

## **Your kid's safe refusal will help kids across the city!**

Dear Parents,

As some of you know, I have been a champion of the Opt Out movement—this is my fourth year exercising my right as a parent to refuse to have my children take the NY state tests and have their data used to further bad educational policies.

I'm writing today to ask you to consider opting your child out this year.

These tests are not the tests you may remember from our childhoods. They come with very real, high stakes attached and it's these specific tests I object to, not all tests.

### **What are the stakes attached to the test?**

- The tests are dictating what is taught, rather than measuring what our kids are learning. Our curricula has shifted to adjust to these tests (that's why our kids get so much less social studies instruction now than they did seven years ago—for now, it's not a tested subject) The tests are developed by corporations, not teachers. In fact, teachers can't even see the majority of the questions. Teachers do not receive scores while they still teach your student, and the information they do receive isn't enough to inform their instruction so the assessment does not drive instruction. From what we have been able to see, educators, researchers, and scientists agree the tests are developmentally inappropriate, culturally, and racially biased.
- The pass/fail line is a political creation, not a measure of student learning. The state waits until all students have taken the test and THEN determines where to set the pass/fail line in order to tell whatever story they want to about education that year. Want to prove the tests are working? Put the pass line lower than it was last year!
- The only thing this test does well consistently is identify where poor and rich kids are. High concentrations of poor kids go to schools that are challenged, financially and academically, often in communities of color. And when these kids perform poorly on the test, their schools can get

shut down and a charter school might emerge in its place. Why? Because politicians get donations from a class of financiers who fund charter schools. Draining resources from public schools and privatizing the system leads us to charters, where the norm is canned curricula, rote memorization and severe disciplinary codes, for more and more kids.

### **Why should I care about those stakes? They don't impact my kid.**

- When we send our kids to be part of the public schools, we enter into a contract that we are part of the public, all of us, not just those of us who can afford to live in a certain zip code. We know the system unfairly targets communities with high poverty and communities of color. And we need to say we are not ok with a system that only serves some kids; we should fight for a system that supports all kids. No child should have test prep as their primary learning in schools.
- Even at a school as wonderful as ours, test prep eats into instruction time.
- The shoddy design of the test again means your student's score may have very little to do with their actual learning and growth.

### **But, HIGH SCHOOL! Don't they need scores to place them in classes in high school? And don't they need these tests so they can take the SAT?**

- No, they don't. While some high schools will use test scores to place students into tracked classes, all high schools have other measures for placing students without scores, because all high schools have students without scores.
- Students do not need these particular tests to have practice at taking tests. We did not test like this and many of us took the SATs when we were old enough to do so. We don't start training kids to drive cars before they are ready; we give them time to learn and practice when they are the right age. The same is true for the SAT. Your child will be able to prepare and take the SAT, even if they don't take these tests. Also, it's good to note how many colleges and universities are dropping SAT/ACT scores from their requirements, or speaking out about how limited a metric they find standardized test scores.

### **Opt Out Successes and Next Steps**

- Opt Out has been the only parent action to achieve change in the state tests. Due to parents who refused to provide their children's data to a bad system, Opt Out won

- o shrinking the tests from three to two days
- o outlawed using test scores as the sole factor in grade promotion or school admissions
- o decoupled test scores from teacher evaluations.

**But won't our school will lose funding if we don't have 95% participation?**

- No, we won't. There is mention in the ESSA legislation that refers to a 95% threshold. But that exists to make sure SCHOOLS are not excluding groups of students from taking the test in order to boost their numbers, NOT to suppress parents' right to refuse the test for their children.. In NY State 90% of all districts fail to meet the 95% rate, some due to Opt Out, and none has ever lost funding.

I know this is a lot of information to think about—please reach out to me if you would like to discuss it further. If you want to opt your child out, you just need to send the administration a letter stating so. The administration is required to ask you to come in for a meeting to discuss your decision but you are NOT required to attend that meeting.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider joining families across NY State participating in this powerful and effective act of civic action.

Best,