

New Book Challenges Schools' 'High Stakes Testing'

Teacher-activist Jesse Hagopian ties education reform to #BlackLivesMatter movement

By **Donovan Smith**
Special To *The Skanner News*

Jesse Hagopian boasts a lot of titles, but at the core he is an educator. Hagopian is a teacher at Garfield High School in the rapidly gentrifying Central District in Seattle.

He recently released his first book, "More than A Score: A New Uprising Against High Stakes Testing," which analyzes the history of standardized testing in America and its close-ties to institutional racism in the country.

The Skanner News' Donovan M. Smith spoke with Hagopian after an event he organized last week with

the 1968 Games in Mexico — to discuss his book.

The Skanner News: Give our readers a general outline of what your role in Seattle's education system has been.

Jesse Hagopian: I teach here at Garfield High School and I'm co-advisor to the Black Student Union here. And two years ago our faculty voted unanimously to refuse to give a standardized test Measures of Academic Progress [also known as] the MAP—we thought it was harmful to our kids. They threatened all the teachers who refused with a 10 day suspension without pay. The teachers didn't back down, and

in Seattle. And that movement helped to ignite a movement around the country where more and more teachers were refusing to give the test; students are walking out in mass like in Colorado—they had the largest walkout in probably U.S. history against high stakes tests recently; and parents are opting their kids out of the test, and it's become the largest movement against high stakes testing in U.S. history. So my book is a chronical of that movement. It has an introduction by former Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch. It also has the stories of the parents who opted their kids out—why they did it. The



PHOTO BY SUSAN FRIED

John Carlos, 1968 Olympic medalist (in back) and writer Dave Zirin (on right) pose with the Garfield High School Black Student Union and their advisor Jesse Hagopian (second from left) before 'Black Power to #BlackLivesMatter: A Forum with 1968 Olympic Medalist John Carlos,' hosted by the Garfield High School BSU at the Quincy Jones Auditorium, Jan. 22. Speakers focused on the relationship between events in 1968, the current #BlackLivesMatter movement, and the significance of youth involvement in both.

teachers from around country refusing to give it. So it's a book that's a testament to the resistance to this corporate education reform and this multi-billion dollar testing industry that's trying to reduce the intellectual process of teaching and learning to a single number.

And then they can use that number to label our schools 'failing' so they can close them, so they can deny students graduation so they can bust up the teacher's union and fire teachers. I'm just glad that this book can be part of that resistance to this corporate reform.

TSN: The #BlackLivesMatter movement is kind of new. Does your in?

Hagopian: I think it really does, because people should know the origins of high stake testing. Where does standardized come

There's a recent study from Boston University which reveals that the number one outcome of attaching high stakes to high school graduation is increased incarceration rates

Olympic legend John Carlos — who famously raised his fist for "Black Power" at

instead the district had to cancel the test, and it's now gone from the high schools

stories of the kids who led walkouts refusing to take the tests and stories of

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