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Open Letter on Student Testing

Contributed by:

Educators for Democratic Schools[1]

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To Teachers, Students, Parents, and citizens:

As teachers, and as activists for social justice, Educators for Democratic Schools is proudly in solidarity with all teachers, parents and students who are standing up to the madness of standardized testing. The teachers of Garfield High School and two other schools in Seattle, WA, have our love and support as they [bravely risk their jobs](#) [2] and more by [refusing](#) [3] to administer the Washington State Exams. We support the decisions of those educators because we, too, believe that these tests are harmful to students, and are being used to degrade the quality of education in this country in three major ways.

First, state testing is extremely disruptive to the cycle of learning. Hundreds of hours are wasted each year in Baltimore City Schools, as mandatory test preparations are given precedence over student-centered inquiry and learning. Even just administration of exams takes a minimum of 200 hours each school year, and in many cases more. Many students find this [stressful](#) [4], and resent the time taken away from real learning.

Second, tests are being [used](#) [5] in ways they were never intended. Standardized tests are designed to give educators information about our students. Instead, they are being used to give politicians information about schools and teachers. As W. James Popham suggests in his [report](#) [6] to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, “Employing standardized achievement tests to ascertain educational quality is like measuring temperature with a tablespoon.” Furthermore, many students, parents, and teachers feel like [guinea pigs](#) [7] in an elaborate science experiment designed to find ways to chart “effectiveness,” not increase it. That the charts are being drawn incorrectly—much of the data is being [misrepresented](#) [8], making American Education seem much less effective than it is—adds insult to injury.

Finally, these tests are one of many ways that education and other public services are being privatized. Corporations like Pearson and ETS collect [billions of dollars](#) [9] for creating, packaging, and in some cases scoring the exams. Then, if schools don’t meet Adequate Yearly Progress, as defined by the No Child Left Behind legislation, they are often closed down and reopened as semi-private charter schools, which takes money, resources and control away from the public.

It is important to note that we are not opposed to all testing, and that we give tests in our classrooms and find them to be important instructional tools when used correctly. The Garfield High School teachers are continuing to test students as usual, with the exception of the MAP standardized tests required by the state, and we support them in their commitment to responsible testing. Although some mainstream journals, such as Education Week, are trying to portray the boycott as narrowly focused on this particular standardized test, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, in a rare show of true solidarity, officially widened the scope. She told Education Week, “It’s broader than just this MAP test. What you have is a system where assessment and data collection are more important than teaching and learning, and that is wrong.”

Our students deserve better. There are many [more effective](#) [10] ways of measuring learning, such as [student portfolios](#) [11]. They will take more time, and will not so easily translate into charts and graphs for the media to proliferate. We at Educators for Democratic Schools know that our students are worth the time. We also know that countries that trust their teachers have better results than those that narrowly rely on these failed exams.

Montgomery County, our close neighbor, has two great distinctions: they have one of the [top](#) [12] education programs in the country, and they just agreed to a three year [moratorium](#) [13] on

standardized testing. They have this luxury because they do not rely on federal funds from Race to the Top, which requires districts not only to administer these tests, but to use them to evaluate teachers.

EDS supports our more fortunate neighbors as well as these courageous teachers in Seattle and the growing number of parents [14] officially relieving [15] their children from the burdens of these tests. We encourage all teachers, students and parents to think critically about why we believe in education, and what we're willing to do to ensure that we are preparing the next generation to do more than just serve and consume.

In Solidarity,

Educators for Democratic Schools
A Caucus in the Baltimore Teacher's Union

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Links:

[1] <https://indyreader.org/contributor/educators-democratic-schools>

[2] http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=jWaNtQa8vGg

[3] <http://www.labornotes.org/blogs/2013/01/when-teachers-refuse-tests>

[4] <http://brainconnection.positscience.com/topics/?main=fa/test-stress>

[5] <http://www.fairtest.org/facts/howharm.htm>

[6]

http://scholar.google.com/scholar_url?hl=en&q=http://cepd410101.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/4846472

[7] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/07/new-york-standardized-tests-protest-pearson-field-tests_n_1579187.html

[8] <http://www.ams.org/notices/201105/rtx110500667p.pdf>

[9] <http://www.kxan.com/dpp/news/investigations/taars-price-tag-90-million-this-year>

[10] <http://www.odysseyschool.com/our-approach/portfolio-based-assessment/>

[11] <http://www.nationalforum.com/Electronic%20Journal%20Volumes/Thomas%2C%20Conn-Portfolio%20Assessment%20A%20Guide%20For%20Teachers%20And%20Administrator.pdf>

[12] <http://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/maryland/districts/montgomery-county-public-schools>

[13] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2012/12/10/moco-schools-chief-calls-for-three-year-moratorium-on-standardized-testing/>

[14] <http://www.hepg.org/hel/article/548>

[15] <http://dianeravitch.net/how-to-opt-out-of-testing/>