



April 9, 2014

Dear SOF Middle School Families,

We are passing on this letter with information about an action that two District 2 schools are holding this Friday in response to the the ELA tests, as the tests are a major issue of interest and concern to many in our school community. Each SOF family can decide whether or not to participate in Friday's demonstrations. SOF is not taking part in any official capacity.

Dear District 2 Colleagues,

Community School District 2 represents a richly diverse group of school communities and it is not often these days that we have an opportunity to join in a shared effort. Last week, and for several weeks prior, every one of our schools devoted hours of instructional time, vast human resources, and a tremendous amount of effort to preparing students to do well on the NYS ELA exams and, ultimately, to administering them. Few of our students opted out, in part because we had high hopes, and, perhaps mistakenly, assured families that this year's exam would reflect the feedback test makers and state officials had received from educators and families regarding the design of the test following last year's administration. Our students worked extremely hard and did their very best. As school leaders, we supported teachers in ensuring that students and families kept the tests in perspective - they were important, but by no means the ultimate measure of who they are as readers, students, or human beings. We encouraged them to be optimistic, and did our best to do the same. Frankly, many of us were disappointed by the design and quality of the tests and stood by helplessly while kids struggled to determine best answers, distorting much of what we'd taught them about effective reading skills and strategies and forgoing deep comprehension for something quite different.

On Friday morning, Liz Phillips, the principal of PS321 in Brooklyn, led her staff and her parent community in a demonstration objecting, not to testing or accountability, but to these tests in particular and, importantly, to their high stakes nature and the policy of refusing to release other than a small percentage of the questions.

By Friday evening officials were dismissing the importance of their statement, claiming that Liz and her community represented only a tiny percentage of those affected, implying that the rest of

us were satisfied. Given the terribly high stakes of these tests, for schools, for teachers and for kids, and the enormous amount of human, intellectual and financial resources that have been devoted to them, test makers should be prepared to stand by them and to allow them to undergo close scrutiny.

We propose that we hold a somewhat larger demonstration, making sure our thoughts on this are loud and clear and making it more difficult to dismiss the efforts of one school. On Friday morning, April 11th, at 8:00am we will invite our families and staff to speak out in a demonstration at each of our schools, expressing our deep dissatisfaction with the 2014 NYS ELA exam. We are inviting you to join us in this action, by inviting your staff and community to join in helping to ensure that officials are not left to wonder whether or not we were satisfied.

Yours truly,

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