Dear Mr. Kremer,

This letter is in response to your commentary titled, “Take yes for an answer,” in the January 25th edition of NYSSBA’s On Board. We would like to thank you for recognizing the role that New York State Allies for Public Education (NYSAPE) have played in being a “vocal and politically effective group of parents and educators opposed to a ‘test and punishment’ culture.” On behalf of the 50-plus grassroots organizations across the state that we proudly call allies in the fight to reclaim our public schools, we wish to respond to some of the arguments you made.

You state that “although our state has shifted from overdrive to neutral on testing, NYSAPE has declared it’s frustrated that ‘nothing has changed.’” You continue with several examples where you believe some changes have been made, such as:

- The governor has “endorsed the recommendations of his Common Core Task Force....”
- The Board of Regents has placed a moratorium on the consequences for students and teachers of the 3-8 tests for the next four years.
- A new testing vendor will play a large role in the state tests next year and according to Commissioner Elia, “teachers will be even more closely involved in the vetting and development process.”
- “In the near future, New York will once again revisit its learning standards, grade-by-grade.”

Unfortunately, promises of change will not suffice until the governor and the legislature change the law. “Endorsements” and “moratoriums” are not changes in law, they are modifications. Furthermore, they are modifications that do nothing for the students taking this spring’s 3-8 tests - tests that will still be developmentally inappropriate, far too long, invalid measures of student growth or knowledge, and provide third party vendors with personally identifiable information without sufficient privacy protections. Moreover, our teachers will still be rated on the basis of unreliable and often invalid local assessments, which will not relieve their anxiety nor the test prep culture that has overtaken our schools.

You continue, “The point is that the state is taking seriously the concerns raised by parents, teachers, and others. It’s hard to understand why NYSAPE thinks further antagonism through test refusals is their best course of action.” Our response to this is we wouldn’t even be having a conversation if over 240,000
brave parents had not chosen to opt their children out of the 3-8 tests. What you call “antagonism”, we call “protecting our children”.

Lastly, you include the veiled threat of federal sanctions if schools do not meet the required 95% participation rate for the 3-8 ELA and math tests. No state has ever lost federal funding due to a testing boycott on the part of parents. Taking Title I money away from the neediest students in order to punish parents who are boycotting a testing system that is out of control is not defensible. Any lawmaker or policymaker taking this course of threatening action would be under extreme political fall-out from the people they serve.

If you would like to see parents become a part of the solution instead of viewing them as the problem, we would welcome an opportunity to meet with you and the NYSSBA Board members to further explain what needs to be accomplished before we opt back into the system. Until the changes we have enumerated are codified in law and we see them implemented in our children’s classrooms, our opt out numbers will continue to grow.

Sincerely,

Steering Committee Members of New York State Allies for Public Education:
Jamaal Bowman, Bronx, NY
Carol Burris, Queens, NY
Nancy Cauthen, NYC
Chris Cerrone, Western NY
Jeanette Deutermann, Long Island
Tim Farley, Capital Region
Kevin Glynn, Long Island
Leonie Haimson, NYC
Marla Kilfoyle, Long Island
Jessica McNair, Central NY
Lisa Rudley, Westchester
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