

Dear members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing again regarding my support for HB 2655 and I request that this letter be submitted to the public record of the hearing.

This bill provides for something very important: the right of a parent to control and direct their child's education.

Oregon has always given parents broad freedom to direct their children's education. As a teacher in Oregon since 1993 and a parent, I have known people to opt their children out of such things as lessons that deal with holidays, health lessons, science lessons, social studies lessons, and reading certain texts. Parents are easily able to opt out of such things, usually with just a note to the teacher. I have also known parents who opted their children out of the entire core curriculum and sent their children to school only for elective classes, such as band or choir. Parents are even allowed to opt out of the entire school system and home school their children if they want. Why would we not allow parents to opt out of this test easily?

Since the beginning of "testing season", parents across the state have been sending opt out requests to their children's schools. As a state leader of the Opt Out movement with Oregon Save Our Schools, I have heard multiple stories of schools and districts attempting to intimidate parents who submit requests to opt out into making their children take the test: parents being required to meet with principals or district administrators who tell them things like opting out will hurt their child's school, districts telling parents that they must supply and pay for an alternative assessment (this for elementary students) parents who are told that they must explain their religious beliefs to the school, parents who say they were told that THEIR CHILD must explain how his or her religious beliefs conflict with taking the test (this from a parent of a third grader). Whether these statements are one hundred percent accurate or not, they are the parents' perceptions of what they are being told. It is inconsistent across the state and worse, some of these requests seem to violate one's First Amendment rights. If I were told by my child's school that I or my child needed to explain our religious beliefs, I would be contacting a civil rights attorney. This bill would eliminate that confusion and make it very clear that parents have a right to opt their children out.

However, I am not in favor of certain proposed amendments to the bill. I particularly appreciate the way the original form of HB 2655 requires, in addition to allowing parents to opt out, that school districts inform them of their right to do so as well as to inform them specifically what tests will be administered, specifics about the results of those tests, and how the data resulting from those assessments will be distributed and protected. In light of [recent news about Pearson testing company](#) monitoring social media and then using private data entered during testing to link students' posts back to their school, I would like protections for our students' privacy to remain in the bill.

I would also like parents to receive unbiased information about their ability to opt students out of the test, and am therefore opposed to any statement about the "purpose and value" of the assessments being included in opt out information. This allows

whomever is in charge to insert their opinions about purpose and value, which I believe is inappropriate. Parents are fully capable of finding multiple points of view about that and making a decision for themselves without inserting state propaganda.

I would hope that when you give parents this right, you would also consider changing the rule that parents' decision to opt out negatively reflects on a school's state ranking. That is not only unfair to the school, which has no control over parents' decisions about opting out (nor should it) but it also puts parents in the position of requiring their children to do something they feel is not good for them in order to avoid visiting negative consequences their child's school, which has no control over whether to administer these tests or not (but should).

Children belong to their parents, not to the state. Parents have a right to know what their children are doing at the schools that they fund through their tax dollars and a right to decide if they want their children to participate in the activities that the school offers. We are losing democratic control of our public schools and our children's private data. I am asking you to please help put an end to that. Let parents raise their children. Let local communities decide what they want to see in their local public schools.

Please support the unamended version of HB 2655 and please consider adding language to remove negative consequences for schools if parents opt out of state testing.

Sincerely,

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