

# **Jesse Hagopian, Teacher & Co-Organizer of Garfield High School Test Boycott and Eric Gurna on the Please Speak Freely Podcast (Transcription)**

Eric Gurna: Welcome again to Please Speak Freely. I'm Eric Gurna, your host, and I'm here in Seattle, Washington with Jesse Hagopian. Welcome, Jesse.

Jesse Hagopian: Thank you very much for having me, Eric Gurna. I appreciate it.

Eric Gurna: Thanks for doing it. Jesse Hagopian teaches history and is the Black Student Union a advisor at Garfield High School, the site of the historic boycott of the MAP Standardized Test. So you all may remember that, I believe it was last year, correct, that, basically, and...

Jesse Hagopian: That's right.

Eric Gurna: And I'm going to summarize it the way I know it, but I haven't done in-depth research so you can really tell us what happened but...

Jesse Hagopian: Sounds good.

Eric Gurna: Basically, the teachers at Garfield got together, created some unity there about the fact that the standardized test wasn't an appropriate measure of learning for their students and said: we're not going to give the test. Is that about right?

Jesse Hagopian: That's about right. That's, yeah, and it changed my life.

Eric Gurna: Well, we're definitely going to hear about that. Before we do, let me sing your praises a little bit more from your recent bio that, Jesse Hagopian, you're currently an associate editor of the Rethinking Schools magazine, correct?

Jesse Hagopian: That's right.

Eric Gurna: And founding member of Social Equity Educators, and was also the recipient of the 2000... Jesse Hagopian is a contributing author to 101 Changemakers: Rebels and Radicals who Changed US History and Education and Capitalism: Struggles for Learning and Liberation. And is that book already published as well?

Jesse Hagopian: Yeah, yeah.

Eric Gurna: But you have a new book you're working on too that we got to hear about.

Jesse Hagopian: I am. I'm working on a new book about resistance to standardized testing and collecting the stories from all over the nation of people who have a better vision for assessment.

Eric Gurna: Great. Well, I definitely want to hear about how your work ties in with work happening around the country, but before we get to that can you kind of briefly tell us the story of the Garfield test boycott?

Jesse Hagopian: Yeah. It started from me with a phone call after school, and I'm the building rep at Garfield High School for the union so I'm used to getting phone calls from members in our building with some kind of contractual dispute that they want clarification on. So I wasn't all that surprised that this member wanted me to come and speak to them after school, but when I got to her room and she was like peering out the doorway and ushering me in, and closing the door, and up on her tiptoes looking over the divider. I knew there was something a little more to this, this request, and Mallory Clarke, our fantastic reading coach at Garfield High School, sat me down, looked me in the eye, and told me, "'I'm not going to give the MAP Test this year.'" And it was a moment of elation for me because I'd been organizing against this test for several years. I got a resolution passed in our union saying this test was an inappropriate way to measure teachers and it wasn't a quality assessment for students. And so it really began there but we went department by department organizing, finding out: what do the math teachers think of this test? What do the reading teachers think of this test? What do the ELL, English Language Learners, teachers think, and what do the special education teachers... and there was unanimity that this test was inappropriate for students. You know, one of the math teachers told me that they teach ninth grade algebra but they're seeing geometry questions on the exam, an exam that our evaluations are tied to, and he told me that would be like if a Spanish teacher saw French questions on their test.

Eric Gurna: Right, right.

Jesse Hagopian: Okay. It's foreign language but it's not the same subject, right. So this was the root of some of the problems, a test that's not aligned to our state standards is going to be used to evaluate us, so we took it to the whole school and we had all staff vote after school one day.

Eric Gurna: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but all staff means all teaching staff, or who's involved?

Jesse Hagopian: Yeah. The entire...

Eric Gurna: Administrators as well or paraprofessionals?

Jesse Hagopian: Not the administrators. Everyone who was in our union.

Eric Gurna: Okay.

Jesse Hagopian: Paraprofessionals for sure.

