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## ***At last, parents rebel against standardized tests***

by [Nat Hentoff](#)

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Around the country, more parents are protesting — and some even boycotting — the standardized collective tests that grade the progress of entire classes and whole schools. In New York City and state, where I live — and elsewhere — the results can cause teachers to lose their jobs and can shut down whole schools.

As for the kids, a parent, Coleen Mingo, describes the stress on her sixth-grade son, and on many other students nationally, in “A testing culture out of control,” (NYDailyNews.com, May 2, 2012):

“He worked hard on an unending slew of practice tests. He obsessed over each mistake as if it were proof he was doomed ...”

The Daily News article notes that a 2011 report commissioned by Congress and conducted by the National Academy of Sciences Committee found that America’s test-based accountability systems “have not increased student achievement.”

Moreover, an author of the report charged that “there is widespread teaching to the test and gaming of the systems that reflects a wasteful use of resources and leads to inaccurate or inflated measures of performance.”

And what of the many students who fail — and whose individual problems and backgrounds are not at all known to the test-makers? As I’ve learned from some of them through the years, they get depressed, and, deciding that they’re just plain dumb about this sort of thing, they drop out of school.

In the April 29 letters section of The New York Times, there are two penetrating insights that further explain the growing rebellion against this mechanical collective testing. Walt Gardner, who writes for Education Week, states:

“If one of the goals of schooling is to create lifelong learners, then high standardized test scores may be a Pyrrhic victory. That’s because long after the subject matter is forgotten, attitudes remain.”

A vital attitude lost in the non-individualized tests is emphasized in a letter from a Los Angeles mother, Pamela Beere Briggs, explaining why she has joined the opposition to standardized tests:

“A remark our 12-year-old daughter made in sixth grade — ‘There’s a certain part about getting good at something that involves loving it’ — lighted a spark of resistance in me. I knew that she was right. We ended up home-schooling for the seventh and eighth grades. This way we had a chance to focus on real learning. No tests. No homework! Lots of reading. Lots of writing. Lots of conversation. What happened? Our daughter not only loves school, but also is good at lots of things.”

One of my daughters has home-schooled her daughter and two sons. I enjoy talking with them. They’re full of ideas and questions about my views and ideas. And they read a range of books for pleasure.

More educators are also liberating children from standardized schools whose regimen of tests and more tests, with no time for appreciation of the arts, such as music, that release individual creative imaginations and emotions.

Dig this national movement from our sea to shining sea reported in Valerie Strauss' Washington Post education blog, "The Answer Sheet," on April 24:

Strauss writes about a national resolution against high-stakes tests that focuses on standardized testing and involves "a coalition of national education, civil rights and parents groups, as well as educators who are trying to build a broad-based movement against the Obama administration's test-centric school reform program."

I support the resolution, but I'm also not aware of any indication that a Republican administration's approach to school reform would not also significantly depend on standardized tests.

According to the Washington Post, the forceful new resolution calls on "organizations and individuals to endorse (this) resolution, which asks officials in every state to 'reexamine public school accountability systems' and to 'develop a system based on multiple forms of assessment which does not require extensive standardized testing' and 'more accurately reflects the broad range of student learning.'"

"We want our elected leaders to support real learning, not endless evaluation," says Pamela Grundy of Charlotte, N.C., who helped Parents Across America lead a revolt last year against standardized testing.

Meanwhile, New York Daily News columnist Juan Gonzales lets us share this grinding spring season of New York public school students:

"Those dreaded state tests are here again. All third to eighth-graders in New York began Tuesday the first of three consecutive days of English language arts assessment, to be followed next week by three days of math tests.

"And those state tests have never been longer... Many middle class families now spend thousands of dollars for tutors to prepare their children for these tests. Meanwhile, poor and minority families who can't afford tutors see their children fall farther behind."

On the same page of that story: "Black and Latino students are nearly four times more likely than their white and Asian peers to be enrolled in the city's lowest-performing high schools, a new study revealed."

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg delights in calling himself "The Education Mayor." He also never mentions that the New York City school system, as in many other big cities, is largely racially and ethnically segregated, not by law, but by differing residential choices."

*Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights. He is a member of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and the Cato Institute, where he is a senior fellow.*