



Statement of Concern Regarding High Stakes Testing

The Niagara Region PTA developed the following statements of concern to address the current issues our children, families, and schools are facing regarding the current educational reforms related to High Stakes Testing, teacher evaluations, and school funding. Our goal is to develop these statements into a state wide resolution in 2013

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STATEMENT 1:

To the members of the State PTA Convention:

We are all here today because we care deeply about our children and want to ensure that they receive the best possible educational experiences.

Based on research and direct evidence from our membership, we in the Niagara Region PTA believe the State Education Department's high stakes testing of our students and teachers is harming our students and our schools. More than two decades of scientific research demonstrates that the current testing regimes yield unreliable measures of student learning and have a negative effect on both students and teachers.

These tests are invalid measures of student achievement and teacher effectiveness. Significant research shows that high-stakes testing actually lowers the quality of education due to "teaching to the test"; narrowed curriculum opportunities, increased emotional distress among children; increased dropout levels; the lack of creativity and critical thinking skills and the total disregard for the individual needs, talents and differences of our children. These tests also do not take into account the socio-economic conditions our schools, students and families face. When students are hungry, scared or in difficult situations, academic testing is not their top priority. Nor should it be. Schools should be safe havens where students feel secure and cared for. Not places where students are made to feel inadequate, stressed and unsuccessful.

All students in grades K-12 are now required to endure countless hours of state testing and local examinations throughout the year. The time devoted to this testing and the test preparation takes away from meaningful learning experiences that develop our students' many talents. We believe it would be more meaningful to participate in authentic, hands-on real world experiences rather than drill and kill high stakes testing that takes the joy and creativity out of learning and are not reliable or valid measures of student success. We strongly advocate for a better system of accountability for our children and our teachers.



STATEMENT 2:

As parents of and advocates for students, and public education, the Niagara Region PTA has worked diligently to research the impact that high-stakes testing has on students and their educational experience. Through this research, we have found nothing to support the connection between the use of standardized tests and improvements in student learning; or, in enhancing the likelihood that students will leave high school ready for college or a career. From across our region, we have heard the many voices of concern -- from our students, teachers, parents and administrators -- expressing their fear and trepidation of these high stakes test-based reforms. That is why we are here!

Our research tells us that these corporate-style reforms have a negative impact on student learning and school culture. Policies that use tests to punish students and teachers are turning a caring profession into a callous corporate business model that puts the interests of students and parents last. The Niagara Region PTA is against a corporate reform model that treats our children like products on an assembly line. Our children are not products on an assembly line, and our teachers are not assembly-line workers!

This reform creates a negative culture. Correlating these tests to teacher evaluations is inappropriate and induces low morale, and takes the teachers focus away from student's needs. To take the vast complexities associated with teaching and learning and reduce them into a single number with no regard for individual differences or widely varying social circumstances is inappropriate and dehumanizing. As PTA members we have a responsibility to address this issue based on our Mission that clearly states "Every child deserves an education designed to meet their needs."

Families are reporting an increased level of stress in their children when they should be seeing joy and love for learning. We've heard from scores of parents that their kitchen tables have become the scene for anxiety, stress, tension, and tears over the increased workload put on our children to constantly prepare for these tests. This is just wrong! Many parents are removing their children from testing and the "Opt Out" movement is growing by the thousands. The Niagara Region PTA requests that the New York State PTA be a strong advocate for the education and well-being of every child and adopt an official position to eliminate the misuse of testing and advocate for a system of appropriate accountability for our students and teachers.

This is truly in the best interests of our students and the welfare of public education.



STATEMENT 3:

New York School districts are experiencing extreme financial stress, resulting in severe budget cuts directly impacting the education of our children. The current state mandated testing regimes are forcing hundreds of *successful* school districts to replace curriculum, best practices, and assessments that were effective for decades with state mandated testing and staff evaluation systems with no evidence of increased student achievement or enhanced teacher quality.

These current reforms are having a negative impact on our students and the culture within our schools. Race to the Top funding runs out after the next academic school year. Who will fund these mandates when the money runs out? What proven programs will we have to sacrifice in order to pay for this unproven "reform?"

At a time when school districts are struggling to pay their basic bills, why would we put this additional burden on our communities?

The State Education Department describes the current reforms as "Building a Plane in the Air". A scary metaphor...These reforms affect the well-being of our children and should be built on **solid ground**, with **proven plans**, by **skilled practitioners**. We don't want our children being flown in the unproven, costly and dangerous plane that these reforms represent. Our children and our communities deserve better!

We feel strongly that the millions of taxpayer dollars being paid to corporations to create flawed testing and evaluation instruments should be returned to local school districts so we can directly provide for the needs of our students. We know what is best for our students and our communities, not big corporations or politicians!

We have a responsibility to advocate for the best educational practices for our students and for the welfare of public education. The Niagara Region PTA encourages the NY State PTA to work with us to finalize a resolution against the misuse of high stakes testing and form a more appropriate system based on the specific needs of our students and our communities. Every child deserves an education designed to meet their individual needs in a nurturing and caring environment. Let's work together as our mission states "To secure adequate laws for the care and protection of our children" and develop reforms that allow our schools to succeed and our children to flourish. Thank you.