

“The ongoing wars, the distortions of truth we have witnessed, the widening gaps between rich and poor disturb us more than we can say; but we have had so many reminders of powerlessness that we have retreated before the challenge of bringing such issues into our classrooms. At once, we cannot but realize that one of our primary obligations is to try to provide equal opportunities for the young. And we realize full that this cannot happen if our students are not equipped with what are thought to be survival skills, not to speak of a more or less equal range of literacies. And yet the tendency to describe the young as “human resources,” with the implication that they are mainly grist for the mills of globalized business is offensive not merely to educators, but to anyone committed to resist dehumanization of any kind.”¹

- Maxine Greene, *In Search of a Pedagogy*

Dear Chancellor Carmen Fariña,

We are teachers of public education in the City of New York. We are writing to distance ourselves from a set of policies that have come to be known as market-based education reform. We recognize that there has been a persistent and troubling gulf between the vision of individuals in policymaking and the work of educators, but we see you as someone who has known both positions and might therefore be understanding of our position. We find ourselves at a point in the progress of education reform in which clear acts of conscience will be necessary to preserve the integrity of public education. We can no longer implement policies that seek to transform the broad promises of public education into a narrow obsession with the ranking and sorting of children. We will not distort curriculum in order to encourage students to comply with bubble test thinking. We can no longer, in good conscience, push aside months of instruction to compete in a city-wide ritual of meaningless and academically bankrupt test preparation. We have seen clearly how these reforms undermine teachers’ love for their profession and undermine students’ intrinsic love of learning.

As an act of conscience, we are declining the role of test administrators for the 2014 New York State Common Core Tests. We are acting in solidarity with countless public school teachers who have paved their own paths of resistance and spoken truthfully about the decay of their profession under market-based reforms. These acts of conscience have been necessary because we are accountable to the children we teach and our pedagogy, both of which are dishonored daily by current policies.

The policies of Common Core have been misguided, unworkable, and a serious failure of implementation. At no time in the history of education reform have we witnessed the ideological ambitions of policymakers result in such a profound disconnect with the experiences of parents, teachers, and children. There is a growing movement of dissatisfied parents who are refusing high-stakes Common Core testing for their children and we are acting in solidarity with those

¹ Green, Maxine (2007). In search of a pedagogy. Retrieved February 21, 2014 from: <http://www.maxinegreene.org/articles.php>

parents.²

Reformers in the State Department of Education are now making gestures to slow down implementation and reform their reforms. Their efforts represent a failure of imagination--an inability to envision an education system based on human development and democratic ideals rather than an allegiance to standardization, ranking, and sorting. State policies have placed haphazard and burdensome mandates on schools that are profoundly out of touch with what we know to be inspired teaching and learning. Although the case against market-based education reform has been thoroughly written about, we feel obliged to outline our position at length to address critics who may see our choice of action as overstepping or unwarranted. You will find a position paper attached to this letter. We are urging you, Chancellor Fariña, to articulate your own position in this critical and defining moment in the history of public education.³ What will you stand for? What public school legacy will we forge together?

² Davis, O. (2013, November 5). Turn on , tune in, opt out. *The Nation*. Retrieved February 21, 2014 from: <http://www.thenation.com/blog/176994/turn-tune-opt-out>

³ Tierney, J. (2013, April 25). The coming revolution in public education. *The Atlantic*. Retrived February 21, 2014 from: <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/04/the-coming-revolution-in-public-education/275163/>