"That teacher doesn’t have to spend the whole week teaching kids how to bubble in circles. She can teach," said Casteline.

With many kids at Hamilton Heights School opting out of the test, the classrooms feel more relaxed, said parents. In one classroom, 20 of the 24 students are not taking the math test for the second year in a row. The number would represent a sevenfold increase of the 276 students who opted out last year, according to the Department of Education.

"There are many other parents who are afraid to speak up," she said. "We want teachers teaching and our child’s interesting work to show they won.

When she tried to opt out of the tests last year, Mergenthaler said administrators told her that her son would be left back. She fought back and won.

"I know that there is increased attention on the state tests this year, and that this has generated some frustration," said Fariña. "We will continue to listen to these concerns and consider them as we move forward. We trust that you will help your schools create an environment that is respectful of the diversity of opinion surrounding this issue," Fariña wrote.

"Parents understand testing is not teaching," said Jane Hirschmann of Time Out From Testing.

"We want parents to know they have a choice," said Kimberly Casteline, the mother of an 8-year-old third-grader at Hamilton Heights School. Students who opt out of the tests are instead evaluated on a portfolio of their work from the year, which is submitted by their teachers.

"I hope that this is an opportunity for schools to say this year is going to be different," said Casteline.

"If you’re a teacher and your job depends on your students doing well on the test, what are you going to do in the classroom?" said Casteline.

"That’s how the system is set up and that’s what we want to change."