

House Committee on Education
Testimony in support of HB 2680
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Diane Mattison-Nottage, Eugene

My name is Diane Mattison-Nottage. I live in Eugene and work at Hamlin Middle School in Springfield as the Title I Coordinator. I have taught middle school Language Arts and Social Studies for the past 25 years.

The use of summative assessments in Oregon has become one of the heaviest burdens on our public schools. Schools are spending more time and money preparing for and implementing large-scale summative assessments than ever before. But the return on that huge investment has yielded no useable results to teachers and students. Why do we continue to invest huge sums of money in the purchase and delivery of these assessments when they have absolutely failed to move the dial on student achievement? The data gathered from these tests sheds no light on why students aren't progressing and I would argue that the results themselves are flawed and are not giving us a true picture of how our students are growing academically.

An example of that flaw can be seen in a former student of mine. A struggling reader, he had just about given up on himself by the time he reached me in 8th grade. Over the course of the year however he began to make some strides. His classroom performance improved and he began to see himself as a reader for the first time. Enter the OAKS test. As he worked his way through the test he confided in me that it didn't seem as hard as the year before. I was watching that day when he hit the final button and his score popped up. His face fell, he looked up at me and quietly got up and left the room. He had missed the mark by 2 points, 2 points! He wasn't interested in the fact that he had improved by 14 points from his previous year's score, he only knew he failed to pass. He is not alone. I could share many, many similar experiences. And when the data is analyzed by those who crave such numbers he will be just another 8th grade failing student indicative of a failing system. How is a 14-point gain a failure? The fact is it's NOT, that's a huge gain, but the nature of these assessments is that they deal in gross numbers not individuals. That's their greatest flaw.

I could share many stories of students being crushed by these one-size-fits-all tests. But that's just one way these assessments negatively impact our school system. We have to take far too much time away from teaching and learning to accommodate these tests. Right now my school is preparing for the Smarter Balanced test. Every day, instead of supporting our reading intervention teachers I am focused on trying to schedule time for 629 students to take the tests without totally burning them out. The assessment folks estimate it will take 7.5 hours total time for the entire assessment. 7.5 hours equates to 10 class periods! My teachers estimate it will take our kids much more time than that based on our experience with the practice test so our students are likely to lose far more instruction time than estimated. Our kids can't afford to miss any instruction time especially for a test that yields no useable information about their progress.

The issue of time isn't only about instructional time. Other school programs are negatively affected as well. For instance, we have a program called WEB (Where Everybody Belongs). Our 8th grade leaders guide our younger students through their first year at middle school. We have what we call Community Time built into our schedule so the 8th and 6th graders can meet and work together. However, that time is now being used to make sure our kids go through the SBAC Training Test, the SBAC Practice Test and both a math and ELA SBAC Practice Performance Tasks. And teachers are using valuable collaborative time to prepare for the assessments rather than using it to plan meaningful units and lessons for our kids. They struggle with this every day because they know they are being forced by the high stakes nature of these tests to forgo what they know is best teaching practice for test preparation activities. We have no choice given the

misguided importance placed on these assessments and the sanctions that can be administered for poor performance.

Chronic absences are a huge problem in Oregon. We have students who regularly miss more than 10% or more of their school days. Being truant has huge negative consequences because kids miss opportunities to learn. It is estimated that kids will need at least 7.5 hours or more to complete all aspects of the Smarter Balanced test. That means at least 10 or more periods of instruction will be missed in key subject areas. Learning time is critical so how can we justify using so much instructional time on these assessments? It makes no sense to me as an educator and a parent that we steal time for learning and use it for a test that has done nothing to improve education or increase learning and in fact is a detriment to our school system and our students.

The tragedy here is that we can do better but we choose not to. There are other ways to measure student growth that are both reliable and informative to teachers and students. We must look clearly at what we are doing, realize it isn't doing us any good and come up with another system that works to improve student learning. We can do that, with your help!