



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on April 15, 2015

N.Y. Parents Keep Thousands of Students Out of Common Core Testing

Parents kept tens of thousands of students out of Common Core testing in schools throughout the city and state of New York Tuesday in a campaign organizers hope reached the goal of 250,000 students avoiding the tests. Official numbers won't be available for weeks, the *New York Post* [reported](#), while observing that the number of third- to eighth-graders statewide not taking Tuesday's English exam will likely exceed last year's 60,000. The Math exam will be given next week.



At the Institute for Collaborative Education on the Lower East Side, 85 percent of the students opted out, according to parents. At PS 321 in Brooklyn's Park Slope, parents said 35 percent of the students refused, up from 30 percent last year. At PS 29 in nearby Cobble Hill, the opt-out rate rose from 20 percent a year ago to 25 percent, the *Post* reported. Boycotting parents say the testing produces both needless anxiety on the part of the students and an unfair means of evaluating teachers.

"I am not opposed to tests," Danny Katch said, explaining why his fourth-grade daughter did not take the test at PS 69 in Jackson Heights, Queens. "I certainly want my kids to respect their teachers and do what the school encourages them to do," Katch told the *Post*. "But these tests aren't coming from the teachers and their tests aren't coming from the school. In fact, almost every teacher I talked to doesn't believe these tests are effective at all."

Liza Ezbiensky of Brooklyn, a backer of the opt-out movement, kept her eight-year-old daughter out of the statewide English and comprehension tests because she believes the tests measure "how well the kids can stay organized and actually complete the paperwork of the test versus actually understanding anything about English or comprehension," she told the *Post*.

Some parents and students were supportive of the testing. "I do feel the tests stress the kids out," said Pablo Reyes, whose son in third grade was in an after-school program two days a week to study for the test. "But he's confident and thriving, so I think the tests are a good thing."

Eight-year-old Furqan Shabazz told the *Post* he had been studying for the tests since first grade. "I was a little nervous because there were a lot of questions ... but we talked earlier about the best way to finish the test."

"I'm happy to have my son take the test," said the boy's mother, Brenda Rodriguez of East Harlem.

Though Common Core has been promoted nationwide as a voluntary program, state Education Department officials worry about reduced federal aid for New York schools if participation in the tests drops below 95 percent.

"Those who call for opting out really want New York to opt out of information that can help parents and teachers understand how well their students are doing," said Jeanne Beattie, a state Education



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Department spokeswoman. “We can’t go back to ignoring the needs of our children.”

The *New York Daily News* published [an editorial](#) Monday ridiculing the boycott as the work of teachers’ unions and “fringe parents.” “The silliness of portraying children who answer English and math questions as victims of near-child abuse is exceeded only by the cynicism of the unions’ anti-testing propaganda campaign. Because the attacks on testing are orchestrated to protect teachers, not students,” the *Daily News* said, naming New York State United Teachers as the driving force behind the boycott.

“Widespread boycotts would undermine the credibility of teacher ratings, reducing the risk that the worst instructors could be fired. Kids would get worse than nothing out of the deal,” according to the editorial.

New York is not the only state in which the Common Core testing is being met with resistance. As reported by [The New American](#) on Monday, students and their parents at Nathan Hale High School in Seattle, Washington, have taken the lead in resisting the new “Smarter Balanced Assessment” Common Core tests. Critics of the program claim that like No Child Left Behind and other federal education programs that theoretically leave curriculum development up to state and local school districts, Common Core as a practical matter has the effect of developing a national curriculum. Tests shape the curricula and the federal Department of Education coerces participation in the program by granting or withholding funds, depending on whether and to what extent the states and localities embrace the federal standards.

Critics have also panned the content of the Common Core program, claiming that in English, for example, there is a reduced emphasis on learning literature in favor of vocational/technical texts, making much of the education a jobs-training program for employers, while expanding the market for technology products. That might explain at least some of the enthusiastic vocal and financial support Common Core has received from some of the world’s largest and most powerful business interests, including IBM, Boeing, Verizon, BAE Systems, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, and, of course, Microsoft Corporation. Microsoft founder Bill Gates has spent at least \$200 million, and some say as high as \$2 billion, through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in a campaign to convince states to adopt the Common Core standards.

“Money flowed to policy groups on the right and left,” the *Washington Post* noted [in a 2014 report](#) on the Common Core campaign. “Liberals at the Center for American Progress and conservatives affiliated with the American Legislative Exchange Council who routinely disagree on nearly every issue accepted Gates money and found common ground on the Common Core.” The most important grant was the \$2.1 million that went to the National Governors Association, whose early adoption of Common Core provided a thin cover for a drive toward federal government control of a nationalized school curriculum. After all, proponents argue, the standards came from the governors.

“You had dozens of states adopting before the standards even existed, with little or no discussion, coverage or controversy,” Frederick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute told the *Post*. “People weren’t paying attention. We were in the middle of an economic meltdown and the health-care fight, and states saw a chance to have a crack at a couple of million bucks if they made some promises.”

Addressing the National Council of State Legislators in 2009, Gates spoke of Common Core’s “clear and rigorous standards that will match the best in the world.” Noting that \$350 million of “economic stimulus” funds would be used to create new tests to determine if students are meeting the Common



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Core standards, Gates [said](#),

When the tests are aligned to common standards, the curriculum will line up as well. And that will unleash a powerful market of people providing services for better teaching. For the first time, there'll be a large uniform base of customers looking at using products that will help every kid learn and every teacher get better. Imagine having people who create great online video games applying their intelligence to online tools that will pull kids in and make Algebra and other subjects fun.

Creating that “large uniform base of customers” for educational “products” will doubtless be a boon for software and information technology companies, but it will not necessarily produce better educated students, even if it does promise to “make Algebra and other subjects fun.” In fact, if schools were doing a better job of teaching, and students more adequately learning, about American history and the Constitution of the United States, there might be a greater understanding in the land — even among senators and representatives in Congress — that the powers delegated to the federal government by said Constitution do not include a federal role in education.

That appears not to matter to those who make laws and set policy in Washington, nor to those in the field of education who appear eager to embrace every new fad and fancy in the field of pedagogy as long as someone else is paying for it.





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