

My name is Jeanette Deutermann. I am the parent of a fifth grader and a second grader. I became involved in this movement almost before it could be called a movement. I became involved when the high-stakes testing and the test driven curriculum it creates, significantly changed my ten year old's attitude towards school in profoundly negative ways. He went from a child who looked forward to school in the morning and would return home talking about the projects and interesting things that went on in the classroom, to a child who cried at night, had stomach aches, and begged to stay home in the morning. This behavior began abruptly during the middle of his third grade year, two months before his first state assessment. The behaviors continued until the day I told him he would not be participating in the 4th grade state assessments, a little over a year later. The relief on his face told me all I needed to know about what was causing his dramatic shift. But he is not out of the woods just yet. The months and months of inevitable test prepping and lack of adequate time for teachers to fit in any inspiring, passionate, and creative lessons in the months leading up to the exams, will still be a challenge to overcome. There are tens of thousands of stories just like mine, some much worse, from across Long Island and throughout New York State. Parents are waking up to the harsh reality of what a test driven curriculum means for our children. It is how we woke up that is most disturbing of all. We were not sought out by activist groups. We were not approached by educators looking to protect their jobs. We were not bought, coerced, forced, or manipulated. We were just being parents. We saw our children crying at night over months and months of test prepping homework. We heard our children say, "please don't make me go to school". We saw our eight, nine and ten year olds wake in the middle of the night asking, "What will happen if I do bad on the test?". On test days we watched our children break out in hives, refuse to eat, throw up, lock themselves in school bathrooms, shake, sob, and lose their smiles. These are not isolated instances, but an epidemic.

My research into high-stakes testing and data mining, has led me to create the Long Island Opt-Out group. We have over 9,700 Long Island families who have joined, and well over a thousand students who refused last years assessments just on Long Island alone. People say to me "Wow! Almost 10,000 people! Isn't that amazing?". Frankly, no; It is not amazing. What these numbers mean, is that 9,700 parents have experienced the same heartbreak I have, while watching the effects that excessive high-stakes tests have on their young children. 9,700 parents have had to educate themselves on why their elementary school children no longer enjoy going to school. 9,700 parents have been forced to stand up against the unethical policies forced upon the schools they love. 9,700 parents are tired of testing companies, rather than teachers, evaluating their children. 9,700 parents have had enough.

When students test scores are tied to a teachers evaluation, you change the relationship between the teacher and the student. Even the best teachers, who try not to focus on the fact that his/her students scores can end their career, are affected by this harmful practice. Can you imagine the pressure that puts on a young child who loves their teacher? I've been contacted by thousands of teachers, too afraid to speak publicly, who tell me stories of horror from their classrooms, and what these test are doing to their teaching styles and to their students. Stories of kindergarten children who begin crying when the teacher takes out her timer because they know it is yet another local exam they will be administered. Stories of special education students begging through tears for their teacher to PLEASE just help them to understand a word they do not know so they can answer a question on the ELA assessment. Or the third grade teacher who herself

broke down crying when telling me that she feels responsible for the abuse to her students when administering hours upon hours of developmentally inappropriate tests to seven year olds who are being set up to fail. The State Education department will say that they do not understand why the children are reacting this way, when they clearly warned them ahead of time that most of them would fail this year's assessments. In fact they predicted that only 30% of our children would pass, before the test was even given. The SED used phrases such as "jump into the deep end of the pool", and "rip off the band-aide". After the damage was done, the SED tells children "not to feel like failures". But that is exactly what our state's young children feel like. Young children spent three quarters of their year test prepping daily, attend early morning test prepping classes for months leading up to the tests, and are subjected to pep rallies and school songs which include lyrics such as "we will score fours". The day of the tests arrived. Students across New York State sat in front of a test that they did not understand, and could not complete. They left the tests feeling like failures. They were labeled failures by the SED. This was not a failure of our schools, but of the State Education Department's mandates that are choking the life out of our students, teachers, and schools. The SED tells us they have set the bar high to align with the path to college readiness. Why is it then that hundreds of eighth graders across Long Island scored one's and two's on the eighth grade math test, yet when taking the algebra regents two months later, scored above 80, meeting the state's college ready standard! It just doesn't make sense. How can we tell an eighth grader they are not ready for ninth grade, but they are ready for college? The bar for proficiency has been set artificially high.

This needs to end, and we cannot afford to wait. Parents have been backed into a corner. We allowed changes to happen in our schools through this regents reform movement without realizing the damage that was to come. Many have said these reforms will fail by their own right. But by then, the damage to my children will have already been done. My 10 year old is already counting the years he has left before he will no longer be forced to go to school. "College and career ready" will be of no use for the tens of thousands of students who will burn out long before their college days are upon them. Inferior teaching to the test practices that dominate the school year are a direct result of tying teacher evaluations to our children's test scores. Through the regents reform movement, the education system of New York, which has once been a source of pride for teachers, parents, students, and citizens, is now one of fear, anger, humiliation, depersonalization, frustration, and sorrow. This movement to end high-stakes testing and data mining is growing rapidly. I have had close to a thousand new members join just over the past few weeks. We are committed. We are organized. We are not going away.

New York State's children need you to save them; and they need to be saved now. Help us stop high-stakes tests tied to teacher evaluations. Help us protect our children's private records and data. Help us save our public education system. Please help us restore the love of learning to our children.

Thank you,
Jeanette Deutermann

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead