

## HB 2655 House Education Committee -- February 9, 2015

### Chair Doherty and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today. My name is Karen Stratton. I live in Beaverton and teach 5<sup>th</sup> grade at Sexton Mountain Elementary School, which is a school with a fairly low poverty rate, and very involved and educated parents. I am here today to testify in favor of HB 2655, as well as the other bills before you later this afternoon.

Even if standardized testing was implemented with the best of intentions to improve our students' achievement, there have been many unintended negative consequences. **I believe parents must have the right to excuse their child from state standardized testing because the original intent has backfired in damaging ways.**

**Briefly, my opinion rests on three factors:**

- 1. The tests can be overwhelmingly stressful to students and affect their motivation in school. (Please read the quotations from my students that I've included below.)**
- 2. The tests and preparation for them narrows the curriculum and takes away valuable learning time, especially for lower performing children who take a longer time to complete the tests. (Please consider the longest test you have ever taken, and wonder why elementary students need 8-10 hours of testing to "prove" they can read, write and do math.)**
- 3. The tests highlight, but do not improve, the school achievement difficulties faced by lower SES students, and the tests do not provide useful information to key stakeholders (parents, students and teachers).**

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### **Impact on students:**

Instead of encouraging students, standardized testing demoralizes children.

I have had personal experience with the stressful aspects of state testing. Last year, I proctored several sessions of computerized testing. Each child had a "target score" for his or her test on a testing note card in front of him or her. When the test was over, the children immediately knew whether they had "Passed" or not. Even some children who exceeded the state standard learned they had "failed" to meet their individual target. Some of these children came to me in tears over their test results.

I felt I had participated in child abuse. I asked my students to write letters to our principal about their testing experiences. Here are some quotes from their letters-

“Remember class tomorrow is testing day!” Right when Mrs. Stratton says that my stomach feels like I just swallowed 200 mouthfuls of butterflies, flies and other flying insects. For the rest of the day my stomach felt the same. All through soccer and dinner. And when I woke up the next morning they were still there. When I submitted my test my heart sunk. I did not meet my goal. I felt down for the rest of the school day.”

“The night before the test, I had a nightmare that I didn’t get a single answer on my test right, and that I had to retake the fifth grade because of it. It might seem pretty silly, but when I was taking the test, I was scared out of my shoes.”

“When my mom told me that she got an email saying that we were going to be testing all week, my heart literally sank to the floor. I hated testing. It was always looking at a computer screen answering problems and then when you finished the test there would still be more to do.”

“The day testing came along I started getting really worried, especially about the math test... The day I finished my math test and got my score was really upsetting. I didn’t meet my score or exceeding.”

“As I walked into the technology lab, my stomach was twisting into knots. I’ve always been nervous about testing, just because the thought of not doing good sinks its way into my brain, and I can’t get rid of it.”

Is it really necessary put this type of stress on our 10- and 11-year-old children? **I collect permission slips for my students to go on a field trip or to watch a last day of school movie. A school experience that can be traumatic to a child should be something parents can say “no” to.**

**Please go to the SBAC website and take a practice test for a grade level you are familiar with.** It is difficult for me to describe what is expected of our students, and it will be more effective for you to experience it directly. Teachers across the country are telling their legislators that the tests are developmentally inappropriate. This means the test asks for mental and physical abilities the students have not yet developed.

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### **Impact on curriculum:**

I expect to spend multiple class sessions training my students on what this test expects and how to navigate it. Briefly, the English Language Arts Performance

Task requires the students to read three long passages, and then use those passages to construct an opinion essay.

I have more than a few students who do not read well enough or do not have the attention span to make it through reading the articles. I have many students who do not type well enough to construct an essay on the computer. What will their experience be as they sit in front of the computer looking at this test?

The tests are expected to take from 8 to 10 hours. However, the average attention span for a fifth grader when confronted with a computerized test is from 15-45 minutes. The logistical difficulties of finding time to test almost 300 third, fourth and fifth grade students for 8-10 hours in small chunks with 30 computers in one lab are mind-boggling. **It will require we suspend or interrupt other learning activities for many days during testing.**

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**Testing does not narrow the achievement gap:**

**No Child Left Behind had a powerful purpose—No child should be left behind. Fifteen years later, using this test and punish system, we have not improved educational outcomes for the 50% of our students living in poverty. Should the solution be a harder test with more dire consequences for failure? I believe not.**

Teachers do not oppose assessment. We assess our students constantly as we teach, both formally and informally. We work hard to inform both students and parents about their achievement and to help them move forward in their learning.

However, despite all the hours spent preparing the students for the tests and proctoring them, I have never been able to use state test results to inform my teaching. The test results come in as a range of numbers, not useful information. I have had students ask me, “How can I do better on the test?” I have absolutely no answer for them, given the lack of information provided by standardized tests.

**States around the country are in an uproar over high stakes testing, and the 70% failure rate of the SBAC and PARCC tests. Oregon should get off this train to nowhere and invest our resources in services that help students. In the meantime, parents should have a right to excuse their children from state testing.**