

Testimony Regarding HB 2680

Chair Doherty and Members of the House Education Committee,

I am a veteran teacher (21 years) at Lake Oswego High School. I am also the president of the Lake Oswego Education Association. I have spent a disproportionate amount of my time lately reading books I do not want to read (about education reform) in lieu of books that would actually be helpful for my teaching profession in the realm of social studies. But, that burden comes with the territory and I take my responsibilities representing teachers in my district very seriously.

I recently had the good fortune to interview Professor Yong Zhao, a U of O Education Professor. (Prof. Zhao will be testifying before the Senate Education committee tomorrow.) His recent book, ***Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Dragon? Why China has the Best (and the Worst) Education System in the World*** should be required reading for every state legislator. Prof. Zhao knows Chinese education well and has a timely warning to America about its flaws, not the least of which is the over emphasis on testing. Zhao's thesis is that the tests are part of China's Confucian past and promote conformity -- not creativity. They create the illusion of a meritocracy (top test scorers got -- and still get, government jobs), but they serve to perpetuate authoritarian regimes, not democratic ones.

I also recently had a fine meeting with Senator Gelser and Representative Linger to discuss education reform. I couched that meeting under the title: Beware the Unintended Consequences of Legislating.

And that brings me to HB 2680. As a social studies teacher, I understand the necessity of compromise in the political sphere and that this bill is an attempt to ameliorate some of the more punitive aspects of the testing mandates. I endorse that attempt. I do, however, worry, when I read clauses like, "Analyze student learning gaps; and identify adjustments in instruction necessary to address student learning gaps." Because, my next thought is -- ok, what will that look like? What new bureaucratic mandate will trickle down once this is law? Because, everything you legislate from this room impacts my school and my classroom. Right now, my school is grappling with how to fit the Smarter Balanced tests into an already crunched school year (furlough days) without interfering with AP testing schedules or finals or disproportionately punishing certain subject areas, not to mention the students themselves.

Teachers, all over my district, are burned out beyond belief by the heavy-handed bureaucratic overlay of federal and state mandates in our profession. Those mandates (manifested in laws and administrative rules) do nothing to promote equity in education and are sucking the lifeblood from the job. They reveal a national disrespect for the teaching profession. The final insult is that the new testing regime being foisted upon school districts (in the name of national standards) is being promulgated by educational profiteers. Perhaps we might call them the testing-industrial complex.

The new Smarter Balanced tests are exclusively for ELA and Math which simultaneously disregards and disrespects all the other curricular areas (my field -- social studies, the sciences, the arts, world languages.) I am NOT clamoring for a test of my own; I mention this as an example of the skewed view of what makes good citizens. I am, frankly, very tired of hearing the phrase, "college or career ready". It is meaningless. There are many paths to a successful life and passing a test in limited areas is not an accurate measure. My own low SAT scores are ample evidence of that. I am a graduate of Reed College, a former Peace Corps volunteer and I hold a Masters Degree in History from the University of Oregon. I have applied for and received

multiple Gilder-Lehrman and NEH scholarship opportunities. Imagine if I had been prevented from graduating from high school because I could not pass a required math test.

I have attached a copy of the infamous matrix designed to evaluate teachers in Oregon. This is your state and this is one of the results of SB 290 in 2011 which was designed to achieve a waiver from NCLB. I would be happy to attempt to help you navigate this nearly indecipherable labyrinth. (Beware the unintended consequences of legislating.)

I now have a couple of asks.

1. Would you throw down the challenge to legislative member to take the Smarter Balance tests yourselves?
2. Would you do a full blown investigation on the full costs of such testing? This could be measured by the loss of instructional time, professional development time (yes, that gets used for SBAC test readiness), the profiteering that results from such testing, the financial burden borne by state governments and, finally, and most importantly, an investigation about what education is truly about?

I will end on a high note. Yesterday, my juniors in my US History class participated in a Cold War debate. They represented either Clark Clifford or Henry Wallace and it was their jobs to convince me (as Pres. Truman) what to do about the Soviet Union. Not only had they prepped well by reading primary source documents and their textbooks, but they argued well using evidence from those sources. The debate was a model of intelligent civil discourse with just the appropriate use of passion. It was utter magic. And, poof, it's gone. Not captured on video (and that wouldn't have done it justice.) Not "testable". Not quantifiable in any way. Students spoke who had never previously spoken. Students stepped up their game, drawn into the debate by the ambient excitement of hammering their ideas out on the anvils of their peers' arguments.

That is how students learn. That is why I teach.

Respectfully yours,

Laura Paxson Kluthe
2000 NW 28th Place
Portland, OR 97210