

Anthony Cody
Save Our Schools March and National Call to Action
12711 Brookpark Rd.
Oakland, CA 94619

June 10, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington, DC 20500-0004

Dear President Obama,

On March 28, you gave us all hope when, at a town hall meeting, you answered student Luis Zelaya's question with these 338 words:

"... we have piled on a lot of standardized tests on our kids. Now, there's nothing wrong with a standardized test being given occasionally just to give a baseline of where kids are at.

"Malia and Sasha, my two daughters, they just recently took a standardized test. But it wasn't a high-stakes test. It wasn't a test where they had to panic. I mean, they didn't even really know that they were going to take it ahead of time. They didn't study for it, they just went ahead and took it. And it was a tool to diagnose where they were strong, where they were weak, and what the teachers needed to emphasize.

"Too often what we've been doing is using these tests to punish students or to, in some cases, punish schools. And so what we've said is let's find a test that everybody agrees makes sense; let's apply it in a less pressured-packed atmosphere; let's figure out whether we have to do it every year or whether we can do it maybe every several years; and let's make sure that that's not the only way we're judging whether a school is doing well.

"Because there are other criteria: What's the attendance rate? How are young people performing in terms of basic competency on projects? There are other ways of us measuring whether students are doing well or not."

"So what I want to do is—one thing I never want to see happen is schools that are just teaching to the test. Because then you're not learning about the world; you're not learning about different cultures, you're not learning about science, you're not learning about math. All you're learning about is how to fill out a little bubble on an exam and the little tricks that you need to do in order to take a test. And that's not going to make education

interesting to you. And young people do well in stuff that they're interested in. They're not going to do as well if it's boring."

A week after you said this, the organizers of the Save Our Schools March created a petition, which states the following:

Our public schools need support. President Obama understands what his daughters need -- occasional low stakes tests used to find out their strengths and weaknesses, and a rich learning environment with lots of engaging projects. Unfortunately the policies of the President's Department of Education are moving us in the wrong direction, towards more tests, with even higher stakes.

If we continue down this path, schools will be completely driven by tests. Scarce resources will be spent on huge expenditures for computers, tests and scoring software, and precious school time will be wasted. Our students will become ever more focused on tests, and less on authentic learning.

With this petition we ask President Obama to bring his education policies in line with the vision he shared on March 28, at the town hall meeting. We invite him to endorse the principles of the Save Our Schools March and National Call to Action, and to speak at our rally in Washington, DC, on July 30, 2011.

Thus far 1,570 individuals have signed the petition, and 180 have offered their thoughts as well. Below are the messages from petition signers, followed by additional letters from teachers and parents.

Rosalie Friend

All children deserve the opportunity to learn. So called school reform ideas based on business practices do not work for schools, because children are required to attend schools whether they want to or not, and schools must find ways to engage all children regardless of background, cultural capital, or wealth. The present achievement tests are useful for determining whether a child mastered a particular set of lessons. They cannot measure what part of that test score was due to the school and what part was due to the child's motivation, family, prior learning opportunities or other factors.

Susan Soroka

Dear President Obama, The words you spoke during your campaign election of 2008 stirred me to believe that "Yes, We Can"... change is coming! As a lifelong educator (30 years elementary and middle classroom teaching/7 years full-time lecturer in college of education/1 year supervisor of student teachers), I am so aware for needed change in our K-12 educational system. NCLB's intent is strong- ALL children deserve quality

education. ALL children deserve the belief that they are valued, cared for, and able to learn. Yet, the testing focus deprives so many children of what education/learning is all about- a desire and thirst to know. I am so hopeful you will attend to the messages sent from us throughout the USA who strive to educate children in a kind, invigorating and accountable manner. But, we need your help to ensure policies support us in this endeavor. I am still hopeful of change. Yes! We Can!

Doreen Puchalski

Middle class and underprivileged children are not disposable. No education means no opportunity.

Caryl Crowell

In a few weeks, I'll be introducing teachers to the Common Core Standards at the request of my county's Regional Support Center, under the County Superintendent of Education's office. I do so with very ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, I support the new focus on comprehension of a variety of texts at all grade levels, something missing under NCLB, and the emphasis also on writing across the curriculum. On the other hand, I've visited the Department of Education's site and read the blueprint for the implementation of the Core Curriculum Standards. I know what's coming - even more onerous testing that we currently endure - something our students, teachers, and schools don't need to tell us how our children are learning. If the current blueprint stands without significant changes as specified in this petition, I won't be able to cast my vote for President Obama when he runs for a second term.

Debbie Lera

I am an educator, trainer of teachers, and author of teacher resource books. And I voted for Obama. I continue to support Obama, but I am troubled by his position on education. I feel very let down by the contradiction between the choices made for the Obama girls and the choices made for public school children. The situation in education has never been so dire in our country, and it is happening at a time that I have a 4-year-old who will be entering school soon. High-stakes testing has seriously undermined the joy in schools and commitment to authentic learning. Knowing what I know, I have no trust in our public school system. After devoting my entire life and career to public education, I now feel as though it is not an option for my own daughter. It's a tragedy.

Angelina Duran

Children are the foundation of our future and they deserve the very best education possible. Educators also need the respectful guidance and expectations to follow in order

to appropriately deliver educational skills that will prepare all students to reach their maximum potential. Thank you for caring about our nations children and educators!

Gina Dal Fuoco

Dear Mr. President, I am a strong support of you and your presidency and I am begging you to stand up for public education. I am a teacher in California public schools and a mother of two. It breaks my heart to see the education my own children are receiving from the VERY school I teach at! Please help us give something better to our kids!

Sincerely, Gina Dal Fuoco

Carolyn Peterson

The current plans for educational reform resemble "reforms du jour." Educational fads have come and gone and then sometimes return again, but current reform measures are likely to destroy public education rather than improve it. In the past, reforms looked at curriculum, methodology, culture, parent and student obstacles and then sought ways to correct barriers to educational achievement. Now all the factors that hinder educational success, but over which schools and educators have no control such as poverty are discarded as irrelevant and the teacher has become the sole target. Now reform focuses on firing teachers and administrators. Where do you think you will find quality replacements? In Indiana, the legislature has passed and the governor signed a new teacher evaluation bill which will ultimately replace everyone. Through annual evaluations, teachers are placed in one of four quartiles. Only those who are in the top quartile are guaranteed to be rehired, receive salary increases, and merit pay. All the rest are in various levels of risk. Already Indiana teacher morale is low. This bill will stress teacher collaboration and increase negative competition -- put down and refuse to help your colleague so that you may place higher. Teacher retirement is at an all time high. Younger teachers are looking for alternate careers. Is this really what we want for public education and educators?

Peggy McNabb

Come on Mr. President...you can do it. Yes you can.

Susan Harrison

President Obama, I had such high hopes for the direction education would take under your leadership. I have been very disappointed. I had hoped that NCLB would be left way behind, and that once again classroom time could be spent in engaging students in

creative learning opportunities rather than test prep for low expectations. I am very disappointed in Sec. Duncan. I cannot believe that his mother, as an educator, supports his race to more testing! I have been a creative educator for over 30 years. It is now nearly impossible to do inquiry and project based learning because our elementary school day is all chopped up into time slots geared for test prep. Is this what you want for the youth of our country? Please join with concerned educators in the Save Our Schools March on July 30th.

Mary Healey

The corruption that takes place in the WTO and the World Bank on an international level is horrendous. The push on standardized tests and mind control of our children is an outcome of their work. Unless educators become strong enough to rely on themselves and demand that they and not the Gov. do the teaching, the Global Society Governance of these two organizations will have complete control of the Global Structure!

Dee Camp-White

President Obama, I voted for you. I believe in you. Please align your education policies for our public schools with your vision for your own daughters.

Kathryn Wanicek

Dear Mr. President, Please stop the focus of testing to drive teaching. We need to assist our children in the development of higher level thinking and authentic learning.

Dr. Sandra Hunt

Educators around the U.S. worked hard on your election because we believed you would move us beyond the failed policies of No Child Left Behind. Instead it feels like more of the same in triplicate! Please reflect upon the educational experiences you and Michelle carefully researched your children and promote those for all children in America.

Shaun-Adrian Chofla

As an interventionist, early childhood education professional, and college educator - I am very concerned with the direction of decontextualized and standardized assessment. Professionals in the fields of child development and education are in agreement that these are not authentic forms of assessment. I fear our political leaders are not listening to children, families, and educators, but to higher education and corporate elite. This may result in short-term political gains, but at what costs to education! If you listen close - you will hear a common voice among children, families, and educators - these

assessments are not supporting children - they are hurting them.

Myra Hutchinson

Movement should be towards more science labs, music, art, less testing.

Carolyn Spence

Dear President Obama, I am in my 39th year as an elementary level educator. I am presently a literacy specialist at a Title I school. A majority of our students speak another language and many enter school without the benefit of preschool. Our children hail from many cultures and are wonderful in so many ways. With the onslaught of high-stakes testing, many of them spend their early academic years labeled as "lagging behind". Can you imagine being 7 or 8 and already "failing"? Our teaching staff is motivated and works hard in spite of the challenges our children face at school and at home. We understand the need for accountability and monitor our students' progress closely. But I worry that, if we use high stakes testing data to make judgments about a teacher's effectiveness, good teachers will abandon the schools that need them the most. They will not want to be labeled "failures" and will preserve their careers by teaching less needy populations. That would be a tragedy. We don't need more bureaucracy. We need a society that truly values education and understands that meeting the needs of all children is not a recipe to be legislated by distant parties. I know you think in depth about all the challenges that face our nation. This issue of high stakes testing must be re-examined at the federal and state levels. Please help us!

angella morris

Please help us in Florida. Our governor is this generation's Hughie Long.

Sergio Martin

We need to move away from more tests and into creating the environment for thought and creativity. Only through promoting an environment where education is inspiring, will students reach their highest potential moving this country to become the engine for inventors and enlightened thinkers that understand and go beyond the vision of our forefathers.

Jeremy Kaplan

"Accountability" does not = standards!!

Teresa Zapp

I am an ECE professor with 24 yrs. experience teaching ECE in the public school system.

I left that job because I couldn't stand to see the children suffer through misguided curriculum set for them by people who don't read research. I chose to work with pre-service teachers in an effort to educate them to continue to fight the good fight for our youngest learners. Just read the research...that's all you need to do.

Sherwood Waldron

As a child psychoanalyst for many years, with a research background as well, I heartily endorse the need for a less "one size fits all" approach to education.

Norma Gentner

This testing craze began in the Bush era when George Bush wanted to help his relative make hundreds of thousands of dollars for his test making company. Bush's Texas was at the bottom of the U.S. list of performance by schools when he was Governor, and he brought that same non-research based mentality with him to Washington. As a recently retired teacher from New York State, I am proud of the accomplishments of my 33 years of teaching. I served my final 13 years as an Enrichment Teacher (similar to Gifted & Talented) in an Elementary School. It was my responsibility to encourage students to think outside the box, or bubble in this case. It was also my responsibility to create problem solvers and critical thinkers. My students received numerous awards---many at the national level. It is this kind of challenge that we need to pose to our teachers and students, not one of becoming "Masters of Bubbology." If our children are to compete in the global classroom, we need to have them solving real world problems. Taking tests where the students are provided with choices (multiple choice responses, or the so-called "bubble tests") will not help them to consider choices other than those presented. Mr. President, isn't THIS what you would want for your children? Do not choose the "Bush Bubble."

