

April 5, 2016

Greetings,

The primary purpose of this message is to ask you to share any information you can with us about how the grades 3-8 state assessments in English language arts are going today.

Specifically, we are interested in any information you might share about opt-outs/test refusals, either for your district or your region.

Even something as brief as, "About the same as a year ago," or "Down significantly," or "Up slightly," would help.

The information would be useful to us in responding to questions from state officials and reporters. We would not identify any districts.

If you can spare a few more minutes, we would also appreciate any reactions to the new state budget from your region.

I will compile the responses and share them with you.

Thank you for any assistance you can provide.

-Bob Lowry

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Capital Region 1	Our test refusal numbers are up slightly from last year. I don't have definitive #s yet, as we are still making phone calls home to inform parents of the use of testing data, etc.
Capital Region 2	Will send opt out view in another email. As for the budget, it really has been a mixed bag. Some districts are significantly down from the governor's proposal, some are even, and some are ahead. My district's building aid was slashed compared to the governor's numbers, we are looking into the possibility of some clerical error- it is highly suspect.
Capital Region 3	A touch lower than last year-19% overall. middle school(grades 5-8) 19%-, one elementary at 14% the other at 28%. No real patterns regarding special ed etc. Most letters are the form letters found online. We had most letters arrive today.  We met with commissioner Elia last Friday as a BOCES(Questar) everyone in room said additional aid will allow them to make no cuts. Troy received foundation aid to keep them going while others- GEA elimination helped.  Last year we had about 8% more refusals for math, so I'm waiting to see if that trend continues.
Central New York 1	Up from last year:({
Central New York 2	In terms of ---- - we were at ~20% last year and ~12% this year. Overall I would say opt out numbers regionally are low....most were lower than last year but

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haven't heard from several yet.

Central New York 3	We are down about 50%
Central New York 4	Mixed results in ---- BOCES -- some up, some down, some about the same
Finger Lakes 1 (Rochester Area)	<p>We are down slightly and it seems like most of my neighbors are also. We were at 20% last year and we're at 16 this year. Most people have the same relative drop.</p> <p>As far as the state budget, I think most people are relieved that GEA is gone but frustrated with the lack of additional foundation aid, the addition of family leave, min wage and no delinking of APPR ...</p>
Finger Lakes 2	<p>We are down 4% in opt outs. I understand that there was a robo call in this area featuring Bill Calla encouraging parents to opt their children out on Sunday evening. We did have quite a few last minute requests.</p> <p>I'm very happy that the GEA was restored. We had about \$800,000 left. We're one of the districts that will be attempting to exceed the cap this year ...</p>
Finger Lakes 3	Down from 20% last year to 15% this year. Pretty much the same families (and most refusals are from kids whose parents are teachers in other districts)
Long Island 1	Here in ---- we were a bit down from last year. Our overall test refusals for grades 3-8 was 58% compared to last year at 63%. The highest % for both years was Grade 8 68% now, 70% last year.
Long Island 2	337 more than last year
Long Island 3	In --- Place the opt-out percentage from today was 57%. This is a significant uptick from last year (50%). Our 3-6 students opted out at about 50% while our 7th grade was at 60% and our 8th grade was at 72%. Many of these were not known to us until today.
Lower Hudson Valley 1	We in ---- had about the same number of test refusals today as we did last year. We went up by 6 at grades 3 and 4 and down by 5 at grades 5-8. Overall, status quo.
Lower Hudson Valley 2	Refusals are up slightly from last year, particularly at the MS level
Mid Hudson Valley 1	<p>Our test refusals were down from last year 20% in the middle school and 24% in the elementary school.</p> <p>We are a rural school and had our small GEA returned and a big disappointment on foundation aid. In our county the richer districts got richer</p>
Mid Hudson Valley 2	In Orange County we had an increase in refusals from 29% last year to 31-35% this year (some of our larger districts are still counting).
Mid Hudson Valley 3	In Sullivan County we were split equally: 1/3 about the same as last year, 1/3 down from last year, and 1/3 more than last year.

