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Spring has finally arrived. It *should* be a happy time, but there is the looming specter of the PSSAs that casts a pall over everything. Instead of excitement and joy, we have anxiety and fear. There are fears of being found inadequate; fears of being accused of cheating; fears of losing a job, a choice of school, a shot at an honors class. Today public schools are largely run on fear with a side of austerity and discipline. The effects are cumulative and devastating: children sick to their stomach; walls clad in garbage bags; the aching feet of teachers from proctoring; the guilt felt by those administering assessments far beyond the abilities of the children who must take them.

I am part of a growing network of citizens who see the harm done by these tests. We do not want these test scores to be used to vilify our schools and teachers. We resent curricular changes, narrowed to suit the needs of the corporate testing model. We will no longer accept weeks of test prep in lieu of meaningful, engaging instruction. We are from Olney, the far Northeast, South Philly, and Center City. Our counterparts are spread throughout the state, from the suburbs of Lower Merion and Downingtown to the rural countryside of Canton and Portage. We are committed to educating our neighbors and advocating for the kind of non-standardized education all our children deserve.

“Anno’s Mysterious Multiplying Jar,” is a favorite picture book. It portrays the power of geometric progression. I may be one of four hundred parents or so parents who opted out in Philadelphia and maybe one of a few thousand statewide, but I am confident in the power of multipliers. You can see how it worked in New York State. Parents across Pennsylvania are committed to this cause. The PDE won’t be able to put the “opt out” genie back in the bottle.

I would like to take a moment to commend Mr. Shaffer and the Office of Curriculum and Assessment for making sure that the Parent FAQ was translated and available on the District website. There have been a number of issues that have arisen and his office has been very responsive. While there are schools where the opt out process has gone smoothly, there are others where administrators have intimidated students, parents, and community partners, and that **MUST** be stopped. District leadership needs to convey up

front, in no uncertain terms that such behavior is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

I am also here to demand that District discontinue disciplinary actions against teachers, including those at Feltonville, for sharing information about a parent's right to opt out on religious grounds. Parents have a direct relationship with teachers and expect them to provide important information. Tactics that try to silence teachers will end up greatly increasing the multiplier for the opt out movement.

The back of my shirt has a quote from Todd Marrone. It says "no one ever changed the world by choosing from among five possible answers." Get rid of the bubbles. The answers we seek are to found in the spaces in between. We're shining a light on testing. Visit our website www.talesfromthetest.org and PSU's www.morethanatest.wordpress.com.