

Testimony to the House Committee on Education regarding HB 2835
March 19, 2015

I am writing as a positive and successful product of Oregon's public schools. Gratefully, I was educated with a well-rounded curriculum.

In elementary school I had PE, music, and library routinely. I was exposed to wonderful literature and the freedom to choose what I read. I was taught the love of playing a musical instrument in grade school, and I played well into high school. I remember science experiments, field trips, Halloween costume parades and valentine exchanges, book reports, learning multiplication, winning poster design contests, researching famous explorers, and putting on a school play.

In middle school, despite my height deficiency, I proved to be the most improved player for my middle school basketball team. I had art, PE, core classes, band, and a teacher librarian.

In high school I learned photography, art, personal finance, and even typing! I took French classes for two years. . I was the school's yearbook editor my senior year. I was on my school Cross Country team. I was successful in both of my AP History and English classes, which allowed me to go to the University of Oregon with 9 college credits already on the books. I learned how to write a strong five paragraph deductive essay with a thesis statement and transitions. All of these experiences stand out to me in my public education experience, and none of it was the result of Common Core State Standards and high-stakes testing.

In Oregon, prior to the early 1990s, we had money to fund a well-rounded education, provide opportunities in sports, journalism, foreign languages, and art. We had teachers who had time to build relationships, plan curriculum without pressures of "accountability". My teachers were helping develop human beings with a wide variety of interests and talents, and we developed at our own rate. Teachers were respected and appreciated. My parents were also supportive of me in my schooling. I had a stable home life. We funded education, and families and students were our touchstone for accountability. Times have changed with regards to high poverty rates and social dysfunction, but our current education reform plan is not getting at the root in what our kids need. CCSS will not save our kids, but alleviating the effects of poverty will.

I have been a public school teacher for 16 years. I have been a library media specialist for 10 years before my position was eliminated due to budget shortfalls. I now teach high-poverty students Language Arts at a middle school in East Multnomah County, and I see our students being robbed of these important opportunities and having it replaced by high-stakes standardized tests which are expensive, change our focus as educators since our jobs are now tied to these test

results, demoralized teachers who are finding it harder and harder to get through each day as they try to keep up with all the new initiatives and demands, and a continued erosion of school funds going into the classrooms of my students. We don't just have a funding crisis, we have a priorities crisis here in Oregon.

And just as our state suffers with a fiscal crisis of several years, here comes Common Core to supposedly save the day. With the adoption of Common Core State Standards, we as a state are giving up our autonomy in deciding what is best for our kids.

I would argue that the pre-CCSS standards were strong and rigorous. Why we abandoned our previous state standards I cannot understand, except to say that as a critical thinker, I noticed that our adoption of them coincided with the timing of our application for the federal Race to the Top grants which required states to adopt "career and college ready" standards. How were our other standards not "career and college ready?" Plenty of successful Oregonians came from our previous standards.

I believe we were sold a bad bill of goods that promised the world, but will ultimately fail to deliver what we expect. Instead of fostering a well-rounded curriculum, authentic assessments, and simplicity, we now have a system of teachers relearning or unpacking nebulous standards, that in the end, are less than what we had before—such as quality speaking standards and personal reading reflection. As a teacher, I don't have time for that. Nor do my students. I need clear and developmentally appropriate standards that engage my students in their learning. Any time saved from this chore can be better spent calling parents about their children, spending more time assessing and evaluating student learning, and developing quality curriculum.

Furthermore, CCSS are expensive! Recent costs for the Smarter Balanced tests are at \$26 per students versus the \$17 per student for OAKS. While the state promises that these tests will provide more opportunities for formative and robust assessments, I can tell you that I can create constant, robust, and meaningful assessments as a professional teacher. No more computers will be unavailable due to testing but instead we can do projects. No one needs to spend money on the products of a testing company or recruit scorers on craigslist. I will gladly do it for my annual salary complete with professional training and experience. Please take the money that is spent on all this testing and data collection systems, and give it back to the schools and classrooms; we can find a better way to spend it to give kids a more authentic learning experience.

To be clear, I am not opposed to standards. I am for standards created by local and experienced educators. Common Core State Standards have not been developed by educators. According to Diane Ravitch, "The Gates Foundation stepped in and assumed that responsibility. It gave millions to the National Governors Association, to the Council of Chief School Officers, to Achieve and to Student Achievement

Partners. Once the standards were written, Gates gave millions more to almost every think tank and education advocacy group in Washington to evaluate the standards—even to some that had no experience evaluating standards—and to promote and help to implement the standards.”

When I asked a math teacher I know about whether or not CCSS standards are better than our locally created state standards, she replied no and that the math department for the state had just invested a lot of time and money into revamping the math standards and they were very happy to start implementing them, but then CCSS came around and they are having to spend a lot of time not only recreating the wheel but recreating the car itself.

So why are we pushing forth with the CCSS? They are expensive. They have never been piloted prior to adoption. They continue to foster and promote the high-stakes testing culture which is destructive to our students, teachers, and schools. They were not created by educators, but by those who only stand to profit. They are not developmentally appropriate especially at the elementary level. They want to tell us how to appropriately teach literature without accessing a student’s background information. In all my professional career, tapping into one’s personal experiences and background knowledge is key in helping kids connect to their reading and make it meaningful, accessible, and relevant. Teachers know this. Testing companies do not.

I recently found a document that mentioned how to “message” CCSS. If they are so great, why do they need messaging tips? In the end, we should be asking, “Who stands to truly gain from the implementation of CCSS?” It isn’t my students who are continually stressed or jaded by more high-stakes tests, who lose out on a well-rounded education because one test labels them as failures and then their school experience is full of intervention and remedial classes.

Rather than pouring more money into a high-stakes standardized testing model, we should instead be investing in school counselors, nurses, smaller class sizes, parent outreach, wrap around services, and after school programs. We should be promoting a system where educator voices are valued and trusted. We should be supporting a well-rounded curriculum with enriching experiences. We should be advocating for project-based learning and authentic assessments created by and evaluated by teachers. We should be eliminating evaluating teachers by test scores and instead looking to the professional practice overall in our success as educators.

For me personally, I can attest that many teachers I know do not support the current implementation of CCSS. We feel that they are developmentally inappropriate. They do not cover the material necessary in a clear and common sense manner. They foster a high-stakes testing culture, and rob our schools of much needed funding.

So what can Oregon do?

Many, many states over the past year are realizing that the CCSS are not all they claim to be. They cannot be altered or changed to much extent because they are copyrighted! New York is noticing an extremely high failure rate as only 30 percent of the students are passing the new test. This says more about the test than the students and parents are rebelling. Parents are starting to opt out of state testing. Students are holding walkouts and protests. Many states have decided to slow down the implementation of the standards. Some have pulled out of the SBAC or PARCC testing consortiums and are writing their own tests. Some states have not adopted the CCSS standards at all.

So before we take another step forward, we as a state should be doing our homework and putting all of this CCSS on hold until we truly know what it is we have agreed to. I encourage you to read articles by Diane Ravitch, evaluate our local state standards and compare them to the CCSS, talk to many teachers about their experience, and think about what kind of education we want Oregon children to have. I can only hope it is as enriching and authentic as mine.

Sincerely,

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