

Community Vo/ces FOR Public Education!

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60 HOUSTON PARENTS TO BOYCOTT HIGH STAKES STATE TESTS ***3rd - 8th Grade Parents in 35 Schools Refuse to Allow Their Kids to be Tested***

HOUSTON -- In protest of the damage high-stakes testing is causing to their children's education, teachers, and schools, 60 parents at 35 Houston area schools will refuse to allow their children to take state standardized tests this week. The spread of the testing boycott marks a new phase in the battle to reclaim schools from the "test and punish" model dominating public education today.

Parents in HISD and seven other Houston area school districts will opt out (keep their children home or send them to a day of creative learning) from the state STAAR exams. In an act of mass civil disobedience last week, parents of more than 175,000 children opted out of New York state's English exam. Katy ISD and Arlington ISD recently passed strongly worded resolutions calling for an end to the use of high stakes assessments.

Sonia Olvera, parent of a fourth-grader and a seventh-grader in Aldine ISD reports that, "I have watched as my daughter, who once loved school, now comes home complaining about all the test prep and emphasis on testing. She is stressed and worried that if she does not pass the STAAR test, her teacher will get in trouble. Opting out sends a powerful message to school boards and state legislators that they must end overtesting."

Christine Diaz, parent of a third-grader at Wharton Dual Language Academy, said, "It's unfair for HISD to be the only district in Texas (except for the TEA 2014-15 pilot districts) using our children's test scores to evaluate teachers. In what other careers do nine-year-olds determine if a professional is fired or not? Fifteen years of endless testing has done nothing to improve student achievement. This policy must stop."

Unlike other states, in Texas, if students attend school during STAAR testing, they must take the tests even if their parents submit a "refuse to test" letter. Parents who opt their children out of testing must take off from work to care for their children who would otherwise be in school.

Community Voices for Public Education (CVPE) has spurred the local opt out movement by educating parents on their right to opt out their children from the tests and offering students opting out with meaningful instruction by certified teachers on testing days while parents are at work.

The educational activities will occur at Live Oak Friends Meeting House in the Heights, 1318 W. 26th St., from 7:45 AM - 3:15 PM Monday to Wednesday (7:30 AM drop off is available). The suggested date for media visuals is Tuesday, April 21 at 7:45 am when parents drop off students, 10:00 am or 3:15 pm when parents pick up their children.

Sarah Rivlin, a certified English teacher who will be teaching at the Friends Meeting House on all three days, said, "Having witnessed the harmful, dehumanizing effects of high stakes testing on children and the learning

environment, I decided I could no longer be a part of it. So I became a conscientious objector. I told my principal that I would not administer the test and that I would instead be taking personal days during the STAAR in order to offer instruction to children whose parents opt them out."

HISD parents joining the boycott live in seven of nine HISD school board districts. They are represented by Trustees Anna Eastman (D1), Rhonda Skillern-Jones (D2), Paula Harris (D4), Mike Lunceford (D5), Greg Meyers (D6), Harvin Moore (D7), and Juliet Stipeche (D8). Their children attend fourteen HISD schools: Burrus Elementary (D2), Coop Elementary (D1), Garden Oaks Montessori (D1), Grady MS (D7), Hamilton MS (D1), Helms Elementary (D1), Herrera Elementary (D1), Hogg MS (D1), Horn Elementary (D5), Johnston MS (D5), Lovett Elementary (D5), Young Men's College Prep (D2), Wharton K-8 Dual Language (D8), and Wilson Montessori (D7).

Students in the Aldine, Clear Creek, Conroe, Cy-Fair, Humble, Katy, and Spring Branch school districts are also opting out.

Donna Reid, mother of a seventh-grader opting out from Johnston MS and an education researcher, said, "It's time to end the obsession with high stakes testing accountability. Our children need meaningful instruction, not endless tests that narrow the curriculum, are developmentally unsound, and are being improperly used to fire teachers, shame children and close schools. Students' progress should be assessed with low stakes diagnostic tests that informs teaching, but relentless benchmarking for high stakes testing must go."

Community Voices for Public Education (CVPE) is a grassroots activist organization of parents, students, teachers and community members who promote community-led, progressive school reform.

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