

My name is Steve Buel, I am a retired 40 year school teacher, a founder of Oregon Save Our Schools and a member of the Portland School Board, for whom I am not speaking today.

I recently saw the movie *Selma*. It occurred to me the reason African Americans were restricted from voting at the time was that the power structure didn't want them to vote because they most likely were not going to vote for the power structure.

The same type of dynamic is working today with the opt-out movement. The reason the power structure doesn't want parents to opt their children out of the tests is that many people will.

And in opting out, parents will expose the new educational power structure around the testing which makes a lot of people a lot of money, allows educational leaders to dodge the real questions concerning weaknesses in our educational system including the wide gap between the haves and have nots in our society which is reflected in the schools, and endangers the jobs and status of people within the system who have made their careers or hold their jobs because of the testing.

Yet parents are allowed to home school, to put their children in Catholic schools or other private schools, and to allow their children to participate in school activities or not. They make all sorts of decisions surrounding the welfare of their children – what movies to see, what friends to have over, what food to eat, when they go to bed, and on and on. But the state is saying you can't withhold your child from high-stakes standardized testing as either a protest concerning the entire system or out of genuine concern for your child's welfare?

The state argues that withholding your child from testing will damage a school's rating. And this in effect will have some damage upon the school itself. Yes it will. But a school's rating is neither as important as the education of or the welfare of our children. And what kind of a system have we devised that puts a school's rating above an excellent education or the welfare of the children in that school? Parents who are opting out and want to do so without claiming a disability for their child or a religious exemption and who want to just honestly say, you have screwed up here, should be allowed to do so.

Not too long ago I went for a walk with my great nephew, a wonderful little kid who I really like, a smart little guy. I asked him, being the old school teacher, how are you doing in school? He answered, "I didn't pass my test." You see, we have made the test the second most important thing to a kid in school after the approval of the teacher. And kids are getting crushed. We haven't handled it well. Yet, we are about to embark on a new testing system which is designed to fail 60 or so percent of all our children. But we find it is more important for corporations and consultants to make more money on other educational materials we will buy to go with the tests to offset this coming disaster than to educate our children well.

You know, if a teacher told your child he or she was stupid you would be irate. You would storm the school. But you are perfectly fine with having these tests tell your child, as it does on the last screen on the computer, you are stupid and a failure.

So the question for you today is which spot on the Edmund Pettus Educational Bridge will you be at? Marching over or standing against the marchers. Both thought they were right you know.

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