Mohawk Valley 1	<p>We were shocked with the high number of opt outs that occurred this morning at Gloversville. We were caught off guard as we didn't get the opt out letters ahead of time except for a small number.</p> <p>I am in a meeting with several districts from the ---- BOCES region and we are all experiencing the same thing in the region.</p> <p>In my district, we passed the 31% opt out rate from last year. We never expected this and I am very frustrated. I am wondering if there was a silent grass root effort by a parent group or NYSUT to organize people today.</p>
Mohawk Valley 2	<p>My opt out numbers are below by grade level. This is down slightly from last year. I asked ---- for our BOCES numbers for you once he compiles them.</p>
North Country 1	<p>We are at about 9% this year. We were at about 6 last year. This year, I had a Board of Education member host an opt out evening in the community...</p>
North Country 2	<p>Town of Webb UFSD is up slightly from last year.</p>
North Country 3	<p>I don't yet have a regional perspective on opt-out, but our Superintendent's group is coming together for our monthly meeting tomorrow; I'll pass along tomorrow once I obtain the regional viewpoint. In my district, opt-out is up 9% over last year, 39% as of today.</p>
North Country 4	<p>We had only 4.3% opt-out yesterday (349 tests, 15 opt-outs). That down from 7.51% last year on day 1 (333 tests, 25 opt-outs). We're not really "newsmakers" here in ---.</p>
Southern Tier 1	<p>Opt Outs: Most schools sharing data in our Region as showing a decrease in opt-outs in the ES (some significant). We are seeing variations in the MS, but most are again lower than last year. In general there are more opt outs in the middle school.</p> <p>The reaction to the budget has been mixed. We have not had a meeting yet to discuss collectively. I know people have been perplexed with transportation aid and the variation from last year to this year. The elimination of the GEA has been a positive, but not for all districts. One thing that is significantly on the radar is the change to the STAR. More info to follow when received.</p>
Southern Tier 2	<p>Opt Outs: Most schools sharing data in our Region are showing a decrease in opt-outs in the elementary schools (some significant). We are seeing variations in the middle school (gr 7 &amp; 8), but most are again lower than last year, although there are higher opt-out numbers at the middle level grades than the elementary grades.</p>
Western New York 1	<p>We had a total of 40% refuse the assessments from grades 3 through 5 and 59% refuse from grades 6th through 8th. These totals are up from last year. With regard to the Budget. Very grateful for the elimination of the GEA, but disappointed that the Foundation Aid did not increase above the Governor's proposal.</p>
Western New York 2	<p>In ---- we are about the same. Just over 50 % in general. We were at 55-56% last year so down slightly but not much.</p>

Western New York 3 We had about the same at the middle school level (about 20%) and less at the Elementary Level (about 15%) compared to last year. Those are initial numbers and may change each day. This year we have parents opting out of some of the tests and not other tests. So they opt out of math but not ELA. Once a plethora of information hit social media over the weekend we saw an increase of opt outs.

The tests are definitely shorter is the only real feedback we have heard on the first day.

What is most concerning is the comments, articles, and media related to opt outs. Our own Congressman (and some legislatures) printed an article that leads people to believe they support "parental choice" ultimately opting out of their child. The discord among the Regents has lead to an interpretation that it is OK to opt out. NYSUT continues their back handed comments and literature that blasts school administration as well as the Common Core.

The unintended consequence of this is the wrath that some of our superintendents are taking in the opt out movement. We are being beat up publicly in social media and many are being singled out. We have all tried to be good soldiers and it is costing some superintendents dearly.

On a positive note, we have been having regular presentations over the last two years about the implementation of the Learning Standards. Our BOE was weary and frustrated with the initial roll out. The information presented is encouraging and the direct result is teachers are reporting support we are on the right path.

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Western New York 4 Our opt out numbers are down slightly this year.

16-17 Budget- we did well because we still had a significant GEA. There were definitely winners and losers regionally. I am extremely concerned about 17-18. Without the GEA in play I anticipate a minimal increases in 17-18 and beyond. The tax cap is driving more aid to wealthy districts---- and poor rural areas will suffer as a result.

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