

Northport

Bellmore Merrick

Mt. Sinai

East Islip
Sachem Samoset Brentwood UFSD
Middle Country

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**** Anatomy of a Giveaway**

Invoice to Pearson:

For children's services = \$32,550,000. That's 434,000 children @ \$75.00 each. This amount matches Pearson's 5-year contract with SED for \$32,136,276

Figuring that half a day will be devoted to the field tests and administrative logistics:

For half an AP's daily salary = \$753,519. That's 3,614 x \$208.50.

For half a Teacher's daily salary = \$1,541,250. That's 12,330 x \$125.00.

The grand total is \$34,844,769