

Pamela Reese Finch, Parent, Brittonkill/Brunswick Central School District

My name is Pamela Reese Finch. I am not an educational policy expert, a teacher or even a school board member. I am not part of an organized coalition or special interest group. I am PJ & Patrick's mom, and one of the 62.5 percent (1) of parents in the Brittonkill Central School District who refused to have my children participate in the New York State testing. My reasons for refusing were simple – I wanted, and needed a way to be heard, so I appreciate the chance to be here today.

In the short time available, I would like to focus on three issues: process, quality and politics

The best description I've heard about New York's implementation of the standards, is that "We attempted to build a wooden house on Styrofoam foundation."

New York charged ahead in its implementation at a time when my children had already started their primary schooling. Within the period of one school year, my children were turned into educational Guinea Pigs. All children deserve better. Before the implementation of these standards, I believed that my children's public school education would provide them the tools and skills needed for success. Now, I am not so sure. Every child should be challenged to reach higher level of learning to the best of his or her ability. It is our collective responsibility to provide them with an education that prepares them for the workforce of the future. Educational standards must be dynamic and should take into account every child's developmental growth and the socio-economic needs. I urge you to revisit the notion of a "one-size-fits-all" education.

I also believe that their education should be practical in its application and from what I have seen; this might not be the case. For example, my youngest child was taught the theory behind multiplication, but never taught the rote memorization that most of us rely on in many aspects of our life daily.

When I am in the grocery store trying to figure out how many apples I need to buy for the week I am not going to get out a piece of paper draw a number line. Like most people, I'll do a quick calculation in my head, two children who consume two apples each day, which equals four apples per day, times seven days. $7 \times 4 = 28$

That might seem to make perfect sense, but that was not how my then second grade child was taught. He was taught the theory behind multiplication, without memorization of the facts. And when I expressed my concerns, the teacher reassured me that he was meeting the state's expectations. The following year, in third grade, the teacher immediately began timed multiplication testing – setting my son up to fail on something he was never taught. As parents we were never told that we needed to make sure our children learned this task over the summer. Otherwise it would have been addressed. Instead, I spent the entire third grade year playing catch-up. In my experience, parents are not truly part of this "new" educational process, which is nothing less than tragic since it is proven that parental involvement will have a positive influence on a child's educational outcome. It's important for children to understand various strategies, in the

everyday application, it is equally important to know the answer. We have the opportunity now to fix this and other holes in the curriculum.

I ask that you truly investigate whether what we are teaching is relevant, age appropriate and truly in the child's best interest. Let me provide you with another example using my then third-grader's homework. I have an Associate's degree in Journalism and a Bachelor's in Cultural Studies/Communication plus more than two decades of professional work experience. Still, last year I "incorrectly" helped my child with his homework. According to his teacher, based on a nuance that I believe could be challenged in a real-world setting, he got a question wrong.

I don't need a formal examination of study to figure out that something is just not quite right. It's time to step back and look at this before we proceed any further.

Testing

I believe in accountability. As a business owner, I am accountable to my clients. It's a fact of life for many of us. I believe that we must have tools in place to gauge each child's process, but it is equally important consider who truly benefits from the current scope of tests. Make sure that the curriculum and testing (including length of exams) are both relevant and appropriate.

Politics

If I could ask you to do only one thing, I implore you to get out your magic wand and take the politics out of my child's educational system. Last spring, the Albany Times Union featured an editorial piece that spoke of how parents were removed from the educational process.

I resent my children being used as political pawns. School funding and teacher evaluations are important issues and ones that that should be addressed, but not at the expense of my children or school district. My school district should not be punished when I, as an individual, decide to withhold my children from what I believe to be are unnecessary and poorly designed tests.

Last year New York put me in a very difficult situation – I don't want my children to get the message that they can refuse to participate in something just because it's challenging or they don't like it– however, I do not feel that they should be forced to participate in testing that has no academic benefit.

One of the biggest frustrations I've experienced as a parent is to witness the various political agendas and being able to do nothing about it. It's time to put individual interests aside and focus on collaboration. Our collective future depends on it. It's important to educate our children in a manner that prepares them to enter the workforce after graduation. It is also important to recognize the various social and development factors that educators face in teaching our students. In considering this issue, it is time to look for common ground and ensure that New York's educational standards are truly in the best interest of our children.