Dianne Pape

I gladly voted for Barack Obama, and still support him. I implore him to support our public school children. They are no less deserving than his own daughters.

james zatlukal

I am a retired educator with 50 years of professional experience as teacher, principal, superintendent, NYS State Education Dept. and a former candidate for the NYS Board of Regents - NCLB - teach/test is wrong!

Nancy Petru

As my public servant, I expect you to selflessly pursue those policies and practices that

make America great, and perpetuate them for our future generations. If your daughters deserve a rich education, so do the underprivileged children that I currently teach. They deserve the same opportunities and resources as your children. They are all full of potential, just waiting to be noticed, just waiting for someone to help them grow, just waiting to blossom into beautiful people full of integrity and hope. The seeds are there! Please save our public schools. Remove the educrats and the political agendas. Let us return to an era of educating our children, of expecting them to be honest, caring individuals.

Andy Reed

Enough is enough. We need to be encouraging to do more thinking, not more testing.

Beth Waleski

These tests are more than bad, they're positively immoral!

Barbara Lakin

Please give us the same education that you want for your own children. Tests have been proven to not be the answer. If we want to be competitive globally we need to make sure that education is a priority. Let our children be innovators, not test takers.

Carol Brooks

Dear President Obama, I have dedicated my life to educating our children but if my governor, Rick Scott, has his way, I will be destitute. This January it will be thirty years that I began teaching in Miami. If he eliminates DROP, I will not be eligible to enter after this July 1st. I am a single parent who has raised two children on a minimal salary, left them at daycare until closing time so that I could stay at work late, gone into school with pneumonia, cracked ribs, etc. so that I would be there for my students and not a substitute teacher. I could go on and on regarding the sacrifices I've made but nobody is listening. Obviously none of us entered this profession to hit the jackpot, but to worry about my retirement and how I am going to live, after THIRTY years of service is beyond comprehension ! We have become the new "scapegoats" in America, blaming us for all of societies problems. I'm sure people on "Wall Street" aren't sitting around trying to figure out how to avoid foreclosure as I currently am.

Respectfully, Carol Brooks Greynolds Park Elementary Miami, Fl.

Kate Menken

My research has indicated time and again the deleterious effects of high stakes testing under No Child Left Behind on students who are English Language Learners. Testing policies have worsened rather than improved the schooling of immigrant students learning English - the results for these students have overwhelmingly been harmful and

punitive. We need change.

karen koenig

Children need to learn facts, figures, the arts, music, history, science, physical education - they do not need to learn how to take tests, tests and more test. There has got to be a better way to measure the knowledge of our students than subjecting them to this torture. It is not healthy for them both mentally and physically.

Peter Veronesi

Mr. Obama, You would never subject your own children to the myopic curriculum classrooms that exist these days in schools because teachers jobs are on the line of their kids don't pass tests! It is RIDICULOUS! If you want to know how well kids have learned, average the >15 grades from the last three years of high school. TRUST TEACHERS TO DO THE BEST for their students! Standardized tests equal standardized minds that cannot solve the problems we will face in the future! They do ensure employees for the service industries though! Is making sure we have a population of non-thinking people a goal? That is what high-stakes standardized tests do to kids!!! Please STOP Them! Peter

Ben Duncan

In New York, standardized testing and charter schools are taking over our public school system. Children need dedicated teachers and a creative environment, not an arbitrary catch-all to determine their success.

Michael Billingsley

I strongly supported the election of President Obama in 2008. I am a college professor and was able to rally legions of students in support as well. However, if the decisions of his nominated representatives continue to favor high-stakes testing for teacher and student accountability, I will find a new candidate to support in 2012. Please Mr. Obama, get it right on this one. Make the tough decisions and back up the platform for which you were elected.

Rebecca Norgrove

Dear President Obama, Follow through and make the educational dream you have for your daughters, available to all public school children across this country.

Thank you,

Rebecca Norgrove Rochester Hills, MI

patricia sullivan-rothberg

We ask the president Obama join us in an important discourse over our public schools. Testing needs to be limited and legislation needs to change. Please come to our march and fight for our public schools.

Randy Harrison

The Professional Educators of Indiana are being forced to work in a deteriorating educational system that will mimic nothing more than a fast food industry as the teachers will not need licenses and will not be compensated according to their degrees and professional development. Through gimmick terms like parent choice, merit pay, vouchers, charter expansion and tax dollars following students many urban areas and eventually wealthier areas of Indiana will have a broken educational system in which anyone will be deemed a professional educator. Yes the professionals I work with are that, professional, and we care about kids. Eventually we will be forced out of the profession as we will become professionals in poverty because our state's and our nation's economies are broken. Thousands here are being laid off or forced into massively decreased incomes as teachers, yet politicians and big business never get hurt and continue to prosper even as gas hits four dollars or more a gallon. For years teachers have been told to do more with less for our students and we have. Now we are being forced to less for ourselves and our own families because we chose this compassionate profession.

Patricia Hinchey

How could you possibly want LESS for poor kids than you want for your own kids? Your appointment of Arne Duncan was an enormous betrayal of many in the education community who supported Candidate Obama believing the promise of real change. Begin to make amends by starting to bring your actions in line with your rhetoric.

Janice Pardy

I want my child to be an exciting classroom where children are treated like children not pawns in highstake testing. I want my child to be as important as your daughters. Please put muscle behind your words.

Lisa Guisbond

What you want for your children is what I want for my own children and all of our children in this country. We can't all go to Sidwell Friends, but we can release our public schools from the chain of incessant high-stakes testing and devote our resources to things that will lift up our schools and not grind them down.

Michael Hladio

Mr. President, your daughters have the opportunity to go to school in a place where, as you said, they are not constantly under the weight of high stakes testing. America's kids deserve the same opportunity to be prepared for a rapidly changing world.

Michael Zimmer

Teaching is about kids. Testing is never about kids. Education is about kids. Testing is never about kids. Learning is about Kids. Testing is never about kids.

Kathleen Elliott

Mr. President, As a teacher and a parent, I have been more frustrated with your administration's position on educational policy than I was with the previous administration - simply because I had expected better of you. Your choices for your daughters indicate that you understand what is best for children, and yet you choose something different for my child. It is not too late to change that choice. Please join the campaign I wage every day to save not just my school, but my students.

Peggy Lohr

Dear President Obama, I am a huge supporter of you! I voted for you and I still proudly wear my Obama bumper stickers on my car for all to see! Please help teachers and students at this very crucial time. Please make education a priority. I have faith in you and your great efforts to do the right thing.

Paul Crowley

President Obama: You know who that teachers are the experts. Not Oprah. Not Bill Gates. Please listen to us and pressure Arne Duncan to do his job. Trust teachers to be the center of the dialog--not billionaires who are set on privatizing education. (see how well privatizing war and prisons has done!) I voted for you once and I'll vote for you again. You're a good man; do the right thing. thank you, sir

Tony Garcia

I want our education to be saved. I've always wanted to become a teacher, to give back to the community that helped me. I want to teach in Nevada but with all these budget cuts, it makes me uneasy to choose this path where i have no support. It's beyond heartbreaking. SAVE OUR SCHOOLS! -Tony

Rosa Castro

Save our educatin, and our arts program please! :D

JoAnne Clark

Mr. President, I wept with relief when you were elected because I thought I was finally getting my country back. I feel betrayed not just by your stance on education "reform" but by your eagerness to embrace the plutocracy that now defines the United States of America. I beg you, be the man I voted for.

Tom Gevurtz

President Obama, I've been proud of what you are doing for sexual minorities, and creating new jobs. I have been most disappointed that your educational policies have only strengthened what was wrong with "No Child Left Behind". Do children need to show at least one year's growth - YES! Do we focus on making students more like cogs for systems or independent critical and creative thinkers who will be appreciated for the gifts they bring to their communities? You know the answer. Thanks for listening to this veteran teacher of 19 years in low-economic, highly diverse schools.

Gabrielle Kasper-Plack

I have a some terrific ideas. How about being a leader in creating a culture of respect for us hardworking and dedicated teachers? How about standing up for us, and for the children our country? How about ending this insane and inane obsession with standardized testing and scores?

Tamara Kennedy

President Obama, I used to teach English. Now I teach a standardized test. We are no longer developing within our kids a desire for life-long learning. Please help us!
Sincerely, Tamara Kennedy Anderson, Indiana

Jane Watson

President Obama, I hope you can speak at the rally. I know you want the same for America's children as you want for Sasha and Malia. Please also remove Arne Duncan as secretary of education unless you feel Sasha and Malia would do as well in a class of 60 as they do in their current classes.

Linda Pinkett

I am a teacher in an small urban district. We believed and believe in you. Will you believe in us?

Jefferson Petty

I am the founding principal of a Big Picture high school just south of Seattle. We serve many students alienated and I would say abused by traditional modes of assessment that have robbed them of their sense of efficacy as learners. I am dismayed by the rampant over-focusing on high stakes testing in my region and nationally. I urge more emphasis on authentic assessments open to diverse demonstrations of learning. The most important things to assess about how our students learn (and whether they are in fact learning) are the hardest to assess and involve participation by multiple adults who know the student well. High stakes standardized testing generates easy data quantifiable from afar by strangers -- not only of questionable use, but very detrimental to learning.

Hope Gibson

Dear President Obama, I believe we share the same vision in helping to educate our children of America. However, there are several approaches to the reforming education. Nevertheless, we need an approach that will assist public schools in developing and creating accountability. This will not happen by destroying the public school system. We do need to develop and show accountability by connecting the parental role, societal responsibility and the public education realignment through their visions, missions and goals for the needs of the children in both urban and suburban areas. President Obama, I need you to join public education in the fight to save America.

John Wernsdorfer

Perhaps The President should consult with his sister in Hawaii. A successful educator who apparently does not rely on bubble testing.

Ellen Bitkower

Doesn't matter what they say, it's all about the test, all they way down to first grade!

David Krupp

Test-Prep has replaced not only Music and Art but also Science and Social Studies in New York City Schools.

Ashley McPherson

I am in my 3rd year of elementary teaching, and each year my job has been on the line. This year is the worst so far, with the administration handing out reduction in force letters to ALL counselors, music & library teachers, and new teachers in our district. How can we afford to add more testing to the school year when class sizes continually increase, and we cannot provide children with music education or teach them how to find a library book? Furthermore, adding more standardized testing to our already limited schedule is

going to decrease the time teachers spend in other areas. Right now, there is so much pressure on students and teachers to succeed on standardized tests that many teachers I know feel guilty allowing time for their students to do an art project. These tests are taking their toll on the kids, as well. 3rd graders are coming down with headaches and stomachaches from test anxiety, when the only thing they should be worrying about at that age is whether or not they will get to use the good jump rope during recess.