Eric Gurna: Okay.

Jesse Hagopian: And all the teachers from every department.

Eric Gurna: Okay.

Jesse Hagopian: So we have about 90 teachers at Garfield and most of them were there at the staff meeting, and, you know, it was one of the most electrifying discussions I've ever been a part of. It was teachers talking about all the various problems they saw with the test. The English language learners, cultural diversity not being respected on this test. The special education teachers talking about how this test was disregarding the individual education plans of their SPED students. But the number one question they had for me was: if we refuse to give this test, if we take the step of boycotting... you know, you're the union rep, what's going to happen to us? And, you know, I wanted to say, oh, don't worry about it. Let's just do it.

Eric Gurna: Right.

Jesse Hagopian: Because I'd been fighting this test for so long and I was so excited that we were ready to organize against it as a building, but I couldn't mislead them or sugar coat it because I knew if we were going to win this struggle people had to go in eyes wide open, knowing what could happen. And I said: those of you in the tested subject especially could face reprimand, up to, you know, being dismissed for insubordination. And those were not the words that inspired the staff to boycott the test. So Miss Gunn, a math teacher at Garfield High School, rose in the middle of our all staff meeting and she said that I am sick of seeing this test label my kids and me a failure, a test that's not even aligned to our curriculum. And she said, ""I would rather be reprimanded for standing up for what I believe in than just sitting back and letting this test run over us for one more year,"" and at that moment I said it's time to vote, and the entire staff took a vote and we voted unanimously. There was not a single ""no"" vote.

Eric Gurna: Wow.

Jesse Hagopian: A couple abstentions of people who wanted some more information but the entire staff spoke with one voice that we were going to refuse to give this test, and a little while later we held a press conference at Garfield High School. After the district didn't get back to us with... you know, we asked them to talk to us about this test one more time and when we heard nothing we called this press conference, and after that my life has been in chaos ever since with just endless requests from parents, students, and teachers around the country to send Garfield teachers out to speak about our actions. Thousands of emails came flooding in, and letters, and flowers, and chocolates...

Eric Gurna: Wow.

Jesse Hagopian: ...from families and teachers all over the country who have been abused by these tests and were so inspired by the action that we took at Garfield. But, you know, our resolve was quickly tested when the superintendent threatened us with a 10-day suspension without pay at Garfield. And, again, it was scary for everybody but especially the people we called the necks. The necks were the teachers in the tested subjects whose neck was on the line.

Eric Gurna: Okay.

Jesse Hagopian: And we wanted to do everything we could to defend them and we wanted to build the biggest possible movement of solidarity so that none of our colleagues would be attacked.

Eric Gurna: And was that mostly English and math?

Jesse Hagopian: Yeah, yeah.

Eric Gurna: Is that who the necks are?

Jesse Hagopian: Yeah.

Eric Gurna: Okay.

Jesse Hagopian: And ELL and SPED.

Eric Gurna: Okay.

Jesse Hagopian: But, yeah. And the rest of us were known as the backs at Garfield High School because we had all their backs.

Eric Gurna: Yeah.

Jesse Hagopian: And but it was... the power of our action was that it was a unified collective work, and wasn't just of the teachers because, you know, quickly thereafter, the PTA, the PTSA, voted unanimously to support us...

Eric Gurna: Wow.

Jesse Hagopian: ...in our action. And the student body government voted unanimously to support us, and then the boycott spread...

Eric Gurna: Yeah.

Jesse Hagopian: ...to other schools. It went to Orca K-8, it went to Chief Sealth High School, it went to Ballard, and we got some eight other schools.

Eric Gurna: In Seattle.

Jesse Hagopian: In Seattle, that joined us. And the superintendent freaked out at this point. He saw a full-scale rebellion on his hands and he saw that his threats didn't work and, to me, one of the most beautiful things I've ever witnessed in my life is seeing an entire staff lose their fear.

Eric Gurna: Yeah.

Jesse Hagopian: It's the type of thing I've taught my students about in class when I'm recounting the Civil Rights Movement or showing them interviews of people who have participated, where an entire population lost their fear and said: we're going to stand up for what we know is right, regardless of the consequences. And going to work became a joy every morning, to get up and go to school and see these people who were sick of being disregarded.

Eric Gurna: Yeah.

Jesse Hagopian: I mean, you know where the education conversation has gone in this country where all the people who are consulted usually haven't been inside a public school.

Eric Gurna: Yeah.

Jesse Hagopian: You know, and it was just beautiful thing to see educators say we should be consulted about what is quality assessment, and if you don't consult us and you ignore our voice after we pass resolutions, after we ask nicely for year after year, then we're going to stand up. We have a way to assert ourselves...

Eric Gurna: Yeah.

Jesse Hagopian: ...into this conversation. And it was a beautiful thing to see.

Eric Gurna: So I want to also get into what happened after that because it's pretty remarkable how the situation has changed this year, I think. But I'm really interested in something you said, you just alluded to, that you've been working for years on fighting this test before this happened. You also mentioned the Civil Rights Movement, and, you know, oftentimes people reference, let's say, Rosa Parks and her refusal to give up her seat on the bus and a lot of people don't realize that she had been to the Highlander Center to learn about resistance and she was a skilled Civil Rights activist and that there was a whole context that she was in. She wasn't, you know, a lady who just one day out of the blue just said, ""No more."" There was something that led to that and that she...

Jesse Hagopian: That's right.

Eric Gurna: ...was linked to many other people. She wasn't just acting on her own.

Jesse Hagopian: That's absolutely right.

Eric Gurna: So I'm really curious to know, what was all that building work that you did that led to that dramatic press conference?

Jesse Hagopian: Well, I'm glad you asked that because that's the part of the story that never gets told and that I think is really important to get out if we're going to replicate this type of action around the country and stand up for quality assessment because it didn't just start last year, for sure. There's been numerous organizing efforts around this specific test and around other issues related to education that I think played a really important role in our movement. First of all,

Mallory Clarke had refused to give this test on her own surreptitiously for a couple of years before there was as stringent reporting requirements, but this year...

Eric Gurna: She had just not done it, not really made a big deal out of it, but just not giving the test?

Jesse Hagopian: That's right.

Eric Gurna: Okay.

Jesse Hagopian: She knew it was not giving her information...

Eric Gurna: Yeah.

Jesse Hagopian: ...that was useful.

Eric Gurna: Yeah.

Jesse Hagopian: She knew that her kids... she teaches remedial reading class trying to get kids in high school who are often at fourth grade reading levels to improve, and she knows that this test wasn't helping her do that and that, actually, her methods were much more successful.

Eric Gurna: Right.

Jesse Hagopian: But this year the testing coordinating told her the reporting requirements are going to require us to give this test unless you have a better idea. It turned out she did. So, you know, I think there was a culture at Garfield where many of us had been opposing this test in different ways. I helped to pass a resolution put forward by a Ballard teacher, Noam Gundle.

Eric Gurna: That's another school here?

Jesse Hagopian: Another school in Seattle. And that had happened, I believe, in 2010 when we adopted this test in the Seattle Public Schools, and we had a rigorous debate inside our union about this test. Some said that if we reject this test, if we pass a resolution saying it's not useful, the parents will revolt and they'll say: see, teachers don't want to be accountable. And we argued that we do want to be accountable because we believe in quality education for everybody and that we can convince parents, that we could get them on our side because parents are seeing the curriculum being narrowed to the few things that are on the test, parents are seeing the inundation of the classroom with these standardized tests, and the fact that this specific test, the MAP Test, was brought to Seattle by a superintendent who also sat on the board of the company that makes the test but didn't disclose that...

Eric Gurna: Wow.

Jesse Hagopian: ...when the test was adopted by the Seattle Public Schools...

Eric Gurna: And what company is that?

Jesse Hagopian: ...to the tune of four million dollars. NWEA.

Eric Gurna: Okay.

Jesse Hagopian: And it, you know, it wasn't just us that had a problem with that. The state auditor came and found that to be an ethics violation.

Eric Gurna: Sure, but, still, the decision to use the test was already in effect.

Jesse Hagopian: Yeah. It went through anyway and...

Eric Gurna: Did that superintendent... was he or she dealt with in any way because of that ethics violation?

Jesse Hagopian: She wasn't. Maria Goodloe-Johnson, the late Maria Goodloe-Johnson, sadly, she was run out of the Seattle schools for a different ethics violation for the belief that she knew that millions of dollars were being taken from the schools by a private entity, basically just stolen without her proper oversight. But in terms of this ethics violation, it was allowed to go unchecked, and that really bothered a lot of us educators and we knew that parents are sick of seeing no big contracts to millions of dollars go out to testing companies that are profiting off of our schools, money that we could use for reading coaches, right? You want to improve reading and math?

Eric Gurna: Yeah, yeah.

Jesse Hagopian: You could add one more test... we already have five required tests you have to pass on top of the MAP Test that's given three times a year, so we could add another test or we could use that money for a reading coach, after school tutors, lowering class size so we have more individual attention, right. And these are the arguments that we knew could win over the staff. The one other thing I'd say that laid the groundwork for this boycott this year besides that activism around the MAP I think was events that happened last year, the previous year, at Garfield where the state legislature announced that they were going to cut two billion dollars from schools and healthcare in Washington state. And a group of us teachers in the Social Equality Educators, we went down to the capitol, along with thousands of Occupy activists and unions who were protesting, and we got into the House, Ways, and Means Committee meeting where they're actually doing the cutting of the budget. And when they gaveled in the session we stood up and we mic-checked the room. We read out the state constitution and the King County Superior Court ruling that said that the state legislature had broken the law with regard to education funding already. So we said that we were actually in a crime scene, that they were breaking the law and that we were conducting a citizen's arrest of the legislature. And at that point the officer didn't believe in my interpretation of the law and...

Eric Gurna: That's shocking.

Jesse Hagopian: ...and arrested me instead, and I spent the evening in jail and my students found out about it. And they launched a Facebook page: Free Mr. Hagopian, unbeknownst to me. And when I got to school the next day they figured it had worked.

Eric Gurna: Right, sure.

Jesse Hagopian: I was freed. So they got bold and they changed it from Free Mr. Hagopian to Walk Out Against the Budget Cuts.

Eric Gurna: Wow.

Jesse Hagopian: And in 24 hours without any help from me or any adults, I didn't even know it was happening, they organized a mass walkout at Garfield with hundreds and hundreds of students streaming past me in the hallway with signs with a pamphlet about what the budget cuts had done to our school and they delivered it in a march to the mayor's office.

Eric Gurna: Wow.

Jesse Hagopian: And it really, I think, changed the culture at Garfield High School to where the staff was inspired by the students' collective action and standing up for their own education.

Eric Gurna: It's really amazing what can happen when there's some unity like that. You know, it's incredible to hear these unanimous... I never know how to say that word right, but unanimous votes...

Jesse Hagopian: That's right.

Eric Gurna: ...in support and in solidarity with the boycott and then the sort of independent action, independent related action of the students and others in other schools, and then I know that there's... the Garfield strike has been hugely inspirational across the country.

Jesse Hagopian: Yeah.

Eric Gurna: Before... I do want to get a little... I do have some questions about that, but I also want to sort of skip to now. So you went through this sort of dramatic part of the decision making and the public interface of it, then there's a lot of media. If you Google your name there's, you know, you're on MSNBC, you're on CNN, you're sort of speaking out about what's happening. But it's also had some policy impact, at least some...

Jesse Hagopian: Absolutely.

Eric Gurna: I don't know if it's temporary or permanent but...

Jesse Hagopian: Yeah, we scrapped the MAP.

