

TESTIMONY
On The Department of Education's Proposed
3rd Grade Retention Policy

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My name is Dee Rieber. I am a parent, educator and vice president of the PA at PS 87 on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. I attended a meeting in our school last week regarding the upcoming 3rd grade tests. I walked out of that meeting, along with other parents, shaking my head. As an educator I ask myself the question: Why? What is the educational validity to testing 8 year old children in a high-stakes arena? It's the educational equivalent to the current "Shock and Awe" foreign policy in this country. We do not believe that high-stakes testing is the answer to ending social promotion. It is merely a left brain attempt to solve the real problems facing our school system.

I called a top administrator at the District 3 office. I asked about the "Promotion in Doubt" letters that went out to almost 32,000 3rd graders citywide. In fact in my daughter's class, 11 students out of 25 children received the letter. The administrator pointed out to me that those letters were a "warning" to those children, saying "Oh, it's just a warning." We get warnings for exceeding the speed limit and stepping over the bounds and breaking the law. What have these children done wrong that they need a "warning". A document generated by an outside source (Princeton Review) that has never even seen the child or heard them speak. Her choice of words were indicative of the punitive climate surrounding these "high-stakes" tests.

I mentioned to her that our constituency feels so strongly that many parents may consider keeping their children home the day of testing. She became very defensive and told me that if we decided to do that it would have negative repercussions for our school. Currently, PS 87 is listed as one of the top 200 schools in the city. She made it clear that by not participating in the test, our school's high standing would be jeopardized as schools are evaluated on an annual basis.

If we were an exceptional school, prior to this "high stakes" climate, why then since nothing has or will change in our educational philosophy would our excellent standing be in jeopardy? It indicates further that "high stakes" tests are punitive at all levels. This atmosphere is antithetical to the joyous nature that is intrinsic to learning. As a result of this, children may view schools as places of fear and anxiety. How can this be a viable solution to the educational challenges our children experience? How can you standardize expectations when we all know that children learn in different ways according to their own internal schedules and modalities.

At PS87, we will not be bullied or intimidated into a climate of fear and manipulation. We will follow our conscience and do what we know is best for our children and ultimately for our school. The message is clear: STOP THE MADNESS OF HIGH STAKES TESTING!!