Betty Wignes

As a teacher of 25 years I implore you to take a hard look at public education. Talk to people who have made a difference in education, not legislators. Children who get a well rounded education including the arts don't need to be taught to the test.

Maria Russell

We need to look at all of the underlying issues affecting education; yes, that includes teacher preparation and effectiveness but it also means issues affecting students in their homes and communities. As long as tests are used against teachers and students instead of for them, they will always be high-stakes high-stress and teachers will always be limited to teaching for them.

Catherine Ulmer

Standardized testing should not be the tool by which students are passed to the next grade or retained. You could have a student who makes straight A's all year long who bombs the TAKS test here in Texas due to the very real phenomenon known as test anxiety and is then retained rather than being passed to the next grade. I don't believe this is a fair indicator of a student's knowledge. Less emphasis should be placed on the standardized tests and more placed on going back to teaching the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic.

Sharon Bruton

I am the Campus Testing Coordinator at my high school - a full time job due to the many tests and benchmark tests that students must take to satisfy an administration that want to determine before the real test what the results may mean in terms of funding, etc. It is estimated Texas high school students will lose 45 days of instructional time due to state testing. This is not teaching; this is testing.

Margaret Garrett

Mr. President, Please stop the madness caused by Bush when instituting NCLB. Basing our national education standards on Texas' flawed, twisted statistics that did not reflect reality is leaving most children, and our future, behind.

Verda Goff

Dear President Obama, As I write this I am trying to figure out how to put what I have to say delicately. Since I am not very good at that, here goes. As I think about the 2012 elections, I am in great turmoil. I believed in you, I trusted you, I thought your ideas and dreams were exactly what this country needs. I have not seen the change you promised. Have you ever heard the term "eating your seed crop"? That is what I feel we are doing with all the cuts in education and all this standardized testing. We want the United States of America to be the smartest, most productive country, yet education funding is being cut to the bone. I still believe in you and the promises you ran on in the 1st election. Please follow through! Put our kids' education as top priority! Save our teachers' jobs. Get rid of TAKS testing and get back to the three R's...Reading, wRiting, and aRrithmetic. I am hoping to be able to vote for you again in 2012. Again, I ask you to please follow through on your promises for change. Sincerely, Verda Goff

Sharon LaCroix-Andersen

Please put a stop to this forced school consolidation. Our town is being forced to close our 2 small elementary schools in support of a large school. Please show me the data, studies and research that supports that a larger school with larger classes, increased busing, decreased teachers is in the best interest of our children. Please put a stop to the consolidation.

Christiane Brossi

Please Mr. President, do not let the big corporations own our school and do not turn our schools into private schools. Education should be an institution available to all as the ultimate example of democracy. I voted for you and hope you will bring respect back to teachers because most of us deserve it. Please don't punish all for the failings of a few teachers.

Jacqueline Atkins

President Obama, Please align your educational policies for our public schools with what you know is right for your own two daughters. That is what every parent wants for their children- not endless test preparation and testing wasting precious teaching and learning time.

J. M. Urrutia

All tests currently used to comply with NCLB are designed and constructed to adhere to a Gaussian distribution (aka The Bell Curve). Such a distribution will never have a "100% proficient" population. Even if the "average" of this distribution is made to be the new

"proficient", there will still be 50% of students who will be below average. This is not "the bigotry of soft expectations", it is plain mathematics.

Carol Grimm

By focusing on preparation for the test, much valuable teaching time in critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity is irrevocably lost! The more Texas has tested, the poorer our rankings have been in graduation rates, dropout rates, etc. Let us focus on educating, not testing. The money is better spent!

Karla Franco

President Obama, You need to trust the Principal in each school to weed out the bad teachers and bring in the good. Teachers and the Administration are professionals. We want ALL of our students to be challenged and learn how to live in our society. There is NEVER a student left behind! Let the teachers handle academics and the bureaucrats handle Government. Teachers do not want to run the Government and Bureaucrats should stay out of Education! You cannot put all of these teachers and children out in the streets. There has got to be monies in other deep pockets. I would like to see what type of education people who represent the Public have had.

Respectfully Submitted, Karla Franco

Saul Zippin

It says a lot that President Obama chooses to send his own children to Sidwell Friends instead of his local Washington DC public school.

Terie Dunn

These standardized tests for special education kids that have to test on their grade level is so damaging. I teach kids with many different disabilities and I have each one work to his/her individual best. They each show progress every year; however, when they get a standardized test (that really isn't appropriate for them---but is required) score back---they are devastated when they don't meet standard. You can't candy coat it for them because they know what is going on and what the tests mean. I am so sad for them to end their school year with such disappointment when they have shown such growth and success all year. Special education students should be exempted from grade level testing. If they are tested, they should be tested on their own academic levels so that progress can be documented and they can be proud of themselves.

Sophia Castillo

Not only do I have children in the public school system in Texas, I am a public school teacher as well. This system of testing AND basing teacher evaluations on these scores is

simply sad. It is disheartening as a teacher to come into the classroom, give it your all, and know that your evaluation will be based on student scores. Unless you have been in the classroom, you will never know how difficult a job it is to teach.

Ruth Mary McGrath

Please use reason regarding testing practices and using test scores as a means of evaluating teachers' effectiveness. In many cases, higher level students are placed in AP courses, and most of us are left with the average students, the special education students, and the English Language Learners. We cannot possibly reach the levels of the students siphoned off from our classes and put into advanced placement classes. Please reconsider some of your educational policies so that we can function in the real world of education.

Marilyn Arney

President Obama, We need to quit wasting money on testing and start putting this money to work funding early childhood education initiatives and full day kindergarten plus more meaningful after school activities to slow down the latch key kid problem. We need to look at adding more days and more hours to the educational program much like the countries that we are always being compared to. We do not need to privatize public education and let a bunch of businessmen with their eye on the profit line dictate our children's future.

Walter Tracy

Please bring common sense to the table. As an educator, I only want what is best for my students! Why don't politicians?

Kim Trompler

I am a veteran teacher of 21 years. I am very concerned about the pressure put on students today to perform on these tests. We spend 10 full school days just testing our third graders in math and reading. At the same time, the state of Texas is cutting funding to our schools while millions of dollars is spent designing and publishing a new STAR test for the state. We have lost our focus on the importance of developing well rounded students with a passion for learning! 2 months ago

Tina Jones

President Obama, Please help our students, teachers and school districts. We need help! Teachers are losing their jobs. I am working on my doctorate degree, but feel there is no need to continue because of teachers losing jobs. Respectfully, Tina Jones

Neely Lyles

In Texas, the Legislature is in the process of cutting billions from the school budget; despite this, next year a new testing agenda with new tests will be introduced. It appears that no matter what the cost to the schoolchildren of our state, the testing debacle must go on.

Mary Chang

We have, this year, tried out the (excellent) public school system in our new community in Massachusetts, having previously only interacted with a private school in San Antonio. What a difference. We are going back to private. Why is it that the private schools, who are not held to these public mandates, can do such a better job at educating my children? Why are my children's public school teachers actually apologizing to me about their inability to adequately serve my children, due to the restrictions placed upon them by the DOE and the state of Massachusetts? I have 2 children who are gifted and 2 who are profoundly gifted. Surely they should have been easier to teach in a public setting than the other special needs children that are catered to? If the public schools cannot serve my children, how can they possibly be capable of serving all the others? Please, Mr. President, allow the schools to offer ALL children what you and I have been able to purchase for our own!

jansen berry

I want to make a difference in children's lives, not just babysit! Being a mother of four children and a teacher for 16 years has proven to me how very important our teachers are to our children and to the future of our country!

Aubrey Comperatore

Please, Mr. President. Our students need to learn how to love learning...not how to assess it. They need to explore their world, not watch it pass them by as they are filling in bubble after bubble. Think of the doctors, lawyers, teachers, scientists, inventors, computer whizzes, authors, actors, engineers, Nobel Peace Prize winners, and future Presidents we could be shaping, rather than testing. You know in your heart that drill-and-kill curriculums are wrong. You wouldn't want it for you daughters.

NIDIA CANALES Teachers are the lowest paid state employees, yet we are being judged on how students do on a standardized test. Every child is different, so it cannot be expected for every one to pass the standardized test. It doesn't matter how hard the teacher works, if the child is not good at taking tests, the child will not pass. What happens when a teacher gets a batch of students that are the low performers? You can't

blame the teacher because the students didn't pass the standardized test. It wasn't the teacher's fault the student couldn't pass.

Sharon Richard

Beginning with the 2011-2012 school year, Texas will have 45 days of testing in the school calendar. Insanity. Mr. President, our children need a classical education enhanced by great new technologies. Multiple choice testing and "teaching to the test" starting at the elementary grades is killing critical thinking and making students hate school. Further, multi-millions of state monies are being spent for all the testing. This money should be redirected into the classrooms of America. Mr. President, all American students should be blessed with the kind of education that Malia and Sasha receive. We could use assistance from the Executive Branch to make that happen. Decreasing the reliance on all the standardized testing would be a great start. How about an Executive Order? Respectfully.

Jerilynn Yungblut

Too much time and money are spent on excessive testing when class time could be better spent on actual learning.

Nancy Wolk

As a taxpayer, I support public schools. As a parent, I wish to remove the extent of standardized testing. My 3rd grader recently went through panic attacks over the Massachusetts reading comprehension test. She had spent the last month in school focusing on examples closer to this test. I would have rather she had expanded her knowledge instead of learning how to answer this test. Let's change how we evaluate our schools and how we evaluate our students.

Katharine M. Noonan

As a National Board Certified science teacher in a poor, inner-city high school, I see devastating effects of high stakes testing every day. Three weeks out from the California Standards Test, which consumes a whole week of instruction, my students are voicing fears about it to teachers and peers. They feel inferior to students in the richer, higher-scoring districts which receive the DOE's praise and dollars. Our science, career and technical education programs wither with budget cuts, while educational consultants grow fat at meetings, trainings and institutes and produce slick products which have nothing to do with education and do not help teachers do their job. Teacher professional development this year has been test-gearred. Standards pacing and review have squeezed much of the joy and real science from our teaching. I am glad that you revealed your thoughts about testing for your own daughters. Please have the decency to get out of the way of engaging, quality instruction for the less advantaged children in our country.

Ily Barden

I loved what you said about over testing the children. We have gotten the cart before the horse on this. Kids aren't learning to think! They are learning how to take tests. IT'S DUMB! and EXPENSIVE!! Help us stop the madness. You can make the difference! As a parent, as a successful student, and as a successful adult, you know standardized testing is ok to a certain point. Please persuade your people to do the right thing, and use the money productively. Stop the madness!! Thank you.

Olga Dimas

I am an elementary school counselor and half of my job unfortunately is preparing for benchmarks for graders 2-5, TAKS for grades 3-5 , and TELPAS testing/rating for grades k-5. When can I be there for the kids? A once a year assessment is sufficient.

J B

Standardized testing is eating up valuable teaching time. Let teachers do their jobs.

