

Change the Stakes

Changethestakes.org

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Parent Anger Builds Over High-Stakes Standardized Tests: Some NYC parents take a stand, refuse to have their children tested

New York City – As the annual rite of standardized testing begins in the city’s public schools, the stakes are higher than ever before: low scores can prevent students from moving to the next grade and limit their middle and high school choices, while aggregate scores that fail to improve over time can be used to close schools and, as of next year, to fire teachers. Some parents believe the stakes have gotten too high.

“I’m not opposed to standardized tests, but the emphasis on testing is out of control. It’s seriously compromising the quality of education at my son’s wonderful school,” said Andrea Mata, mother of a 3rd-grader in Manhattan. “Too much time is spent on test prep, and everything else – notably science, social studies, and our school’s entire dual language curriculum – has become secondary,” added Ms. Mata. She has decided to take action; her son will not take the state language arts test this week.

Ms. Mata is not alone in her anger and frustration. Parents in the city and elsewhere across the country have begun to unite with teachers and administrators to fight high-stakes testing through a spate of new organizations and campaigns.¹ But unlike Ms. Mata, most New York City parents who oppose the tests are reluctant to “opt out” because of possible repercussions for their child, their child’s teachers, and their school. New York does not allow parents to legally opt out of state-mandated standardized tests as Pennsylvania and California do.

Although only a handful of parents are likely to refuse to have their children tested over the next two weeks, some hope their actions will encourage other parents to join the broader movement to end high-stakes testing. “It’s been difficult to get definitive answers about the consequences of opting out, but we feel so strongly that these tests are hurting our son’s education that we felt compelled to take the risk,” said Robert Kulesz, father of a 3rd-grader in Queens.

Critics of high-stakes testing cite a long list of harmful effects on children and their education. Because the stakes are so high, schools have narrowed curricula and neglected non-tested subjects. Teachers are rewarded for high test scores rather than for inspiring a love of learning, fostering creativity, or encouraging critical and interdisciplinary thinking. Students know that doing well on standardized tests is highly valued, which creates undue pressure and anxiety. As the length of the tests increases, so does the stress, especially for younger children who have a harder time sitting still for long periods and for children with extended testing time to accommodate learning issues. Critics also point to the vast resources expended on testing when the city has lost thousands of teachers and class sizes are increasing.

¹ In addition to [Change the Stakes](http://Changethestakes.org), other organizations that oppose high-stakes testing include [Time Out from Testing](#), [United Opt Out](#), [Parents Across America](#), [Save Our Schools](#) and [Fair Test](#).

Despite the rising tide of opposition to high-stakes tests, the city and state already have plans to implement more: New York is part of a consortium of states working to develop a common set of K-12 assessments in English and math to be given throughout the school year.² New local assessments also are being developed for earlier grades and in subjects like the arts.³

According to Janine Sopp, a parent who is active in Change the Stakes and opting her 3rd grader out of this year's exams, resistance against high-stakes testing is likely to grow in the months and years ahead unless officials at the federal, state, and local levels heed mounting opposition. "Parents and teachers are frustrated because our concerns about what high-stakes testing is doing to public education have been ignored or even dismissed. Officials who keep upping the ante have little or no classroom experience and typically send their own children to private schools but somehow think they know what's best for public schoolchildren," said Ms. Sopp, whose daughter attends the Brooklyn New School.

Parents will get another chance to opt their children out of standardized tests before the school year is over. According to the State Education Department, most schools will be invited to serve as field testing sites for Pearson, the for-profit test development contractor. The field tests, which are scheduled for June, will be administered in only one or two grades per school.⁴ They allow the test company to try out sample questions for use on future exams but serve no educational purpose for the children taking them.

To schedule interviews with parents opting out of this year's tests, call Janine Sopp (917-541-6062) or Andrea Mata (646-831-3903).

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[Change the Stakes](http://changethestakes.org) (changethestakes.org), 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 these tests in New York City. 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.

² The consortium is the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, <http://www.parcconline.org/>.

³ http://articles.nydailynews.com/2011-07-22/local/29818539_1_arts-education-budget-cuts-high-school-students

⁴ <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/apda/ei/38fieldtest-memo-12.pdf>.