

Testimony on HB 4150 – February 5, 2014

Dear Members of House Education:

Adoption of HB 2220 sparked a much overdue conversation across the state of Oregon regarding one of the most archaic practices in schools – grading! Teachers and administrators in schools throughout Oregon began the difficult conversations about what a grade should mean. Much of that work was stymied, when ODE released a narrower interpretation of HB 2220. I believe the interpretation was accurate, just disappointing.

For many years, the grades awarded to students have often been based on how well students “played the game of school” rather than whether they had attained the skills and knowledge that had been set forth in the course curriculum. Students were rewarded for unrelated extra credit, sitting quietly in class, completion of homework –even if it was not corrected, etc. Those behaviors are important, but often have little to do with measuring student academic attainment in the class. HB 4150 attempts to clarify rules around grading; however we believe it goes too far in spots and cements bad practice in others.

It is our understanding that an amendment is being proposed to eliminate Sections 2-4 from the proposed bill. We would support that amendment. We believe the provisions in Section 1, 5, b (lines 19-25) provide districts with the option of choosing a proficiency-based system without adding an extra layer to district operations, as proposed in the sections that would be eliminated. Districts will involve appropriate stakeholders in the discussions prior to adoption.

We are also concerned with page 2, lines 1-18 and 34-36 which seem to run counter to initial intent of the bill and cement in statute the idea that grades may be based on those other factors that may not reflect the academic attainment of the students. At the same time we recognize that some of those behaviors directly demonstrate or are related to employability skills of our graduates. Rather than inserting them into the course grade, we would advocate for them to be included in the comment section on the report card or reflected in a separate section of employability behaviors or skills.

Finally, we recommend changing the word “three” to “five” on page 2, row 23. We strongly support a limitation around the number of indicators that we are asking teachers to report; however, we believe three is too narrow of a restriction in some content areas categories

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Ron Wilkinson, Superintendent