

February 9, 2015

Oregon House Education Committee

Chair Doherty and Vice-chairs Frederick and Sprenger and members of the committee:

My name is Betsy Salter, S-A-L-T-E-R. I am the mother of a PPS 9th grader, Maggie.

Thank you for considering all of the bills on today's docket. They are all important and address issues I have been concerned about for several years.

My testimony today will focus on HB 2714 and HB 2655.

After much research and soul searching, I started opting Maggie out of the OAKS tests when she was in 7th and 8th grade. As a 9th grader, Maggie is not expected to take the new SBAC test.

My reasons for opting are many and I attached a copy of my 8th grade opt out letter to my submitted testimony.

I would like to mention that before opting Maggie out, she had always received scores considered as "exceeds expectations" in reading, math as well as 5th grade science.

It is so hard to get information about parental rights to opt out of the state assessments. I learned about it a few years ago because I was concerned about how Oregon's new education reforms (elimination of elected state superintendent of public instruction, creation of OEIB, tunnel vision focus on state test scores...) were similar to what was happening elsewhere around the country.

In PPS and Oregon we are trying to get the word out to parents through social media, but that is not how it should work. HB 2714 and 2655 would require school districts to notify parents that they have the right to opt their students out of state assessments.

When parents ask school principals about opting out, we get a variety of responses. The state and school districts do not provide information about parental rights to opt out of state assessments directly. Parents hear about the right to opt out via word of mouth and when they talk to their school principal or district representative they may get factual information that respects parental authority or they may get misinformation intended to threaten or create fear that a parent must subject their child to a practice they view as unjust and detrimental to teaching and learning in all our public schools or else their school will lose funding, all their staff will be fired and replaced or the school will be closed. This level of punishment has only been meted out because of students taking the tests, never because students have opted out of the tests.

As a lifelong democrat, I have been hugely disappointed that the U.S. Dept. of Ed has continued the failed test and punish policies of No Child Left Behind, with perhaps worse policies in NCLB waivers and Race to the Top competitive grants.

It's time for Oregon to live up to her state motto when it comes to high stakes state standardized assessments. Please, make Oregon "Fly with her own wings" and adopt the opt out provisions in HB 2714 and HB 2655.

Thank you.

Betsy Salter
Portland, OR
PPS Parent

Attachment: Salter 2014 Opt Out Letter