

Change the Stakes

Changestakes.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 20, 2013

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Local Group Calls On Schools Chancellor to Disavow Use of Experimental Test Scores

New York City – With New York’s annual cycle of standardized testing set to begin on April 16th, unrest is rising among public school parents and educators who charge that testing has become excessive and that using standardized test scores to make high-stakes decisions – to promote students to the next grade, fire teachers and close schools – has reduced public schools to test-prep factories. But Change the Stakes (CTS) – an activist group comprised of parents, teachers and teacher educators – argues that this year’s tests are so fundamentally flawed that the scores should not be used at all.

In an open letter to Dennis Walcott, the Chancellor of the Department of Education (DOE), CTS asserts, “The upcoming testing cycle represents an unprecedented grand experiment: the exams, and the standards on which they are based, are new and untested.” The letter calls on the Chancellor “to publicly pledge that scores from this year’s state English Language Arts (ELA) and math tests will not be used to penalize students, teachers or schools.”

Jeff Nichols, a parent member of CTS explains the group’s stand. “Education policy is moving way too fast. New York State adopted a set of national education standards called the ‘Common Core,’ so a new curriculum is being developed and teachers are making a huge transition. Even though the shift is far from complete, the upcoming tests are based on the new standards.” Fred Smith, a retired test expert who worked at the DOE, likens the process to “putting a new car through a crash test after it’s only gone half-way through the assembly line.”

Lauren Cohen, a 5th-grade teacher and also a member of CTS, said that parents are very apprehensive about the implications of the Common Core for this year’s reading and math tests. “At parent/teacher conferences, all parents wanted to talk about was Common Core and the tests. They’re anxious because the DOE is saying that the tests will be harder to pass; that obviously makes parents worry for their kids.” She added, “Our students are really feeling the pressure, but it’s difficult for us as teachers to reassure them when there’s so much uncertainty.”

CTS urges Chancellor Walcott not only to announce that scores on the April exams will not be used for high-stakes decisions about students, teachers and schools but also to publicly affirm that parents have a right to opt their children out of the tests.

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