Eric Gurna: So sort of update us on that. Yeah.



Jesse Hagopian: That was our slogan and I was shocked. At the end of the school year an email flashed up from the superintendent, and buried in the middle of this long message was the fact that the MAP Test was going to be optional for high schools next year.

Eric Gurna: Yeah.

Jesse Hagopian: And, I mean, when I read that out to the students it was a eruption of joy, fist bumps in the hallway, spontaneous celebrations because we had been threatened. We had all stuck together and we won. You know, it was an incredible lesson of the power of solidarity over intimidation. And, like you said, the most beautiful thing about the struggle was that it wasn't just a victory for Garfield High School, that this sort of took off across the nation. We saw walkouts in Portland, in Chicago of students walking out of the test. We saw 8,000 parents in Long Island opt their kids out of the test.

Eric Gurna: Yeah.

Jesse Hagopian: 13,000 in Texas marching against these high stakes tests. They had 15 required graduation tests in Texas and they actually knocked it down to five...

Eric Gurna: Wow.

Jesse Hagopian: ...through this mass mobilization. They had a group in Texas that formed the... became popularly known as Mother's Against Drunk Testing, and the movement just interrupted into what they called the Education Spring last year, and I think we're still riding that momentum.

Eric Gurna: And there's other related activity in terms of the Chicago teachers' strike, the work that I recently features on Please Speak Freely of the Providence Student Union...

Jesse Hagopian: That's right.

Eric Gurna: ...which is similar. So where do you think this is all going in a national sense?

Jesse Hagopian: I mean, to me that's the most exciting part, that those of us directly impacted by the education system, the people that are the constituents of the education system, the parents, students, and educators are asserting our voice all across the country, and I think we're going to see something unprecedented in US history this year, especially this spring. We're going to see people refuse to allow Bill Gates and the Gates Foundation, Eli Broad and The Broad Foundation, Walmart family, The Walton Foundation. Those are the three biggest players in education policy. People who have never been on the inside of a public school for more than a visit, people who want to privatize our schools with charter schools who want to reduce the intellectual process of teaching and learning to a single number, use that score to label a teacher and a student so that they can close 50 schools, like you're seeing in Chicago, or deny students graduation or fire teachers. People who really don't know what quality pedagogy is about are directing our schools and I think this spring we are going to see the largest eruption of grassroots

activism in defense of public schools that maybe we've every seen. I mean, I'm hearing plans for a national month of action in the spring maybe in May when the most high stakes tests are offered and I think the number of parents opting their kids out of these tests is going to be unprecedented. I think the number of students who will be refused to be labeled a number and the possibility for boycotts beyond Seattle I think is very real. So I'm optimistic that those of us who are the backbone of the education system will reclaim it and decide the direction we think it should go in.

Eric Gurna: And that's a big question, right? Because you mentioned pedagogy which is not often talked about, the actual process of learning...

Jesse Hagopian: That's right.

Eric Gurna: ...is not often even discussed in these sort of education reform conversations. If you, you know, look at the recent Education Nation...

Jesse Hagopian: That's right.

Eric Gurna: ...on NBC, which I know you were featured on, there's not a lot of talk about how learning happens in the classroom, outside the classroom. And there's a lot of talk about assessment, and accountability, and all these other things, but a criticism of those of us who are fighting against high stakes testing and all of the stuff that you've been talking about, Diane Ravitch being the most high profile activist, a criticism of Ravitch and others is that are defenders of the status quo.

Jesse Hagopian: Right.

Eric Gurna: That they want to bring us back to some horrible yesteryear, you know, and to be honest I sometimes relate to that criticism because I hear people talking about how we need to get back to something, and I often feel like I don't know if it was ever so great.

Jesse Hagopian: Right.

Eric Gurna: I never got to experience anything close to my vision for what education could be except in these little moments: this one teacher in sixth grade or this, you know, these little glimpses of, wow, it can be like this, you know? But for the most part, it's like I don't know if we really want to go back to something, but we want to go forward to what, right? Because there's this vision that Gates and, et al, Duncan, Bush have laid forth and their vision is pretty clear, you know.

