

I am writing to support the passage of HB2655. As both a teacher in the Canby School District and a parent of a junior at Oregon City High School, I have personally and professionally experienced the lack of information and confusion around the Smarter Balanced assessment, impacting students, parents, and teachers.

As an educator, I have the unfair advantage of being “in-the-know” about Smarter Balanced assessments, opting out, and alternative graduation requirements, as I have received professional training and education about these issues. In contrast, the average parent is at a disadvantage, as Oregon school districts have not consistently informed parents about Smarter Balanced assessments, their right to opt-out their students from testing, or alternative Essential Skills graduation requirements.

After serious deliberation, we have chosen to opt-out our son, Ian, who is a junior at Oregon City High School, from SBAC testing this year. We made this decision based on several factors, but primarily because Ian does not need to take the test to graduate. His PSAT scores exceed the minimum requirement to fulfill the Essential Skills requirement to earn his diploma. Ian is a 4.0 honor student, who consistently takes AP and honors courses, and is proving his “college and career readiness” through the rigorous course work he engages in on a daily basis. His excellent teachers throughout his K-11 education within the Oregon City School District have guided him along a path that ensures that he is fully college and career ready. He simply does not need a Smarter Balanced test score to prove his competency.

What is unfair and confusing is that some districts are providing both testing information and opt-out forms, some provide one or the other, while other districts have not informed parents of anything related to standardized testing at all. To this date, Oregon City High School and the Oregon City School district have not distributed any information whatsoever to me about Smarter Balanced testing, opt-out procedures, alternative learning activities my child will be engaged in during testing time, or alternative Essential Skills graduation requirements. The only reason we learned testing dates and opt out procedures was by personally contacting the OCHS principal by phone. If we had not relentlessly educated ourselves as to our rights and then pursued those rights, opting-out and discovering alternative graduation requirements would not have been possible.

I teach English Language Development to students Kindergarten through sixth grade, whose first language is something other than English. It has become glaringly obvious to me that parents who speak and/or read a language other than English have been gravely discriminated against receiving any information about standardized assessments, their right to opt out their child from testing, how to opt out, or alternative graduation options. To my knowledge, any information currently available is primarily in English, some in Spanish, and none that I’ve seen in any other language. And to add to this frustration, information has only been made available via the internet, which many families do not have access to, nor have families been directed how to access it in any way, shape, or form. Because of my legal rights and responsibilities as a public educator, I am not allowed to share the information I know with parents or students during the school day. This has left me, and countless other educators, feeling helplessly entrapped by withholding what should be publicly shared information.

Oregon is known for its independent and pioneering spirit. Oregonians take pride in their free thinking, creativity, and open minded perspectives. It is time for Oregonians to take a stand and seriously examine Smarter Balanced's methodology, construction, purpose, cost to school districts, and distribution and use of private student data. It is time for Oregon to defend the rights of educators, parents and students to ensure that everyone is informed about all of the issues related to standardized testing and the choices they have the freedom to make. Please support HB2655. It is simply the right thing to do.

Sincerely,

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