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New York defends standardized tests for students as movement against them builds

Parent organizers protested against New York's standardized testing in Harlem Thursday, and talked of the stress it caused children and the time it took away from learning. Some others parents in the city agree, as the number of students being opted out of the tests has tripled in some areas. But state officials say the test results are important because they are used to promote students, and evaluate school performance and educators.

BY ERIK BADIA , BEN CHAPMAN , CORKY SIEMASZKO / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS /

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They are just saying no — to state testing.

The revolt against the education overlords in Albany was gathering steam Thursday as parent organizers at Public School 368 in Harlem said they will not subject their kids to the annual English Language Arts (ELA) and math exams that begin next week.

Kimberly Casteline, whose 8-year-old son attends the school, said the tests are unfair.

“A child can have a bad day, a child can be a bad test taker,” said the Fordham University professor. “Test taking does not equate to learning and that’s where we’re getting these two concepts conflated.”

Casteline and the other refuseniks believe the emphasis on standardized exams takes the joy out of learning and forces teachers to teach to the tests.

“I decided to opt my son out of the test after realizing that he was going to spend six valuable days of the school year taking the test, and even more days



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More and more parents are opting their children out of taking New York's standardized tests, call them time-consuming stress inducers.

preparing for the test," Casteline said.

Jasmine Batista, who has two sons the school, said the test needlessly stressed out her 10-year-old.

"He was concerned that he would not go on to the next grade," she said. "He was crying, he had no appetite, he couldn't sleep. He was so happy when that test was done."

Now her 8-year-old is feeling the angst.

"My third-grader is now also stressed out because of what he saw his older brother go through," she said.

Donnie Rotkin, a former public school teacher who is now an academic coach at two elementary schools in northern Manhattan, echoed the worried moms.

"Too many schools spend weeks, months, narrowly focused on preparing kids for these tests," said Rotkin.

While surveys show that many public school parents share those sentiments, so far very few have yanked their kids out of the classroom on testing days.

Last year, 5,100 of the 1.2 million students who were supposed to take the tests statewide didn't do so, officials said.

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State Education Department spokesman Dennis Tompkins defended the testing as “one of many tools that should be used to measure student growth and help inform instruction.”

“The year, the parents of more than a million students across the state will ‘opt-in’ to the state assessments,” he said.

But the rebellions in schools like P.S. 368 are spreading across the city and gaining in strength, the anti-testing advocacy group Change the Stakes claims.

Two years ago, 113 city students opted out of state tests. Last year, the number grew to 276. And this year, the group estimates the number of students defying the education lords in Albany will triple — perhaps exceeding 1,000.

At the Brooklyn New School, well over 200 students — nearly 80% of students in testing grades — are skipping the exams this year, the group said.

Over at the Earth School in Manhattan, the refusal rate has climbed to 50% of the students compare to 30% last year, the advocates claimed.

Out in Brooklyn at P.S. 446 in the Brownsville section, more than two-dozen parents of third-graders have submitted refusal letters.

In Fort Greene, at the Academy of Arts of Letters, the number of third-graders opting out of the tests climbed to 40 — a 70% increase over last year.

The movement against testing first flickered last year when the state introduced tougher new examinations aimed at raising education standards in New York.

Scores immediately took a nosedive across the city and state, falling from a 70% pass rate to 30%.

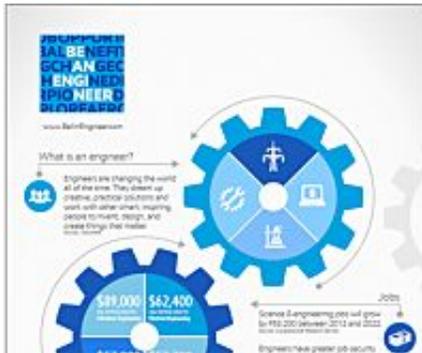
Administered for roughly one hour per day over six days, spread out over five

weeks, the results are used in decisions to promote students, evaluate school performance and educators, and figure into bonuses for school staffers whose students do well on the tests.

There are no official consequences for the kids who opt out of the tests. Instead of being judged on how well they did on the standardized exams, they will be evaluated on their school work.

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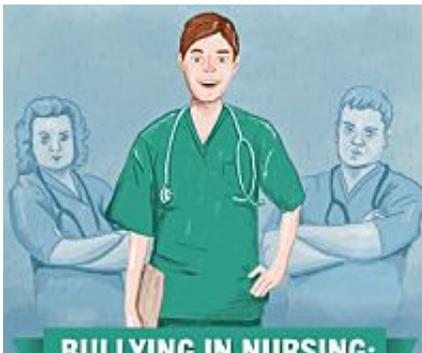
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