Alicia Hinojosa

I am a teacher and I totally agree. We teachers have been having to teach the test instead of what we should be teaching.

David Tesch

Mr. President, I voted for you, because I hoped for change we could believe in. I am a teacher, and am seriously considering other professions, due to the harsh climate and unreal expectations being put on teachers these days. If you and your department of education can't get on the same page, what hope is there for the rest of the country?

Roxanne Ciatti

President Obama, Please walk the talk - endorse the principles of Save Our Schools and speak publicly at the rally on July 30!

monica sosa

we need to help our children with their education. It used to be that the teacher would really teach the academics that are needed to have our students compete with other countries. With all this high stake testing our teachers have forgotten the real reasons why we became teachers. I asked my daughter the other day what she was learning and she told that they are focusing on the TAKS. We are losing our children to all these high

stakes tests.

Lourna Yzaguirre

I have been teaching for over twenty-five years, and I cannot believe what my profession has become because of too much testing and what the so-called reformers want to do to the US educational system. It sickens me.

Teresa Valent

Arne Duncan needs to come too.

Rebecca McKee

If you would like to see just how much testing is happening in my state, here's a sampling: By the end of the year, our 9th, 10th, and 11th grade students at the high school where I teach will have taken the following tests: English TAKS, Social Studies TAKS, Math TAKS, Science TAKS, at least 2 periodic benchmarks for these same tests, a new district-required ACT-related test called PLAN, field tests for the new STARR End-of-Course exams in Writing, Reading, Math, Social Studies, and Science, our LEP kids will have taken TELPAS, and our special ed children (including those that have severe disabilities) will have taken TAKS-ALT. These are in addition to AP exams and college-entrance exams that our juniors and seniors will take. Really, it's ludicrous. If a normal person would just take a look at any public school district's testing calendar in Texas, they would think it was a joke. On 90+ school days, there is some test being conducted on some student. It's bad for kids, it's expensive, and in my opinion it's not helping our society to raise better-educated children. As one of your supporters, I hope you are really serious about putting an end to the "piling on."

Monica Hart-Nolan

As a first grade teacher, and mother of 2 children, I oppose the viral testing that is infecting our nation's schools. I believe these so-called "high stakes" tests really are just an instrument in the so-called "free-market movement" to discredit and privatize our public school system. Standardized tests do not inform my instruction and they consistently undervalue and misrepresent my students' real learning. With regard to the evaluation and retention of teachers, these tests are nothing more than an elaborate crap shoot, which teachers' careers should never be tied to.

Linda Gerver

Our children deserve better.

Joseph Lucido

We, the educators, parents, and concerned citizens whose names appear below, reject

NCLB and call for legislators to vote against its reauthorization but consider the reauthorization of ESEA under a new vision. We do so not because we resist accountability, but because the current law's simplistic approach to education reform wastes student potential and undermines public education.

Overall, focus on students as individuals with their own hopes and dreams rather than educating for sameness and conformity. This will go far to enhance greater student learning. A recent USA Today/Gallup poll shows that a strong majority of Americans support a major overhaul of No Child Left Behind or total elimination of the law. Among all respondents with opinions about NCLB only about a quarter said, "Keep basically as is." Democrats, Republicans and Independents share these opinions in very similar ratios. More precisely: 16% want to "eliminate law"; 41% said, "keep with major revisions"; 21% replied, "keep as basically is"; and 21% had no opinion or did not know enough to say.

We request that in your discussions and deliberations:

1. Recognize that it is unfair and immoral to demand equal outcomes while remaining silent about equalizing the resources at federal and state levels that create the opportunity for children to learn. Funding schools should go to those schools that are in most economic need not by competitive grants. Conduct school site inventories by qualified educational professionals of required educational materials, supplies and experiences and provide the funds in accordance with those needs. Educationally impoverished students require more help.
2. Address economic, social and cultural issues, which are outside the school day yet impair learning. The availability of nutritious food before school and at lunch, community health, and library services will give students the energy and resources they need to focus. It will help keep more students in school, and provide locations for reading, research and study.
3. Improve the most vulnerable schools rather than punishing schools that serve disadvantaged children. Eliminate "turnaround models" (required in Race to the Top) that have no basis in research. Rather help struggling schools by determining which particular site based issues exist that limit a school's ability to provide for its students; then address those. Do not change the entire school carte blanche.
4. Focus assessments in ways that improve instruction, display real performance, and encourage exploration, imagination, and critical thinking. Eliminate standardized testing. Rather allow for multiple sources of evidence in determining student learning and growth. Respect teachers' professional autonomy to modify and adjust lessons as dictated by the needs of their students rather than preparation for local, state and national testing regimens.

5. Create a national assessment program which uses sampling following the model of the NAEP and under the guidelines of The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, created by the American Psychological Association, the American Educational Research Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. It must also be in accordance with the 1974 Research Act requiring informed consent on the part of any tested student.
6. Permit each school site to determine a workable school improvement timeline based on the specific needs of their student population to replace the 2014 dystopian deadline. Each site in conjunction with its state, county, and district staff should join with parents to develop this timeline, with specific goals and appropriate evidence.
7. Encourage funding of art, music, foreign language, career/technical education, physical education, geography, history, and civics in the curriculum, especially in low-income neighborhoods.
8. Evaluation of teachers should not be based on student test scores (value-added methods) but rather comprehensive methods of looking at all facets of teaching and learning as evidenced in state professional teaching standards. School wide evaluations should be based on high quality accreditation processes developed just for this purpose.
9. Eliminate the use of accountability principles which employ threats and punishments at the site, district and state levels that are intended to prevent professional educators from expressing their views on programs and policies that are permitted under the reauthorized ESEA.

Grachelle James

The National Review Online posted an article on Dec. 1, 2010 that began with this: "For about two years now, President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have been co-opting much of the GOP playbook on education. They support charter schools. They endorse merit pay. They decry teacher tenure and seniority. On alternating Thursdays, they bracingly challenge the teachers' unions." You can read the article at: <http://www.frederickhess.org/8424/arne-duncan-talks-tough> Republican leaders are gutting public education across this country and Secretary Duncan is their spokesperson. Do you really believe what they believe?

Kate Lenox

American schools are once again facing a budget crisis. Programs will cut and positions will be lost. Yet there still has to be money for testing. Where are the arts and music programs? Where are the counselors, librarians and school nurses? They are on the chopping block. I don't believe that public education is failing our children. I believe the government is failing public education. Stop the testing madness. Every child should

have the education your children have.

Melia Dicker

When I saw your Univision interview on education, I thought, "THIS is the man I voted for." I heard you express that high-stakes tests punish students and schools, and that students need to learn useful information in ways that engage them. Please endorse the SOS principles and speak at the rally this July -- on my birthday!

Fred Bartels

President Obama, Please help public schools provide the same wonderful education that your children are receiving at their private school.
Sincerely, Fred Bartels

judith becker

I supported your campaign and I supported my daughter who trained volunteers for Young Democrats in Stockton, Ca. I am retired from teaching in elementary school in one of the "low-performing" schools. We missed our goal by a tiny percentage in this high-stakes testing charade. We are not teaching science or social studies due to your policies. You do not seem to grasp what you are doing to the poorest students. I am very angry and disappointed.

Lisa Falco

I am an educator at a high poverty, Title 1 elementary school in Los Angeles. Out of a staff of 33 teachers, we are slated to lose 12!. This is a moral outrage. Meanwhile, we have plenty of money to fight wars on three fronts. This country needs a realignment of its priorities.

Jennifer Bernardo

The erosion of our educational system is at a crisis point equal to that of the economy, the environment and our countries place on the world stage. Families here are being forced to fight (often a losing battle) to save our schools from over-bearing CMO's whose focus is on data and bottom lines and not the wellbeing of our children. Please stop the insanity before it is too late.

Renee Hargrove

It already feels as though I am testing my students more than teaching them; this has to stop.

Michelle Adams

As a parent of 4 young children, I am appalled at the current state of the public education system. NCLB is the worst thing that ever happened to American education. Children are being taught to the test, and nothing else. When I was in school, we learned hands on with science experiments. We learned math for math, not for being able to write it out in paragraph form on standardized tests (Everyday Math..worst curriculum EVER!) We read actual books and classic literature.

Mark Roschy

Please read the work of Yong Zhao and allow schools to improve through investment, not through corporate accountability initiatives and privatization interests.

Dr. David Timony

Mr. President: Now more than ever it is time to develop an educational system that serves students instead of training students, that trusts and develops committed educators rather than ranking them, and one that seeks to do what is right for our future generations instead of the egos of current politicians.

Rosina Mcvicker

Dear Mr. President, My Dad brought his young family to the United States during the 1960's almost exclusively because of the availability of a quality and equitable public education. Please listen to the voices on this petition. Thank You. Rosina

esther rich

Please support positive change for our schools. Cutting pay and funding is NOT going to make schools better. Spending more money and time on testing is NOT going to better prepare our students for success in the global economy.

Jesse Phillips-Fein

You send your children to a private school. All children should have access to this quality of education, which is not "assessment-driven", but motivated by Quaker principles of educating the whole child. Stop having a double standard and start supporting education reform that is teacher and student focused, not based on corporate models and test-taking profiteers.

Frank Wilson

The current testing mania is malignant and verges on criminal fraud. There is not a shred

of evidence that it effectively supports learning that a child can build on, personalize, or use in his or her working life once out of school. Adult success is most often founded on and sustained by the acquired skill of honest self-appraisal. The school's job must be to help each child discover what s/he can be, and show them how to use critical self-appraisal to focus, broaden, and refine their own ambitions and skills.

Erin Hepworth

Politicians need to get accurate information on how schools and students function by actually talking to people who work in schools. Stop relying only on statistics and data and look at students as individuals with a variety of skills and needs. Not everyone wants to go, will go, or should go to "college". If you want to read data, read data about how students learn best... hands on authentic learning.

Laura Easley

There should be more teachers - current teachers, in high-performing and low-performing districts - on the teams who create the standardized tests, so that the tests can accurately measure what the students actually are learning and what the teachers believe is most crucial for them to learn.

Steve Golin

What you said about your daughters was right. What you are doing about our schools is not the same, and is wrong. The kind of education your kids are getting should be available to all. Instead, you and Arne Duncan are promoting a test-driven model of education. Firing all the teachers in a Rhode Island school, based on tests, does not lead to the kind of school your kids go to. Please do the right thing for my granddaughter, not just for your daughters.

Yvonne Siu-Runyan

President Obama, the testing craze is NUTS. Why do we spend money on testing, testing, testing, and there are no books, materials, etc. and teachers. When you clapped when the RI teachers were fired, you really hurt my heart. I was appalled by your clapping. Please, your educational policies ala Duncan/Gates/Broad/Walton are really sick. I am really disappointed that you chose your basketball buddy, Arne Duncan to be your Secretary of Education, I thought, "Huh? Duh?" It is obvious that there is just fear and punishment in schools. Do you know that fear and punishment hinders learning? What Malia and Sasha have re: school is what ALL kids need. How can you be so blind? Corporate fascism is going on in this country.

