

CHANGE THE STAKES

8 REASONS TO OPT OUT

- 1. When students, teachers and schools are rewarded for high test scores and punished for low ones, the tests themselves become the focus of education.** Class time is devoted to test prep, which robs children of their natural desire to learn.
- 2. The state exams test only two subjects: English and math.** That encourages schools to give less time to social studies, music, art, world languages, physical education, and even science.
- 3. High-stakes testing undermines important learning.** In its 2011 report to Congress, the *National Academy of Sciences* reviewed America's test-based accountability systems and concluded, "There are little to no positive effects of these systems overall on student learning and educational progress."
- 4. State exams are loaded with poorly written, ambiguous questions.** A statement signed by 545 New York State Principals noted that many teachers and principals could not agree on the correct answers.
- 5. While New York State is paying Pearson millions of dollars, it is massively underfunding NYC public schools.** This is part of a national trend: states cut funding to public schools while pouring millions into new computer systems designed for Common Core tests.
- 6. High-stakes tests don't help students learn or teachers teach.** The results come too late for that. The tests are largely punitive: they punish teachers, students, and schools that don't perform. Low test scores can be used to hold good students back and rate strong teachers as "ineffective" despite high ratings by their principals.
- 7. High-stakes testing undermines teacher collaboration.** Teachers are judged on a curve, which discourages them from helping students in another teacher's class.
- 8. One-size-fits-all tests punish and discourage students who are already vulnerable,** including students of color, English-Language Learners, children with special needs, and students from families living in poverty.

READY? HERE'S HOW

- 1. Notify the principal in writing that you intend to "refuse" the tests on behalf of your child.** Go to the Change the Stakes homepage (changethestakes.org) and download a sample refusal letter.
- 2. Follow up to confirm the arrangements for testing days.** You may be told that New York has no provision for opting out. Although technically true, there is a procedure for handling refusals. In 2014, roughly 60,000 students across the state refused the tests! Insist that your child will NOT participate.
- 3. If you are told that your child MUST take the exams or that your child will have to attend summer school, refer the principal to the Parent Guide issued by the NYC Department of Education in March 2015.** This document states: "If, after consulting with the principal, the parents still want to opt their child out of the exams, the principal should respect the parents' decision and let them know that the school will work to the best of their ability to provide the child with an alternate educational activity (e.g., reading) during testing times." You can find the guide here, <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/FF39E667-D2CB-4B3E-BBCE-60B3B6B200EC/0/2015ELAMathStudentParticipationParentGuide030615.pdf>
- 4. Prior to the first testing day, talk to the principal and teacher about a plan to engage your child in a meaningful activity during testing periods.** Many schools will find a place for test refusers to read or work on homework or allow them to help out in another classroom.
- 5. If you have questions, email us at changethestakes@gmail.com.** We can put you in touch with parents who refused the tests last year or are planning to do so this year.

Change the Stakes, a group of New York City parents and educators, promotes alternatives to high-stakes testing.

changethestakes.org