

Katie Lapham, Teacher, NYCDOE

I'm a NYC parent but today I'm speaking to you as a NYC teacher. I stood before John King in 2013 and got no reaction from him. I am more hopeful today and feel compelled – once again – to speak up on behalf of NYC educators and students who are suffering under corporate education deform.

We detest what the Common Core package has done to instruction. This July 21, 2009 quote from Bill Gates will clarify what I mean by package:

Bill Gates said, "We'll know we've succeeded when the curriculum and the tests are aligned to these standards. Arne Duncan recently announced that \$350 million of the stimulus package will be used to create just these kinds of tests—next generation assessments aligned to the common core. When the tests are aligned to common standards, the curriculum will line up as well—and that will unleash powerful market forces in the service of better teaching. For the first time, there will be a large base of customers eager to buy products that can help every kid learn and every teacher get better..."

We are given poor quality, scripted curriculum that is not developmentally appropriate. Education deformers have turned critical thinking and rigor into an extreme sport, frustrating and boring teachers and students to the point where – for example – a large number of us dread teaching math. Close reading has become tedious and is killing the joy of reading. The chief purpose of schooling nowadays is to teach skills that kids will need to know for the Common Core tests. Independent reading, through which students experience joy in having the freedom to discover a wide range of books regardless of level, is now viewed chiefly as a tactic to build students' stamina for the absurdly long Common Core tests.

Our freedom to teach and to facilitate the development of whole child is curtailed. Due to the high-stakes nature of testing, those of us who work in a Title I school face immense pressure to raise test scores. Virtually every decision made at the school level is done with testing in mind.

No educator I know finds any value in the Common Core ELA and math tests. They are poorly constructed, developmentally inappropriate, decontextualized, confusing and deliberately tricky. Equally flawed is the new Common Core-aligned NYSESLAT, which is an ELA & content assessment, not a language test. Not only does the NYSESLAT fail to consider cognitive development stages but it also disregards what we know about second language learning. Our English-language learners, in particular, are being subjected to excessive testing that does not accurately measure what they can do. These bad tests are an insult to our intelligence.

Parents – please know that teachers – like myself (and there are many of us) – support your right to opt-out. We would opt-out of administering these tests if we could. In fact, a few bold teachers have. We hope that in 2016, opt-out numbers will reach 500,000.

Nothing short of a revolution is needed if we want true education reform. The Common Core package – all of it – has got to go. Revisit the lost standards, have teachers create diagnostic standardized assessments, stop using test scores to evaluate teachers and to punish schools, invest more in social services for our school communities.

Be brave and stand up to corporate education deformers. Let's all stop being complicit in this costly, wrong-headed experiment that's designed – in large part – to weed out so-called “bad teachers” and so-called “failing” schools. There are more effective and humane ways to improve our schools and to support the diverse needs of the children of New York State. Start by asking a teacher.

Katie Lapham, Brooklyn, NY