Leslie Hepler

As a public school teacher, I have seen my 11th grade students less and less over the past 15 years. Teaching time has been replaced by testing time, reviewing for the test, and remediating after the test. There has to be a better, more efficient way to measure student growth. More testing and less instructional time is not the answer! Please reform the NCLB act so that student successes are not measured by one "stick"!

Julie Dearborn

Dear President Obama: I voted for you, but was never awed. I thought, and think, Hillary Clinton was the better choice. She vowed to end NCLB. You vowed to fix it. As an education president, you have been much worse than I thought you'd be. RTTT is NCLB on steroids. Arne Duncan is in over his head. Fire him. Get rid of high stakes testing, Stop supporting merit pay and other unproved, ill-advised solutions. Be a president who values critical thinking, not bubbling.

Sincerely, Julie Dearborn English Teacher

Nancy Healy

I was a teacher for 30 years and worked hard to foster the kind of learning environment you said you want for your daughters. I felt accountable for every child in my class and measured their progress often, not with a state-mandated grade level test but with assessments based on the content I had taught. When NCLB became law and the consequences of inadequate yearly progress (measuring two unequal groups of students) became dire, I was forced to abandon the methods I believed in for fear my students would not do well enough on the tests. When I moved on to two different charter schools to help with aligning curriculum to the state standards I saw the same results--less innovation and more standardization resulting in less inspired teaching. I decided to opt for early retirement in 2009, discouraged by what I saw happening in Washington. I was hopeful, Mr. President, that you could change the direction of NCLB. But the message from the Department of Education has not been encouraging. Please endorse the principles of Save Our Schools.

Geralyn Bywater McLaughlin

Your remarks on March 28th reminded me of why I voted for you. I believed that change was coming - and that included education that wasn't just about teaching to the test. Please join us on July 30th and share with us YOUR vision (not Arne Duncan's).

Karen Packard

President Obama, I voted for you and I have been so disappointed with the way you and Secretary Duncan have increased the damage done by NCLB. How could you have Linda Darling-Hammond debate education on your behalf and then turn your back on what she said and on teachers like me who helped elect you because we believed she was speaking for you? How could you appoint your basketball buddy to implement RTTT and LERN, programs that do what the chair of Senator McCain's education committee argued for? When former Education Secretary Margaret Spellings endorsed those programs, you should have known they were on the wrong track and replaced Secretary Duncan with a real educator, someone with the knowledge and expertise to implement programs that would create healthy, equitable learning environments for all children, someone who knows that standardized test scores correlate with a child's socio-economic status and provide no useful information about an individual child, someone who could do what Linda Darling-Hammond said you believed in, someone who can bring your education policies in line with the vision you shared at the town hall meeting on March 28.

Karran Royal Please don't use New Orleans as a model for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. You know what kind of education you want for your daughters. Doesn't every child deserve to have what you want for Sasha and Malia?

Amy Valens It is painful to read your words, and then see them twisted into the opposite of what you seemed to intend. Every day students as beautiful and deserving as your daughters suffer the effects of a narrow, high stakes test-driven focus in their classrooms, with no signs of relief in the proposals of your Department of Education. A true sign of leadership is recognizing when it is time to change course!

Jeffrey Selman

I have fought long and hard to protect Public education and we need your support and leadership now to prevent any back sliding.

Suzy Stark

As a long time, passionate teacher I am thoroughly disheartened by what we are now doing to our children. I've fought the good fight to do what's right for our children. Well intentioned, but misguided and short-sighted policies like No Child Left Behind have pushed me to retire early. I can no longer force feed instead of guiding. I can no longer push young children to do things they should not be doing. Please listen to educators.

Darlene Staley

I currently work in a high-needs, Title I, Differentiated Accountability school that has not met AYP. We are doing exactly what you stated you did not want to see...teaching to the test. Students who "don't count" are not going to the science lab or not getting additional tutoring (although that may not be so terrible, since the tutoring is just test prep). We have stopped teaching our 3-5 graders how to read; instead we spend hours teaching them how to take a test. I can no longer work in this environment. I consider this kind of 'teaching' a form of malpractice and is ethically wrong. Please change the education policies coming out of Washington, D.C.

Rog Lucido

Dear President Obama, I hope you would get a chance to read the book I wrote and have sent to Mrs Obama: 'Educational Genocide-A Plague on our Children' . It very clearly sets out the effects of the current educational policy which has cast a pall over our students.

Regards, Rog Lucido

Renee Goularte

President Obama, I have been a teacher for twenty years and in that time I have seen education policies disintegrate until the only thing left going on in school is prepping for tests. Unfortunately, your education policy is not improving this situation; in fact, it is making it worse. You have chosen a quality education for your daughters. Please endorse the same kind of quality education for ALL American children! This testing madness has got to stop, or we will not have a populace educated enough to run our country in the future. This is a frightening situation! 2 months ago Remove Flag Like Reply

Patricia Jehlen

Dear Pres. Obama, I am Senate Vice-Chair of the Massachusetts legislature's Joint Committee on Education. I've been a teacher, school committee member, teacher trainer, and state representative. I raised three children and am helping with our two granddaughters. As a strong supporter in 2008, I've been dismayed that your administration has pushed for policies that are not based on any research or facts, and are harmful to schools. If you were speaking from your heart and mind at the town hall meeting, we are in agreement, and I hope you will bring your administration's policies in line with your values and what you want for your own children.

State Senator Patricia Jehlen

Esther Bolton

Please look at countries like Finland who are highly successful in education and who hardly test at all. Please do not think more tests will improve standards. Tests kill the joy of learning completely and add crazy stress onto teachers and students for no good reason whatsoever. Please don't cave in on this one.

Parent Letters

Dear Mr President,

I am very upset that my grandchildren's school has no Art or Pe. Now to hear that they might lose Music also I am at a total loss. I thought that our children are supposed to have the best education.

People that come to the United States seem to be getting so much more than our own people who have been born here in the United States. I am at a total loss and I am starting not to believe in the government. Also the children who have no medical and get medical thru the state don't get the full benefits like those people who come to the United States. Please help our children to have the best education that they should have. Please make sure that we don't loss any more educational programs.

Some children can not take tests and need to do the testing on a one on one basis. Also some children need to be tested for different problems. Please save our special educational programs, art and music. Give back to the schools what it should have
Thank you.

Sincerely, a single mother who is helping raise her grandchildren.

Evelyn

Dear Mr. President,

My child came home the other day complaining because he was asked to spend time practicing "bubbling in" during his class in preparation for our state high stake standardized test called FCAT. His school has worked diligently for the last month in prep for this test. No one has had PE for a month. No one has had social studies, science or art. No one has had music. The reason? The school needs everyone to do well so they can stay open another year. They are also paying all the children for score increases. My child will get \$25 for each level increase on the test.

Practice isn't limited to this past month. The whole year is spent in FCAT prep. It just isn't as intense as the weeks leading up to FCAT. Now I hear the state has passed a new law saying that teachers will be evaluated based on how my kid does in their class. So, the pressure isn't high enough this year to perform? Next year they'll have to promise trips to the new Harry Potter theme park in Orlando to get higher scores I guess.

Why is this a problem if the test is based on things the kids should know? Because it excludes everything else. It excludes art, music, social studies, foreign language, critical thinking, creative thinking, creative writing, PE, etc. My child only learns what is on the test for much of the year. What will be the outcome? A generation of kids who meet the minimal standards of FCAT and no more.

I hope you will consider talking with Arne Duncan about RTTT. This is what it gets you. I don't think you would want this as a parent. Please reconsider your support of high stakes testing. It is an education killer.

Thanks,
Clare Kirchman

Dear Mr. President:

I am one of your fans, but I have some issues with your education policies. Testing is not education. Race to the Top seems too much like No Child Left Behind.

I have two children. My son, Carson, didn't work so hard in school, but his test scores kept him in advanced classes. His little sister, Jenny, always a good student, never could understand why she wasn't allowed in the G&T programs with her brother. She got nervous over tests, and the results were predictable. That didn't stop her from earning a scholarship in engineering or from getting a graduate degree. The tests didn't define who she was or is. But for too many children, tests will either open doors or close them.

What can we do to make education about critical thinking, problem solving, and the joy of learning? How can we make teachers part of the solution instead of victims of bad politics?

I will do my best to make my classroom a place of wonder. Meanwhile, I will wait for you to consider what we teachers have been trying to tell you.

Sharon Martin

I am not a student, not a parent, and not a teacher. I am a taxpayer and I live in a community. I want learning to be the focus of classroom instruction so that students are able to problem-solve and think, rather than spend their time preparing for standardized computer-based testing. Producing good test takers is no goal for this nation. In these extraordinarily difficult economic times, I want zero dollars diverted to large-scale

experimentation and used in ways that go unsupported by experts in the field. I firmly support accountability and I am not opposed to testing. I am opposed to the test obsession that has been forced on the nation. I want students, parents, teachers, and members of the community to be included rather than ignored and brushed aside as if they play no role whatsoever in this matter. Being included is far more than a polite invitation to provide input. These are modest and reasonable requests.

Sandra
Brevard County, Florida

Dear President Obama,

As a grandparent of a kindergarten student, I am seeing her struggle to sit all day with a pencil and try to write letters. There are no paints, blocks, dress up clothes, imaginative toys in her classroom. There is no discovery, no centers for her to really engage her mind and learn new experiences. If this is what she gets in kindergarten, I am truly terrified for the rest of her school experience because I know that the only concern is for testing. And testing profits the test companies, not the children. Bring back the blocks, clay, paint, sand and water activities and allow children to grow and learn naturally!

Joan Kramer

Dear President Obama,

At this point in the education crisis, I believe we need to study the financial costs of testing and have an educated and informed discussion on a TESTING MORATORIUM. We would not send starving athletes to compete in the Olympics, would we? Continuing spending on testing of poorly funded education systems is cruel, unusual, and poor fiscal policy. If the public school my children attend were not to be penalized for students not testing, I would boycott the current testing practice until we all could see an adequately funded education system in place, with a long term vision for more than testing. An appropriate plan gives the power back to the ones educated and closest to each child - teachers, educational and health service providers, administrators, parents, and local communities.

Monique Clifford

As a parent, I am absolutely against using standardized tests for any school students. My sons are in fourth and sixth grade. This year, both were subject to testing amounting to approximately 32 instructional hours, (six to eight hours four times during the year.) They reported that they did not receive any feedback from these valuable instructional hours which they, (and I!) felt were just wasted. Feedback came to *me* through the mail well after the fact, as if I was the one supposed to be learning from the tests! The time spent did not help them do well on the subject areas, they merely reported on a single, individualized performance. Theorists Piaget and Bandura among many others tell us to provide as many activities and social learning situations as possible as best practices for helping children learn. Their studies show that the learning gained through valuable practice and instant feedback helps them learn better and faster. School hours are precious! Sequestering students this much to perform on bubble-in tests must stop!