Jesse Hagopian: Yeah.

Eric Gurna: The vision of those who oppose that vision doesn't seem to get much airtime or are sort of anti-this and fighting against that. So once we have that... like, say next spring is how you just prophesized, right. Where do we go then?

Jesse Hagopian: Yeah, excellent. The first thing I should say is that those defenders of corporate education reform who claim that Ravitch, or me, or this movement as defenders of the status quo I think need to be put in check very quickly by saying that the No Child Left Behind Act has now been in place for over a decade.

Eric Gurna: Yeah.

Jesse Hagopian: So maybe you could say that we were defenders of the status quo in the first year, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, but once you get over a decade, now you're policy is the status quo. Has it worked? And we can say definitely that we have seen a disastrous policy of test and punish, right, ravage the school system. So at this point Secretary Duncan and the corporate reforms are the status quo, and I think you're right. We need to have a vision to undo the status quo and to move us in a place that we've never seen public education in this country go before and that vision has to be intimately bound up with a vision for what is quality pedagogy. And so I would say a couple things about what that vision would look like. First of all, with assessment we need to move away from standardized testing as the god we pray to, as the sole arbiter of intelligence, in our society.

Eric Gurna: What do you think about the current focus on college and career-ready and are you talking about a way of reframing the purpose of education away from that?

Jesse Hagopian: Absolutely. I think that the focus on college and career-ready and giving grades to schools and to colleges, it's all about ranking and sorting our children, and I'm about empowering them. I think we need to completely reframe the purpose of education, that first and foremost the purpose of education has to be to solve real problems that we face in the world today. If our world was humming along doing well we could talk about...

Eric Gurna: It's not.

Jesse Hagopian: ...we could talk about a different purpose for education but the problem is we face immense social crises in the world today, right. I mean, there's an epidemic of violence against women in our society today that goes unchecked, and this sort of sexist misogyny is just peddled in the mainstream media every day that feeds into this abuse. We have endless wars in the Middle East to where our country can spend untold amounts more to bomb children in the Middle East but not to educate them here at home. We have economic collapse so that in the world's richest country we have one out of four kids living in poverty. I mean, that's obscene. That's just absolutely outrageous, and to me possibly the biggest challenge is climate change, right, because if we don't figure out how to develop problem solvers in our world today we won't have a world that's hospitable to humanity anymore. And this is a medium term to a short term problem that we're going to face with millions of people projected to be climate refugees from island nations around the world in the near term and then the future of humanity threatened in too distant future. And I think that if we don't reframe the purpose of education to be about developing visionaries, imagination, to foster collaboration so that we're working together, I mean, hello? Government shutdown here. We could use more collaboration in our world today, people that know how to work together to solve the problems that we face today. If we can't figure out how to make our schools about critical thinking rather than rote memorization and fill-

in-the-bubble then we're going to be lost as a country, more importantly as a world, and I think that if we take that as our starting point that education has to be about empowering our youth to solve the problems that they're seeing in the world today. Then we can develop much better public policy around education, and much better forms of assessment, and much better ideas for how we go about empowering them. Do we want to straightjacket them with 14 standardized tests for a kindergartener, as one mother in Chicago told me that her family is being subjected to, right? Or do we want to lower class size, give great instruction to our educators and professional development that shows how to foster collaboration and move towards forms of assessment that can look at many of the skills? And I think that's the crossroads that we're at today and I hope that that kind of repurposing of education can enter the mainstream debate through all this activism that's coming this year.

Eric Gurna: Earlier you told the story about the superintendent in Washington who was on the board of the testing company for the test that she brought in to use in that district, obviously profiting the company that she was on the board within. As you said, that was an ethics violation. That's one example but there's a lot of corporate and commercial interests in the world of education...

Jesse Hagopian: Yeah.

