

March 18, 2015

Thank you Highline School Board for this opportunity to speak. My name is Donna Shaman, Highline School District occupational therapist. My strength, my expertise is evaluating and promoting children's development. Tonight I speak from this knowledge base, and from my heart, from watching our schools cause emotional and educational damage, due to high stress, test-driven, developmentally-inappropriate curriculum- to the detriment of children's development and well-being-- damage to their body without adequate recess and adequate pause, to their brains without high-interest, content-filled learning, and to their emotions- with the absence of joyful learning and the fear of testing and failing.

In my field of occupational therapy-learning is the occupation of students and teaching is the occupation of teachers. Today, in schools, the occupational hazards of our school system fall in the category of occupational abuse for both our teachers and our children.

With No Child Left Behind, what began as a well-motivated process to improve student learning has become an increasingly irrational high-stakes take-over. High-stakes testing and standardized-teaching to these tests are bringing out the worst in everyone. Everyone is stressed. Our community of learners and teachers are increasingly anxious, depressed, fearful, and yes angry-angry about learning and teaching for the sole purpose of passing toxic high stakes tests, designed to be unpassable by 2/3 of our students.

This toxic learning environment is damaging our students' brains and souls, their human development, their well-being. Our students and our teachers are our casualties. The learning process is our casualty.

Not too long ago, schools were the hub of joyous, creative, humanistic, connected, project-based learning. You love electronics, or dinosaurs, or Shakespeare, or astronomy - go for it, find your passions, discover! Humans are programmed to learn and make meaning from play, from exploration, from cooperative investigation. Today, young learners never even know that as people, we have interests and passions to cultivate and societies to improve. No, not now, now it is standardized, learn as quickly as possible, learn to a random prompt, there is nearly no content taught in early grades, take the maps off the wall, maps are not on the test. For our youngest students- just letters and sounds, words, words after words on the word wall- boring, decontextualized, dehumanized learning. This is not how our brains are designed to learn!

It is the school system, the school curriculum- it is on steroids, it disengages students from their childhood, from true learning, from being more deeply human.

High stakes testing, this crazy focus on testing is destroying us, destroying the teaching profession, the trust in our teachers, the trust in our students, the trust in learning.

So, I trust you, Board members, I trust you want to learn fully about the rapidly growing opt out/refuse standardized testing movement. I hope that Highline School District moves quickly in this direction. I hope we get braver and braver, and like Selma, we make history! You will not hear this perspective when you walk the halls and talk to teachers- teachers are too scared to talk.

Crazy, too scared to talk about education! That's what education is supposed to be- think, talk, disagree, debate!- No! we have been too scared, but we are becoming braver, here, across the country, tonight!

I trust, as our esteemed School Board, you want to understand the growing national movement to return education to the experts- the teachers. May I have your permission to offer you each a few websites to further your learning about taking our schools back from Pearson Corporation and returning our schools to the Highline School District.

Thank you!