

Testimony to Oregon House Education Committee
March 16, 2015

My name is Elizabeth Thiel. I am a teacher in Portland Public schools, and a parent of two children in the same district. I am asking you to support of HB2655, to increase parents' right to opt-out of standardized testing and provide them with factual and balanced information about high-stakes tests.

As a teacher I have spent my career dealing with the real impact of standardized testing on schools and students. One school I worked at was closed due to test scores, and two others have been sanctioned with Focus status. I have seen students literally sick over testing, and many so demoralized that they believe themselves to be failures. I have watched limited time and resources shift toward tests and test-prep, as my students have lost access to electives, support staff, and wrap-around services. Our myopic focus on data and testing is undermining the work of public schools.

Because I am a teacher, I know more about high-stakes tests than most parents.

I know that standardized tests are not helping teachers teach better. A single number for "reading" or "math" tells me almost nothing about what a student needs to learn; it certainly does not help me understand how to motivate her, connect with him, or make any child's experience at school meaningful and relevant.

I know that the data I could receive from a standardized test will not meaningfully inform me about the quality of my child's school. A quality school experience has far more to do with my child's relationship with her teacher, the fostering of her self-confidence, her opportunity to problem-solving and create, and her exposure to relevant and engaging curriculum, than to any test score.

I know that the data from high-stakes tests is far more likely to be used to justify the closure of a school, the elimination of un-tested subjects, and the shortening of recess, than for making instructional decision that would benefit my child or her classmates.

I know that despite the limited, possibly dubious, use of this data, my child and her class will be robbed of at least 8 hours of instruction in order to take this test, and about 8 more hours of test preparation to learn the interface.

I know these things because I am a teacher, but I am also a parent. **Other parents deserve to have real information about standardized tests, not just the promotional material that districts feel compelled to give out in order to meet participation goals of 95% in every subgroup.**

Knowing what I know, to act on my conscience, I must opt my daughter out of high-stakes standardized testing this year. Current policy prohibits parents from opting out of testing for any reason but religion or disability. Oregon needs to recognize the right of parents to have a voice in their child's education, and to act on their ethics

when confronted with a system that is harmful to children and to the institution of public education.

Opting out of test, like opting out of other activities that a parent objects to, should be a straight-forward and uncontroversial issue. My choice to opt my child out of testing will not adversely impact any other child: those who does not opt-out can still take the test, and I will happily provide activities for my daughter during testing time. My choice to opt-out should not adversely impact my school: whether or not I chose for my child to test tells nothing about the quality of her school.

However, Oregon policy has artificially created an adverse impact when parents opt-out of testing: schools, including the one my children attend, are currently penalized by ODE when families opt out. The school's score on the state report card is dropped if the percentage of students tested goes below 95% in any subgroup, even if only a few parents opt out, and even if the opt-outs are due to religious belief or severe disability.

This is coercive, creating an environment in which parents are pressured to submit their children to a test they believe is harmful, so that their school community isn't punished with a docked rating. **I ask that you add to this bill a provision that schools no longer be penalized when parents opt out.** The thinking behind the 95% participation rule is that it prevents schools from cherry-picking students to test in order to artificially inflate results. The intent of the rule was not to prevent parents from having a voice in making decisions about their child's education. **If schools must be judged on participation, the cohort of potential participants should not include those who have opted out.**

Parents deserve to have accurate information about testing. They deserve to have a voice, without the threat of retribution from the state. Please move forward with HB 2655, and amend it prevent opt-outs from impacting a school's rating.

Thank you for your work in support of Oregon's public schools,

Elizabeth Thiel
4543 NE 24th Ave
Portland, OR 97211