Eric Gurna: ...particularly when it comes to curriculum, textbooks, and testing.

Jesse Hagopian: That's right.

Eric Gurna: And oftentimes those are one and the same companies that are putting those together, and lately we see this sort of feeding frenzy of consultants and others around a common core, right. So all of a sudden everybody's an expert on integrating common core into your classroom even though it just came out. So I guess I want to ask you, do you give much thought to the corporate and commercial interests and do you see a connection between that and the sort of hyper competitive, hyper hierarchical sorting system that you mentioned that the tests actually, the tests and the ranking systems, actually encourage?

Jesse Hagopian: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, our superintendent was part of NWEA but that's small potatoes in the world of the testing industrial complex that's just become a behemoth. I mean, it's a multi-billion dollar industry led by Pearson, and we know that the common core initiative is really just a windfall for these testing companies because if you have the same standards in every state, then you can develop one test and sell it to every state and the profit margins go way up. And I think that many times the assessments that we're given, the tests that we're using in our schools, are not driven by: what's the best way to assess what our kids know? But about who gets the contract and who's got the lobbying power? And I think that that gets it exactly wrong. I think that we need to challenge these testing companies. We need to look into the money that they're spending on influencing our politicians and we need to raise our voices against that.

Eric Gurna: And you just made me think of that. I never thought about this before but there's a real parallel here between the drug laws that were passed in the 80s and 90s with the over

sentencing of minor infractions, drug infractions, the disproportionate sentencing for, say, crack versus powder cocaine that were advocated for by the prison builders, essentially.

Jesse Hagopian: Absolutely.

Eric Gurna: There's such a parallel between that, which is so sad when you think about it.

Jesse Hagopian: I mean, it shows you why we need to repurpose education to solve problems...

Eric Gurna: Yeah.

Jesse Hagopian: ...because when you have, you know, wealthy prison industrial complex lobbying to get prisons made and then you have testing companies lobbying to get their product into the classroom, you create severe social crises and I think I'm glad you raised that specific case because I think the two are actually linked in a very dangerous way because high stakes testing has been shown in a new study, in a peer reviewed journal, to actually increase incarceration rates in our country. And so our kids are being tested out of school and into prisons, and it happens in several ways. The first way is when their skills, their knowledge, and what students really value is not respected in our classrooms and instead a very narrow ability to eliminate wrong answer choices is the skill that's valued kids rightfully tune out, and when they tune out in the classroom then you see more behavioral problems and discipline problems, and then you see the suspension rates rise, and then you see kids not graduating because they miss school, and then you see an increase in the prison population. And I think that's one very real consequence of these standardized tests. I think beyond that, the graduation requirements, the ELCs or end of course exams that are required to pass to graduate are fueling the school to prison pipeline. The kids who aren't passing these end up in higher rates, according to the most current research, in prison. And I think Arne Duncan and the rest of the corporate education reformers have to be held to account for that. What do you say? That the policies that you are pushing are leading to higher incarceration rates, right? Arne Duncan has said that education is the Civil Rights Movement of our time, and that's a lot for me to take from a guy who also said that Hurricane Katrina was the best thing that ever happened to the New Orleans Public School System because it wiped out the schools and allowed it to be charterized. But I do think he's right, that it is the Civil Rights Movement of our time. It's just that I don't remember that the Civil Rights Movement was led by billionaires.

Eric Gurna: Yeah.

Jesse Hagopian: And I don't remember that the Civil Rights Movement contributed to mass incarceration.

Eric Gurna: Yeah.

Jesse Hagopian: And if I remember right the Civil Rights Movement was started with a boycott, and I hope that our boycott also helps lead to mass grassroots activism in defense of our public schools.

Eric Gurna: And I hope so too.

Jesse Hagopian: Right on.

Eric Gurna: And I want to really thank you, Jesse Hagopian, for taking the time to be on Please Speak Freely. It's been a real pleasure.

Eric Gurna: Right on. Thanks so much.

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