

March 18, 2015

My name is Tracey Drum and I teach at Bow Lake Elementary School.

I want to start by thanking you for what you do to serve our students and promote quality learning. I know that you care about our students. Susan, you've listened to my concerns, you've fed me soup, and you've made proclamations that have given me hope. Michael and Bernie, you've both come to my school's science fairs and asked questions to my students to defend their scientific conclusions.

I'm sorry that last year none of you received an invitation to our science fair. There weren't enough science projects to showcase. In the high-stakes testing climate teachers didn't have the time to teach science. That was the case last year, even though we were just piloting the SBA. No test scores would be available and no punitive actions could be given. Yet, the climate was such that even the 5th grade classes -those are the ones who had to take the science MSP test- were told to teach science only on Fridays. You can't learn science once a week. You certainly can't learn it well.

And so, in the spirit of our new evaluation system, think of my speech today as an artifact I could submit for criteria 7, component 4f- showing professionalism, in the Charlotte Danielson model where it reads that...

Expert teachers understand that students are the highest priority. They advocate for their students in ways that might challenge traditional views and the educational establishment. It also says that accomplished teachers consistently adhere to school and district policies and procedures, but are willing to work to improve those that may be outdated and ineffective.

These high-stakes tests are outdated and ineffective. The ranking and sorting of students through testing has its origins in the Eugenics movement and it is harmful to our community. These tests are reinforcing a fixed mindset by labeling our students unfairly. These labels follow our students and further limit their learning opportunities. Test questions are intended to confuse and trick students. Try the sample tests online and see for yourself. They do not help me to know my students better or inform me as to who is reaching standard. They tell me who is more savvy at taking tests, and they line the pockets of investors in the testing industry.

My students are my highest priority, and it's because of that, that I ask Highline to consider canceling the SBA. The SBA has not been proven in any way to be reliable or valid. In fact, it's very much the opposite. I will send you a report that details the myriad of problems in the SBA math tests, with numerous examples of how test questions violate the Common Core standards.

If not cancel the test, then follow the examples of other school districts and offer explanations to parents for how to opt out or refuse high stakes testing. My parents and my students trust me. They trust that I will do what's best for them. And I object to abusing this trusting relationship by putting me in the position of promoting these tests over valuable learning.

Most importantly, I want you to realize that your hands are not tied by ESEA. We need you to stand up and defend our kids. We need you to be our leaders. Alice Walker said - The most common way a person gives up their power is by thinking they don't have any. You are not powerless. But in our current testing craze, we all are disempowering our students by trading learning for test prep. Empower our parents. Empower our community.

Thank you