Testing should help a child know how they can do well in a course. It has been shown that when a student does well in a course he/she is more likely to begin to pursue it on their own. I believe that this will be a key to help lead them to an ongoing interest in things that they are interested in, and the self motivation to continue that pursuit so they can know the fulfillment of mastering it! That is my goal for my children, but in the current accelerated testing culture now prevailing in their schools, that goal is being trampled upon by a philosophy of educational travesty which should be called 'NCLB and the Wonders of Standardized Testing', like a herd of scared and stampeding cattle frantically racing to nowhere across an endlessly barren plain! We must stop this madness NOW!!

I desperately want to help public schools to re-instill the love and magic of learning which I've experienced in my life!! These tests and the time that they take away from real learning begin to destroy that goal and the natural curiosity which we must foster in our children. I must prioritize a great many things to ensure healthy trajectory for my children's development. It is a misguided priority in education to view and use these tests as some 'silver bullet' to solve the woes of public education. It is an OUTRAGE that standardized tests are used in this way with on our young learners!

Sincerely, Jerry

Gerald Hewitt Ed. Sp.

I present to you

Parent Letter 1

Dear Mr President,

I am very upset that my grandchildren's school has no Art or Pe. Now to hear that they might lose Music also I am at a total loss. I thought that our children are supposed to have the best education.

People that come to the United States seem to be getting so much more than our own people who have been born here in the United States. I am at a total loss and I am starting not to believe in the government. Also the children who have no medical and get medical thru the state don't get the full benefits like those people who come to the United States. Please help our children to have the best education that they should have. Please make sure that we don't loss any more educational programs.

Some children can not take tests and need to do the testing on a one on one basis. Also some children need to be tested for different problems. Please save our special educational programs, art and music. Give back to the schools what it should have
Thank you.

Sincerely, a single mother who is helping raise her grandchildren.

Evelyn

Parent Letter 2

Dear Mr. President,

My child came home the other day complaining because he was asked to spend time practicing “bubbling in” during his class in preparation for our state high stake standardized test called FCAT. His school has worked diligently for the last month in prep for this test. No one has had PE for a month. No one has had social studies, science or art. No one has had music. The reason? The school needs everyone to do well so they can stay open another year. They are also paying all the children for score increases. My child will get \$25 for each level increase on the test.

Practice isn’t limited to this past month. The whole year is spent in FCAT prep. It just isn’t as intense as the weeks leading up to FCAT. Now I hear the state has passed a new law saying that teachers will be evaluated based on how my kid does in their class. So, the pressure isn’t high enough this year to perform? Next year they’ll have to promise trips to the new Harry Potter theme park in Orlando to get higher scores I guess.

Why is this a problem if the test is based on things the kids should know? Because it excludes everything else. It excludes art, music, social studies, foreign language, critical thinking, creative thinking, creative writing, PE, etc. My child only learns what is on the test for much of the year. What will be the outcome? A generation of kids who meet the minimal standards of FCAT and no more.

I hope you will consider talking with Arne Duncan about RTTT. This is what it gets you. I don’t think you would want this as a parent. Please reconsider your support of high stakes testing. It is an education killer.

Thanks,
Clare Kirchman

Parent Letter 3

Dear Mr. President:

I am one of your fans, but I have some issues with your education policies. Testing is not education. Race to the Top seems too much like No Child Left Behind.

I have two children. My son, Carson, didn't work so hard in school, but his test scores kept him in advanced classes. His little sister, Jenny, always a good student, never could understand why she wasn't allowed in the G&T programs with her brother. She got nervous over tests, and the results were predictable. That didn't stop her from earning a scholarship in engineering or from getting a graduate degree. The tests didn't define who she was or is. But for too many children, tests will either open doors or close them.

What can we do to make education about critical thinking, problem solving, and the joy of learning? How can we make teachers part of the solution instead of victims of bad politics?

I will do my best to make my classroom a place of wonder. Meanwhile, I will wait for you to consider what we teachers have been trying to tell you.

Sharon Martin

Parent Letter 4

Dear President Obama,

As a grandparent of a kindergarten student, I am seeing her struggle to sit all day with a pencil and try to write letters. There are no paints, blocks, dress up clothes, imaginative toys in her classroom. There is no discovery, no centers for her to really engage her mind and learn new experiences. If this is what she gets in kindergarten, I am truly terrified for the rest of her school experience because I know that the only concern is for testing. And testing profits the test companies, not the children. Bring back the blocks, clay, paint, sand and water activities and allow children to grow and learn naturally!

Joan Kramer

Parent Letter 5

Dear President Obama,

At this point in the education crisis, I believe we need to study the financial costs of testing and have an educated and informed discussion on a TESTING MORATORIUM.

We would not send starving athletes to compete in the Olympics, would we? Continuing spending on testing of poorly funded education systems is cruel, unusual, and poor fiscal policy. If the public school my children attend were not to be penalized for students not testing, I would boycott the current testing practice until we all could see an adequately funded education system in place, with a long term vision for more than testing. An appropriate plan gives the power back to the ones educated and closest to each child - teachers, educational and health service providers, administrators, parents, and local communities.

Monique Clifford

Parent Letter 6

Dear President Obama

As a parent, I am absolutely against using standardized tests for any school students. My sons are in fourth and sixth grade. This year, both were subject to testing amounting to approximately 32 instructional hours, (six to eight hours four times during the year.) They reported that they did not receive any feedback from these valuable instructional hours which they, (and I!) felt were just wasted. Feedback came to *me* through the mail well after the fact, as if I was the one supposed to be learning from the tests! The time spent did not help them do well on the subject areas, they merely reported on a single, individualized performance. Theorists Piaget and Bandura among many others tell us to provide as many activities and social learning situations as possible as best practices for helping children learn. Their studies show that the learning gained through valuable practice and instant feedback helps them learn better and faster. School hours are precious! Sequestering students this much to perform on bubble-in tests must stop! Testing should help a child know how they can do well in a course. It has been shown that when a student does well in a course he/she is more likely to begin to pursue it on their own. I believe that this will be a key to help lead them to an ongoing interest in things that they are interested in, and the self motivation to continue that pursuit so they can know the fulfillment of mastering it! That is my goal for my children, but in the current accelerated testing culture now prevailing in their schools, that goal is being trampled upon by a philosophy of educational travesty which should be called 'NCLB and the Wonders of Standardized Testing', like a herd of scared and stampeding cattle frantically racing to nowhere across an endlessly barren plain! We must stop this madness NOW!!

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Sincerely, Jerry

Gerald Hewitt Ed. Sp.

Here are the seventeen letters we collected from educators, followed by one from a student, and one from a taxpayer.

Teacher Letter 1

Dear President Obama,

I've been an elementary public school teacher for 38 years, an adjunct professor of education for 15, a parent for 41, and a grandmother for 11. That's 105 years of aggregated experience on the teaching side. Add to that my 65 years of learning from my grandmother, parents, teachers, friends, and colleagues from grades K-20. Just so you know where I'm coming from.

Children learn in a dynamic environment, surrounded by fascinating problems to be solved. They need the freedom to choose their activities while being presented with progressively more difficult tasks. Beginning in infancy, learning is a social process. By interacting with peers and adults, learners make discoveries, share, and celebrate. “Kid watchers” (teachers and parents) note individual student differences and preferences and plan activities that motivate and stimulate. We lead by example. We share our own excitement about a book we just read, a personal goal we reached. We model the joy of learning, as well as the frustration of not knowing or understanding, and the perseverance needed to break through and move on. As parents and teachers, we continually ask ourselves if the learning is relevant. Are we preparing our children to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they will need to create a safe, happy, successful life without us?

It’s also important to consider the question, “Are children learning what we’re teaching?” I used checklists of skills to keep track of the progress of my students in the 1970s and still do, although the checklists have been updated to match the curriculum standards. I saved samples of student work from the beginning of the year, to compare with what they could do at year’s end. I counted the number of digits per minute a child could write multiplication facts, and taught the child to track daily results on a chart. Over time, we celebrated the “learning curve”. This I also still do. Each spring, my students took a standardized test in reading and math. At year’s end, I looked at work samples, self-assessments, data from teacher-made tests, textbook-based exams, performance ranked by national norms, report card grades, and “teacher judgment” to evaluate a child’s readiness for the next grade level. I felt confident sharing my “portfolio” of evidence with the Principal and the child’s parents.

Thirty years ago, standardized testing was a one-day event. Now I spend the first 7 months of third grade preparing my class for two days (70 minutes each day) of reading assessment that will determine if they are promoted to fourth grade. The kids don’t know that starting with Day One, we are on a mission to “acquire reading fluency by the end of third grade.” I artfully guide my charges through their first “chapter book” by introducing vocabulary, discussing characters and setting, and asking the “higher level” questions that teach “cause and effect” and “compare and contrast” so they can determine “Which title best fits the story?” (Main Idea). I spend a few class periods after the “Winter Break” to make sure they can “bubble” the answer choice, and admonish them to “read ALL of the choices before you mark your best answer”. Necessary evils. Will my kids still want to curl up with a “just right” book (one at his/her personal independent reading and interest level) after the dreaded test is over?

As I write this, I need to wait about another month to get the results of my children’s performance on the high-stakes FCAT reading test. Parents are on pins and needles, because a “Level 1” score means four weeks of “summer reading camp” and then another testing opportunity to prove achievement of reading fluency in order to be promoted to Grade 4. One of the most powerful uses of assessment to promote learning is feedback. Since I’m not allowed to look at the reading passages of the “secure” test, I can only tell

my students “you did your best”. But I won’t be able to use the FCAT results to inform instruction for further growth in reading. Parents will get a 4-page report with numbers and explanations, but their bottom-line is “did (s)he pass?”

I know colleges need a way to evaluate applicants, so those high school end-of-course exams and competency tests have relevance. Likewise, administrators from the local school to the federal level need data to evaluate the success of programs and initiatives. Why don’t you just ask us teachers what works and what doesn’t? Apple, Google, and Pixar are just a few examples of successful business models that factor in the input of the people doing the actual work.

Mr. President, I know you’ve got a lot going on, so let me just make one suggestion for moving the politically-charged morass of education reform forward. Let’s keep some money back from the corporate test developers and eliminate high-stakes testing at the elementary school level. Developmentally, this kind of assessment is inappropriate for young children. Elementary educators have the tools and skills to ensure that each child’s school days are filled with both joy and accomplishment. We can do this without the burden of one-size-fits-all accountability.

Trust me.

Dee Camp-White
Dream Lake Elementary
Apopka, Florida

Teacher Letter 2

Dear President Obama:

My ninth grade students do not learn in any one way. They learn and display their new knowledge in myriad methods. Some learn best through old-fashioned lecture. Some learn best in collaborative pairs. Some learn best through drill and practice. Some learn best through repeated exposure to material in a variety of ways.

Additionally, students do not display what they have learned in one way. Some are fantastic test-takers. Some create fabulous projects and presentations. Some teach other students. Some quietly show their progress by contributing to class discussions.

Sadly, Mr. President, the only method outsiders see data on is the state standardized assessment. You do not see the slow change in a student who begins to believe in himself and begins to participate in class. You do not see the student pulling his hair out as he stresses over the state assessment, even though he recently created an online project that properly included and identified all the elements of literature. You do not see the student

who speaks NO English yet is forced to take a test completely in English.

