2020-21 NYS Refusal Letter

Student: _____ School: _____

Teacher: _____ Grade: _____

Dear _____,

We are writing today to formally inform the district of our decision to refuse to allow our child _____, to participate in:

_____ the 2021 New York State grade 3-8 ELA assessment

_____ the 2021 New York State grade 3-8 math assessment

_____ any stand-alone New York State field testing in the 2020/21 school year (grades 3-12)

_____ any local/benchmark assessment administered in the fall, winter, and spring (may include STAR, AIMSweb, MAP/NWEA, i-Ready, SLO's) in the 2020/21 school year (grades k-12) (excluding spring 2021 middle school local assessments being used as a final assessment)

_____ the 2021 grade 4 New York State science assessment _____ the 2021 grade 8 New York State science assessment

Our refusal should in no way reflect on the teachers, administration, or school board. This was not an easy decision for us, but we feel that we have no other choice. We simply see these tests as harmful, expensive, and a waste of time and valuable resources. We understand that changes are being discussed and minor changes have been implemented. We feel that these changes are not enough to offer relief to our children taking these assessments.

We refuse to allow any data to be used for purposes other than the individual teacher's own formative or cumulative assessment. We are opposed to assessments whose data is used to determine school ranking, teacher effectiveness, or any other purpose other than for the individual classroom teacher's own use to improve his or her instruction.

We believe in and trust our highly qualified and dedicated teachers and administrators. We believe in the high quality of teaching and learning that occur in our child's school. We hope our efforts will be understood in the context in which they are intended: to support the quality of instruction promoted by the school and to advocate for what is best for all children. Our schools will not suffer when these tests are finally gone, they will flourish.

We do apologize in advance for the inconvenience or scrutiny that this decision may cause the administration, the school, and staff.

Sincerely,

INSTRUCTIONS FOR REFUSAL LETTERS

The first thing you should do before filling out your refusal letter is to find out which assessments your district administers, and which assessments you want to participate in. Teacher, principal, school, and district evaluations can be based on state assessment results (ELA or math), group state science assessment scores, or group regent scores. For example, a district may negotiate with union leadership to use the Earth Science Regents. For every teacher in the district (k-12), about half of their evaluation score would be based on the district average of Earth Science regents scores.

Local assessments (MAP, NWEA, AIMSweb, IReady, Achieve3000...) are chosen and administered by the district. Some are standardized, some computerized, and some are written by teachers. A few have diagnostic value**, and many do not. Some may want to refuse computerized assessments to ensure their child's data cannot be collected and tracked. Many of the computerized assessment platforms have had issues with information being hacked, such as the widespread hacking of AIMSweb personal student information (Pearson). Not all districts will honor the request to refuse local assessments. If your child is old enough to refuse on their own, refusals can still be accomplished in those cases. Please read up on the information about these assessments, speak to your child's teacher if you are unsure, and make the decision that best fits your child and your family. Refusal letters should go to the school principal. Copies can also be given to the teacher and the superintendent. These are questions that should be asked BEFORE your child takes a local assessment:
Questions to ask your district before allowing your child to participate:

1. How much time will my child spend using the chosen program/assessment on the computers throughout their day/week/year?
2. Is this program just assessments or are there lessons attached and given throughout the day?
3. Who will have access to the data? Is it a closed system (only district personnel has access) or an open system (the company providing the service has access to data)

4. Is my child's student ID being attached to his login information? (Student ID's can link to countless personally identifiable information that you wouldn't want the companies providing the service to have access to).
5. What decisions are being made based on these computer testing results? Are you allowing the computer program to determine student needs or are you relying on the expertise of the teacher? (You could request that the teacher determine if your child needs remedial help BEFORE) these assessments are given.

DESCRIPTIONS/TERMS:
APPR - Annual Professional Performance Review
Just like students, teachers, principals, schools, and districts are given a number grade at the end of every year that represents their effectiveness rating. These scores are used to rank, sort, and punish. Schools can be closed and teachers may lose their jobs or face disciplinary action based on the results. As per NYS law, 50% of an educator's scores must be based on a State Education Department approved assessment.

LOCAL ASSESSMENTS

Local assessments are also called SLO's, and can include MAP, STAR, DIBELS, AIMSweb, Achieve3000, i-Ready, and teacher-created assessments. These benchmark assessments are often administered the first week of school and then administered multiple times throughout the year.

**Some districts have chosen to use assessments that are widely considered to be valuable diagnostic tools, such as the DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) and the F&P (Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment), as their local assessment. Again, the concern is that once an assessment is used to rate a teacher, its diagnostic value decreases. This is a perfect case in which a parent could request to have the test administered, but the score withheld from the evaluation.