



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 8, 2015**

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### **Parents Assert Their Right To Refuse Harmful Testing Practices To Protect Children from State Sanctioned Harm**

At a time when opt outs have reached critical mass and parents across the state have pledged to refuse to allow their children to be subjected to state-sanctioned harm, both Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Elia confirm what Hudson Valley parents have long known to be the truth: parents have a fundamental and absolute right to direct their children's education by refusing the controversial Common Core tests.

"State and federal officials must not intrude when parents seek to make choices about what is best for their own children. There are aspects of the NYS Testing program that parents may find questionable and objectionable for educational, political, social, ethical and/or religious reasons. The decision to refuse the test does not come lightly. It is a family decision that is simply beyond the control of administrators and teachers" said Anna Shah, founder of Hudson Valley Parent Educator Initiative and Dutchess County public school parent.

After threats of sanctions in response to the historic 220,000+ opt outs that took place during the 2015 testing season, cooler minds prevailed. The Governor and Commissioner agreed that the existing Common Core and testing regimen is fatally flawed and parents making informed and difficult decisions are in the best position to decide what is best for their children. State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia said, "Parents can choose whether or not to take the test...if parents understand [our rationale for testing] and they still want their child to opt out, that certainly is their right<sup>1</sup>." Governor Andrew Cuomo said, "At the end of the day, parents are in charge and parents make the decisions<sup>2</sup>." It stands to reason, parents should not have the added burden of coercion or intimidation by school personnel when it comes to subjecting children to the draconian high stakes nature of the Common Core tests.

Tim Farley, educator and Columbia County public school parent, said: "Common Core, assessments and the invalid New York State teacher and principal evaluation plan (APPR) have had an adverse impact on the nature and quality of education in our children's classrooms. Parents have expressed grave concerns about the impact excessive testing is having on special

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<sup>1</sup> <http://wxixnews.org/post/ed-comm-says-parents-have-right-opt-out-their-kids-tests>;

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nystateofpolitics.com/2015/08/cuomo-schools-shouldnt-be-penalized-for-test-opt-outs/>

education students, English language learners, and the youngest most vulnerable population of students in kindergarten through second grade. Parents have done their homework and are aware that these testing practices are not good for children, which is why families are exercising their right to opt out in droves.”

“A parent’s right to refuse the test on their child’s behalf is tantamount to other Constitutionally protected rights already recognized by the courts. We have the right to free speech, the right to assemble peaceably and now, finally, we can assert the right to refuse the test on behalf of our children in New York State. That parents have a right to refuse the test is an admission from Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Elia that was long overdue” said Liz O Shea Mullins, of Hudson Valley Against Common Core and Dutchess County public school parent.

“Whatever the proper scope of parental authority in education may be, under the guise of a “mandate” or forcibly subjecting public school children to take the flawed common core tests tied to an unstable teacher and principal evaluation scheme, it is not in the best interest of children and neither is forcing a child to sit and stare. Such practices surely impedes parents rights, in fact, it threatens to subvert these fundamental rights whole” said Suzanne DiAngelo Coyle, of Stop Common Core Rockland County and Rockland County public school parent.

“We parents refuse the tests because they’re wrong. It feels as if the entire school year is devoted to test prep, which has killed the love of learning for our students and the craft of educating for our teachers. We refuse because we see the pain our children are experiencing from the loss of a fair and appropriate education. It is our legal right and moral obligation to protect our children” said Stacey Kahn, of Stop Common Core in Ulster County and Ulster county public school parent.

“If there was any confusion before, it is now gone. The full scope of the right to parent has been settled. There is no doubt that parents are vitally interested in the education of their children and can refuse the test on behalf of their children. Schools must honor a parent’s decision to opt out. We expect refusals to double, if not triple this year as parents assert their fundamental right to protect children from state-sanctioned harm” said Christine Zirkelbach, founder of NY Stop Grad HST and Putnam County public school parent.

*HV Alliance for Public education, is a grassroots organization dedicated to advocating for the rights of parents and public school children against harmful testing practices in the Hudson Valley. For refusal letters and/or to learn more, please visit us here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/485430588295878/>*

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