Please, Mr. President, let us end high stakes testing. Students do not mind taking an annual standardized test, but they do not want or need or learn from taking 8 reading tests a year, 8 math tests a year, 6 writing tests a year. Testing does NOT equal learning.

Teachers read research. They deal with the policy changes of governments. And, because they see their students every day, they know best how students learn. Why not allow them to do what they know?

Thank you so much for listening, Mr. President. Please consider the children, and let teachers teach instead of test.

Sincerely,

Dr. Beverly A. Wixon

Teacher Letter 3

Dear President Obama,

The misuse of standardized testing dumbs down high-school curriculum and impedes college readiness. High Schools are becoming test-prep centers. Valuable electives are falling away, replaced by test-prep courses. Vocational training for the career-minded student has been weakened. Sacred classroom time is under attack as required testing takes up more and more of the students' time at school.

The misuse of standardized testing also creates a fake system of accountability. Your own DOE studies show random error rates of 26 to 33 percent using this method to evaluate teaching. My state, Florida, ignores this reality thanks in part to your RT3 policy.

The primary indicator of test scores is income. Teachers cannot create jobs, but you can.

Many teachers feel betrayed by what they perceive as your sellout to the testing industry. Given the circumstances, it's very hard to argue with them.

I am an NBCT who walked for you and talked for you last election. But I would not expect much support from teachers unless you straighten out the misuse of testing. It is pernicious, dishonest, and destructive to students and schools.

Your focus should be on teacher training. I don't mean con-artist consultants, but real academic training at accredited colleges and universities. Provide tuition credits. Push teachers to grow their knowledge and skills in a legitimate academic setting.

Mike Archer

Teacher Letter 4

Dear President Obama,

How do my students learn best? Depends on the student. C giggles over Don Quixote, getting all the jokes. B, a ninth grader, still reverses his 'b' and his 'd' on his Logs. K can't sit still for 45 minutes, and he's a senior. S looks deep beneath the surface of the characters in his books. N loves finishing books to find more. D reads David Sedaris and Stephen King. T just found Piece of Cake and is inspired to find success in her life. H knows he reads slower than his classmates, but he reads every day.

These students, ninth through twelfth, have one thing in common. They're all in my class, Reading for Pleasure. Some are gifted readers and writers, some still struggle; some excel. But for one hour a day we all read together and we all write together. This is authentic assessment. Every day we read and every day we write. I respond and give students an audience for their insights. We all read. We all write. We all deepen our comprehension.

I know from research and my own observations, every student improves over our semester. Some tell me their ACT scores have improved. Some tell me their English grades improve. Some feel more confident in their abilities to read and interpret text on their AP tests.

But my class is in jeopardy. With the push for career-ready-is-college-ready from our new State Superintendent, my elective will be squeezed out of the curriculum to make way for more required courses. Fewer choices for students means those with artistic gifts, musical gifts, will be forced to take classes that do not interest them, to become 'career and college ready.'

I mourn for my students who are weighted down by tests and test preparation. I mourn for every student who will not be allowed to reach his potential in my school because of arbitrary tests and requirements that do not honor the people my students are. They deserve better – they deserve the education your own girls enjoy.

Claudia Swisher, NBCT, Oklahoma

Teacher Letter 5

Dear Mr. President,

I am an educator, and have been for years. Standardized testing has certain limits, but I agree with your pre-presidency speech that described the need for “low-stakes, low pressure environment, with the results used not to punish them, their teachers or their school, but simply to find out what their strengths are, and where they might need extra support.”

Over the years, I have seen testing take the place of learning as the number-one priority of my students and their parents. This is not progress! I am in almost constant contact with teachers as part of my job, and the pressure on them has become unbearable as well. If their students do badly on standardized tests, it reflects badly on them.

This situation is an enormous waste of resources on the part of our educators, and almost guarantees that students will be encouraged to “just pass”, after which they will be pushed through to the next grade, with or without the foundation they will need to succeed in the future.

Please, Mr. President, remedy this situation. We are in an education crisis.

Sincerely,

Sara Taylor

Teacher Letter 6

Dear Mr. President,

Many months ago, in Denver, your esteemed wife, Michelle, told students that she did not always “test well”; that students should not judge their abilities based upon such singular testing. Now, you have added your own common sense statements about what should be the real role of tests in education, namely informative, to guide good, interesting instruction. That simply has not been, cannot be, the case under No Child Left Behind legislation. What we want for our own children, the best learning situation, we should want for all. You can help that happen—still.

Bill Younglove (a 45 year educator)

Teacher Letter 7

Dear President Obama,

The following quote sits on my desk as a daily reminder: "Good teaching, effective teaching is not just about using whatever science says ‘usually’ works best. It is all about finding out what works best for the individual child and the group of children in front of

you. ~ Alfie Kohn May I give you a brief snapshot of my 10th grade Biology class in a small, rural Title 1 school? It is filled with struggling learners. Mutual respect is the rule in my classroom because it is the key to reaching low SES students. I've learned that daily formative assessments are a powerful tool to guide differentiation. I'm constantly building my "teacher toolbox" and every year I become a better teacher. I have very few lab supplies. We have been told to not expect any funds for next year. The labs I offer in my class will continue to be funded out of my own pocket. When I think of the money that is wasted on standardized testing, test-prep programs and materials, I am deeply saddened. What a waste! To assume that I need a standardized test to gauge learning is insulting. I need lab supplies. I need additional time to plan and reflect with my department. I need quality resources. I want the same resources available to the teachers at Sidwell. I've visited their web site and I hunger for the opportunity to provide my own students the same experience. Standardized testing will not replace what Sidwell offers their students. In closing, I am deeply saddened by your educational polices and I will not support your re-election bid. What I would like to know is this... What happened? What changed? Where is the hope and change we were promised? Perhaps you should place a copy of Mr. Kohn's quote on your desk as a gentle reminder of what good teaching looks like.

Sincerely,
Amy Williams

Teacher Letter 8

Dear President Obama,

I, as an educator by profession and passion, am deeply concerned about the direction education policy is heading. I've been concerned ever since you appointed Arne Duncan as Secretary of Education. Learning and teaching is not and should not be about making money. It's about opening up possibilities. Legislators are eroding public funding for schools so that they won't work so that they can use the dysfunction they have created as an excuse to privatize schools. This is not a desirable solution. Public education was designed to give everyone as equal an opportunity as possible, not to create a platform for the few elite to push their agenda. Educators, the ones trained and experienced in the field, ought to be the ones informing policy decision. As a taxpayer, I expect that our budget address the priorities of its citizens. Time and time again, what do people say they care about? Education. Time and time again, what gets slashed in our budget? Education. If you fix nothing else during your term as our leader, fix this.

Doni Faber

Teacher Letter 9

Dear President Obama,

After our latest staff meeting, I am extremely disheartened. My principal gave our staff the news that we did not meet AYP this year. Our elementary school, one of five in our district, was the only one that did not meet AYP. That was not the most disheartening part of the meeting, though. She shared with us our numbers. Over 94% of our students

are proficient in reading. Our test scores were smack in the middle of the scores of the other schools. I asked why, if our scores were not the lowest in the district, we did not meet AYP and the other schools did. What she said next was the source of my dispiritedness. We did not meet AYP because we needed to show 10% growth in achievement. The other schools had lower scores to begin with, so they were able to show a 10% increase in growth. We have reached the point where all schools will end up at some point, the point where we are asked to squeeze water out of a stone. Instead of celebrating our successes, we are preparing for the public's reaction when testing results hits the papers tomorrow. I have been asked to write how I think students learn best. I believe students learn best from teachers who are enthusiastic about their jobs, teachers who feel valued as professionals, teachers who are given the freedom to facilitate learning in ways that are proven effective by more than a single method of assessment. I am working hard and will continue to work hard because that's what I do. My peers are working hard. We are working hard together. We are doing all the right things. Really, we are. Despite this, your administration is telling me I'm not by supporting a system that is guaranteeing failure for all. People in my community and across the country are harassing me instead of supporting my efforts. How much more disheartening can it get than that?

Sincerely,

Joanne Davis

Teacher Letter 10

Dear President Obama;

I teach in a K-12 Waldorf school. The philosophy underlying the education is revolutionary. It is based in teaching students with a curriculum that correlates with the growth and development of the individual child. It is an integrated curriculum that promotes collegial relationships and collaboration, which discourages competition. This spirit of cooperation and sense for social justice, cultivation of strong community and future focus is comprised of parents and teachers working together to educate. We do not use standardized tests and reject the idea that a test that is designed for one learning style can adequately measure the capability of any human being. Waldorf schools are all over the world. I am proud to be a part of something that both honors the spirit of the classic education, celebrates the human being and cultivates community. The schools were meant to be available to everyone but in the US, where everything has a price, it is only open to those that can afford it. This is unfortunate. We all do what we can. I work for low wages sometimes 60 hours a week as our school is teacher-run. I wish all of the systems based on dubious philosophies the best of luck. I went to public schools and believe in the ideal of education for all. I am sorry that I live in a country, and a state, that so little values the education of its young. I continue to have faith in you as a visionary president and have experience in politics so know that it is a St. Vitus dance. The fact that you exist alone gives me hope. May God help us all.

Sincerely,

Morgan Vierheller

Austin, TX

Teacher Letter 11

Dear President Obama,

I am sorry to have to say that I am very disappointed in you. I voted for you because you promised to look at NCLB and make major changes. You are now more than half way into your term, and absolutely nothing has changed! NCLB is a bad law. It assumes that all students are the same, and the reason that many students don't achieve is that the teachers aren't trying hard enough, therefore they and their schools should be punished. The entire premise is so far beyond absurd as to completely boggle the mind. This law has completely destroyed public education. Instead of creatively teaching our students things that interest and excite their curiosity, we teachers have been forced to constantly drill them on the reading and math skills that appear on the tests. Anything that is not tested had been drastically reduced or completely dropped from the curriculum including the arts, science, and social studies. The result is that we are creating students who hate to read and are completely turned off to education. Another problem that NCLB has created in the name of educating our students to become critical and analytical thinkers is that the foundational skills and knowledge that students need before they can analyze and evaluate are being glossed over in an effort to push them farther faster. The result of this is that students are frustrated because they aren't given enough time to master the basics and they aren't ready to do what is asked of them. Once upon a time the purpose of Kindergarten was to teach social skills. There is truth in the expression "everything I need to know in life I learned in Kindergarten." Now Kindergarteners don't have time to learn and practice social skills because reading and math are being pushed at them all day. And people wonder why student behavior problems are becoming worse each year! Mr. President, we have waited long enough for you to keep your promise to fix this problem. The time is now. Please get rid of high stakes testing and all the baggage that it has dumped on public schools!

