

# Change the Stakes

[Changethestakes.org](http://changethestakes.org)

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## **CTS Demands Full Disclosure of School Testing Program Calls Pearson's June Field Tests a Waste of Time and Money**

**New York City** – Change the Stakes, a coalition of parents and educators in New York City, announces its opposition to the latest round of standardized testing, the stand-alone field tests that are scheduled to be given in June. Over a thousand (1,029) public elementary and middle schools in the city are scheduled to participate in this additional statewide testing. Last week, science field testing took place in 116 other New York City schools.

The price tag for this extra developmental testing is conservatively estimated to be \$3 million. It comes on top of the six days (540 minutes) of regularly scheduled English Language Arts (ELA) and math exams administered just last month, when the items being field tested were embedded within the state-mandated tests. This doubled the amount of time needed to complete the exams.

The New York State Education Department (SED) and test publisher, NCS Pearson, Inc., have not provided advance notice to the public about the June field tests nor sufficiently explained why they are necessary. Moreover, testing experts regard stand-alone testing as a dubious practice at best, and virtually useless when conducted so very late in the school year.

“June is a terrible time of year to test children—be it operational or field testing,” asserts Fred Smith, a test specialist formerly with the city Department of Education (DOE). “The expectation that children will be motivated to perform at their best near the end of the year doesn’t even rise to the level of wishful thinking,” stated Mr. Smith. He also points out that stand-alone field testing by SED was discredited for yielding misleading data on which to develop new tests. “In 2009, SED’s test advisers acknowledged this approach was problematic because students who took the exams knew they were experimental.”

SED’s elementary and intermediate school field tests will be administered between June 5th and 15th. Most schools will test only one grade between 3rd through 8th; however, 259 (23%) of the schools are being asked to give the experimental exams on two grade levels. (*Change the Stakes is providing user-friendly information about all field test school and grade assignments broken down by borough at [changethestakes.org](http://changethestakes.org). Parents can visit the website to find out what tests are due to be given this June in their children’s schools.*)

The primary purpose of the June stand-alone testing period is to allow Pearson, the State’s education testing contractor, to perform research for operational exams it will then sell to the SED. The State is on record as stating participation in field testing is “not mandatory,” yet schools and parents in New York City have been kept in the dark and not advised that they have a choice about whether or not their children should participate.

“Our kids are being used as guinea pigs for the financial benefit of Pearson, to the detriment of their own educational experience,” said Deyanira Ruiz, who has a daughter in a grade that has been selected for field testing. “They’ve already lost untold hours to test prep and the April math and literacy exams, reducing the amount of time devoted to art, physical education, social studies, and languages,” she added.

Some teachers are questioning the use of valuable class time for field testing. Lauren Cohen, a teacher in Manhattan, is fed up. “Far too many of us teach in schools that already face enormous pressure to dedicate an excessive amount of classroom time to test preparation between September and April. My school received a notice, on Pearson letterhead, informing us that we must also give an ELA field test to 3rd graders in June,” she said. “Field tests supply no useful information to teachers or educational benefits to children. My students are burnt out on testing, and this meaningless drudgery will take away valuable learning time,” stated Ms. Cohen.

Fueling a rebellion among parents against the upcoming field tests is the disclosure to date of roughly 30 errors, along with some questionable content, on the tests administered in April. The state forbids the disclosure of test items, further undermining parent confidence in the exams themselves. Diana Zavala, parent of a 3rd grader in Manhattan, contends, “Transparency and accountability should also apply to the corporations making the tests. If we are to believe these tests are worthwhile and that the company is making ‘better tests,’ we should be able to examine them.” She added, “but what we really want is more teaching, less testing, and assessment that is more connected to the actual learning that takes place in the classroom.”

### **Change the Stakes is Calling for the Following Regarding June Field Testing:**

1. The DOE should immediately disclose specific information about the stand-alone field tests, explaining their nature and purpose and notifying parents of children in the 1,029 field test schools about the dates the tests are scheduled to be given.
2. Pearson and the SED should address the claim by independent testing experts that the timing and format of these tests make it unlikely they will generate reliable data needed to develop valid operational exams.
3. SED and DOE should allow parents and entire schools to opt out of participating and only administer field tests to students in schools/grades for whom explicit parental consent has been granted. The need to obtain authorization to test their children from parents or guardians should extend to all testing when the main objective is to support research and development for commercial testing products.
4. Non-participating students in schools and grades undergoing testing should have a meaningful educational alternative activity during the testing period.

To schedule interviews with parents or teachers, please contact Andrea Mata at [changethestakes@gmail.com](mailto:changethestakes@gmail.com). Testing expert Fred Smith can be reached at [fjstats@aol.com](mailto:fjstats@aol.com).

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*[Change the Stakes](#), a committee of the Grassroots Education Movement, was formed to expose the damaging effects of high-stakes standardized tests. We are a group of parents and teachers working to build and unite opposition to high stakes testing in New York City. Our membership includes a group of parents who refused to have their children tested during the regular State exam period in April 2012. We believe high-stakes testing must be replaced by more educationally-sound and balanced forms of student, teacher, and school assessment.*

*See our [online petition](#) demanding that New York State develop a non-punitive process by which parents concerned about the impacts of high-stakes testing on student learning can opt their children out of standardized tests.*

*Change the Stakes collaborates with other groups working to challenge high-stakes testing in New York, including [Parent Voices NY](#) and [Time Out From Testing](#).*