

Public Letter on Standardized Testing from Authors and Illustrators of Books for Children and Youth

October 22, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

We the undersigned children's book authors and illustrators write to express our concern for our readers, their parents and teachers. We are alarmed at the negative impact of excessive school testing mandates, including your Administration's own initiatives, on children's love of reading and literature. Recent policy changes by your Administration have not lowered the stakes. On the contrary, requirements to evaluate teachers based on student test scores impose more standardized exams and crowd out exploration.

We call on you to support authentic performance assessments, not simply computerized versions of multiple-choice exams. We also urge you to reverse the narrowing of curriculum that has resulted from a fixation on high-stakes testing.

Our public school students spend far too much time preparing for reading tests and too little time curling up with books that fire their imaginations. As Michael Morpurgo, author of the Tony Award Winner *War Horse*, put it, "It's not about testing and reading schemes, but about loving stories and passing on that passion to our children."

Teachers, parents and students agree with British author Philip Pullman who said, "We are creating a generation that hates reading and feels nothing but hostility for literature." Students spend time on test practice instead of perusing books. Too many schools devote their library budgets to test-prep materials, depriving students of access to real literature. Without this access, children also lack exposure to our country's rich cultural range.

This year has seen a growing national wave of protest against testing overuse and abuse. As the authors and illustrators of books for children, we feel a special responsibility to advocate for change. We offer our full support for a national campaign to change the way we assess learning so that schools nurture creativity, exploration, and a love of literature from the first day of school through high school graduation.

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