Margie Adkins, NBCT

Teacher Letter 12

Dear President Obama,

I have been a teacher for 30 years and am also a NBCT and love my profession. I hate to see how it is being run down in this country today even when it was already not highly valued. It takes an entire community to educate a child - I need my administrators, guidance counselors and support staff to help me teach my class, I need all the teachers who came before me and who teach the child the rest of the day to work with me. I need the community's support and most of all, the parents' support to help me educate this child in my subject area - for which I am highly trained. A standardized test given on one day can not possibly provide an adequate picture of that student's learning and most certainly can not tell you about what I am doing as a teacher. It can provide valuable information as a diagnostic tool. Kids are not uniform widgets produced in a factory. Politicians should not be making these decisions - educators with classroom experience and knowledge of educational research should be doing this. When our country begins to respect education and educators more than sports personalities we may be able to get

things on the right track and high stakes testing is not going to move that child to do any better and it should not be the deciding factor in my paycheck.

Terri Bohr

Teacher Letter 13

Dear President Obama,

I am a 33-year public school educator in a college town in South Georgia I also teach one class for pre-service teachers each semester at the local university, working to equip them to be knowledgeable and effective literacy teachers. Like many educators, I am passionate about my role in helping students become successful, motivated, life-long learners. Over the years I have been assigned many students who faced issues and disabilities that impacted their achievement. I willingly and lovingly worked with students who were wheelchair bound or walked with walkers, students diagnosed (and some only later diagnosed) with autism spectrum disorders, students born to drug addicted mothers who exhibited behavior disorders, cognitively impaired students, and students with developmental delays. Many of my colleagues also worked with more than their share of children with disabilities because they worked effectively to bring out the best in all students. Recently, due to the Response to Intervention process that has reduced the number of students assigned to special education, more students needing instructional intervention are assigned to regular classrooms. I applaud this practice for many reasons, but in light of the additional challenges to meet the needs of all students, I question the use of standardized test scores to gauge the effectiveness of teachers. I have always been a proponent of standardized testing. I believe it is one piece of information to help guide educators to meet the needs of students. I do not, however, support the use of standardized test scores to rate teacher effectiveness. In my school system, the superintendent implemented a reward system for teachers whose test scores showed growth and were above a specified percentile. This demoralizing practice caused resentment and a feeling of being unappreciated for tireless work on behalf of students with special needs. The use of standardized test scores to rate teachers is a slap in the face to those who unselfishly give attention, energy, and compassionate care to students whose achievement is jeopardized by issues beyond their control.

Beth Persinger

Teacher Letter 14

Mr. Obama,

As a parent and educator I am concerned about the direction education in this country is headed. Students learn when they are engaged in their learning and what they are learning is relevant to their lives. The ongoing focus on standardized tests has started to take its toll. I am a college academic adviser and have worked in at a community college for over ten years. From my experience, once upon a time, students came out of high school and entered college with so many questions about life. Now, they only have one question on their mind: "Is this on the test?" In a future where knowledge and information will be the most valuable currency, our children will be at a huge disadvantage if this trend is allowed to continue.

Sincerely,
Tom Mason

Teacher Letter 15
Mr. Obama,

I am a teacher, and I know how my students learn best. I've known many of them since they were starting their 10th grade year, and this year they will graduate. They learn best when their interests are ignited, when they see relevancy in their education, and when they can see their own work show them how far they've progressed in learning. They do not learn when they are only trying to prepare for a test that the state and federal government requires. They do not internalize the learning, because bubbling a test means nothing to them; in fact, they have slowly, as they've taken the tests year after year and also matured, come to resent the fact that they take a test that means nothing to their education. What my students do internalize is accomplishing something, and being able to demonstrate that accomplishment. If, as suggested, districts administer formative assessments to determine student growth, they should not be punitive, as the tests are tending to be now; they should not be tied to teacher evaluations. Formative tests should be what they suggest: INformative, so that as a teacher, I can better differentiate for my students, something that not even the state-mandated tests do for students with needs as varied as the grains of sand on a beach. Mr. President, if going without constant standardized testing is good enough for your daughters, and they are receiving a high-quality education, then why is it not good enough for the rest of the students of the country over which you preside?

With hope,
Heather Nolen

Teacher Letter 16

Dear President Obama,

I am dismayed at the value your administration continues to put on standardized high stakes testing. The people leading your education reform seem to think that all our educational system needs is a better test. Education reform needs to focus on eradicating childhood poverty, improving instruction for all, and eliminating the contraction of curriculum which high stakes testing promotes.

Instead of spending millions of dollars in each state to create a so-called "better test," spend this money on providing families of poverty with food, shelter, and a school system that inspires them to reach their potential.

Recently, one of those computerized tests that you are betting your educational reform on posed the following vocabulary/phonics question: What is the name of the neck of a horse? My student's response—"How in the heck am I supposed to know? I've never ridden a horse before." The student was expected to choose the correct spelling of "mane" from four choices.

While I understand that the purpose of this question was to determine if a reader could pick out the correct homophone, I don't understand how this information will help me determine if this child understands what he reads. If the student's answer is not correct, it only tells us that the correct answer was not selected. It does not tell us why he or she made the selection or how I can fill the gap needed to correct the problem.

As I discussed this problem with a colleague, she pointed out to me that the name of the horse's neck is actually neck. The mane is the hair on the horse's neck. Beyond the limitations of the quality of data gained from such questions, I am forced to ask, "Who is checking the validity of test items?"

Why have you selected a cohort of philanthrocapitalists and Mr. Duncan, with limited experience at the classroom or even school level, to lead your reform movements? Listen to the real experts in education: Linda Darling Hammond, Dr. Peter Johnston, Richard Allington, and other leaders who are respected educational researcher and who have also spent time "in the trenches." You might also consider the knowledge and experience of classroom teachers.

My class will soon study the Revolutionary War. Students are always inspired by the tales of ordinary people recognizing injustice, rising up against the status quo, and fighting for what is right. Be careful, Mr. Presidents, your attempts to undermine public education will be met with the same response, and many of those ordinary people were your "feet on the ground" in 2008, the ordinary people whose small and numerous donations and hours of volunteering help you get elected the first time.

I am an educator who long for the change you promised. I have certainly witnessed change since you took office, but I presumed you meant change for the better.

Stefanie Fuhr

Public Educator

Littleton Public Schools

Teacher Letter 17

Dear President Obama,

I am a teacher. Actually, I consider myself the lead learner in the class, as we are ALL learners and ALL teachers...the class motto. What I desire most for my students is that they leave me more empowered and energized to embrace the challenges ahead in their world and lives. I want them to be prepared to think, to reason, to solve problems, to be proactive in their spheres of influence, to provide for themselves and their families, to promote rightness and justice and compassion in their world, to thoughtfully contribute to the needs around them, and to become mindful of others and their gifts and contributions, too. I want them to be creatively disposed rather than rigidly settled. I want them to be able to process and engage fully in meaningful discourse around matters of concern to them and their world. I want them to become rational AND intuitive problem-solvers rather than blame-placers. I think, Mr. President, that I want for my students and my grandchildren precisely what you want for yours.

As a teacher, I have invested myself wholeheartedly, unreservedly into that very effort, and I feel I am more than qualified to offer my sense of what kids need in schools today. They need challenges that force them to struggle to make sense of ideas and content, so that the neurological pathways created in their minds are richly connected across the hemispheres and they are using both mind and heart to approach their world and experiences. I contend that no paper and pencil, bubble-the-answer test can measure adequately what kids have learned when submerged in a rich learning community and rigorous curriculum, since knowledge is fluid, and what I really want them to learn is in

the processes of learning and sense-making rather than in the content by itself. I certainly am hoping they learn content, believe me, but that is inadequate to prepare them for the challenges of this hot, flat, crowded world. Since my time with them is limited, I try to invest every learning experience with all the richness and texture I can, connecting content areas and building up their awareness of the transcendent patterns among disciplines. I attempt to model what lifelong learning looks like, but more importantly, to give substance to the ideals of humanity and character. My successes may not always show up on a test, you know, since my goals are so little quantified in standardized metrics, but I am most happy when a former student tells me that they have never forgotten the need to formulate the questions and justify the answers. When they suddenly perceive themselves as agents of their own learning, rather than passive receivers of knowledge, I am over the moon. I don't think such intangibles are measurable, but they are certainly significant.

Success...achievement...these ideals look different for different kids. For some, success is showing up at school when there is no one around to ensure that they do. For others, success is becoming hopeful that indeed, learning is possible for them, too. I doubt, however, that future generations will consider success as a perfect score on a standardized test, since that achievement is not contextualized in the real world, where life happens all around, and where they are hopefully disposed to embrace it. Indeed, judging success in learning is not possible under standardized testing constraints, for it is in the furnace of life's challenges that character is forged and true learning is tested. I am NOT against standardized testing, per se, since any measure of concept acquisition may yield helpful information, and good teachers are savvy on that point. However, I am definitely opposed to the idolization of whatever information is gleaned on those tests.

Respectfully,
Lianna Nix

Taxpayer Letter 1

I am not a student, not a parent, and not a teacher. I am a taxpayer and I live in a community. I want learning to be the focus of classroom instruction so that students are able to problem-solve and think, rather than spend their time preparing for standardized computer-based testing. Producing good test takers is no goal for this nation. In these extraordinarily difficult economic times, I want zero dollars diverted to large-scale experimentation and used in ways that go unsupported by experts in the field. I firmly support accountability and I am not opposed to testing. I am opposed to the test obsession that has been forced on the nation. I want students, parents, teachers, and members of the community to be included rather than ignored and brushed aside as if they play no role whatsoever in this matter. Being included is far more than a polite invitation to provide input. These are modest and reasonable requests.

Sandra
Brevard County, Florida

Student Letter 1

Dear President Obama,

As a high school graduate of '08, I went through the standardized testing way of learning. Fortunately, I got into GATE and I feel that's what saved me, particularly in my

elementary school years. More and more, I started realizing that I wasn't really learning and, especially in high school, I stopped caring about school. Going to college made me realize once again how much I loved learning, but K-12 was so focused on whatever test that was coming up. I particularly loved how after we wouldn't do so well on that test and the school would come back and say that we need to do better. We? I'm being punished for my colleague's bad test scores. How fair is that?

But how fair is the test in general? There's a reason people hardly test IQs any more: intelligence cannot be measured. Success, education, etc. cannot be measured because they are intangible factors. Success to one person is completely different than to another, and yet our country is firm in their belief that students should be manufactured into cookie-cutter graduates that all know the same things.

What do I want? I want to let the teachers teach. A wonderful quote that I realize applies to every single one of my colleagues in college right now: "Don't let education get in the way of your learning." – Mark Twain. Students now are unable to see the big picture, can't relate one thing to another if they have not learned it, and need to be spoon-fed information in order to remember it (until after the test). We can't measure the success of a student based on their scores of a silly test. What about the artist who is not so great at academic subjects? What about the math guru who has a hard time analyzing a Shakespeare play? These tests make teacher stick to whatever will be covered in the test at the end of the year: let them actually teach us to love their subject, because these tests don't make it easy for them to do so at all.

Your student,
Dana Linnell
Fullerton, CA

We appreciate you taking the time to read our thoughts. If you have any words in response, I would be happy to share them with the contributors of these letters.

Regards,

Anthony Cody
Save Our Schools March and National Call to Action
www.saveourschoolsmarch.org