

To: The Joint Interim Committee on Student Success
From: Oregon Public Education Network
Re: Policy Recommendations
Date: November 6, 2018

Members of the Interim Committee,

The corporate “reform” model of education has been the dominant force in public education since the “No Child Left Behind Act” was passed in 2001. This model is predicated on providing “accountability” through “measurable results”. Terms such as “outcome-based”, “data-based” and “standardized testing-based” have been used to describe it.

Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent in Oregon to provide the “measurable results” deemed necessary to prove that Oregon students are being successfully educated. The federal government, state government, and local school districts have jointly spent these tax monies.

We believe that this model of education has been an unqualified failure, that taxpayer money has been squandered and that great damage has been done to students, teachers and families.

Failure and Harm

The failures and harmful results of this corporate “reform” model include:

- The deeply discriminatory tracking of low-income, ELL students and students of color as a result of the “testing-sorting-tracking” system that favors students with access to resources.
- The increasing minimizing of the creative and professional role of teachers as the instructional leaders in their own classrooms.
- The dramatic increase of “corporate model” top-down, standardized systems in school districts which diminish school-based, building administrator and teacher-based initiatives.
- The continually increasing number of tests administered to students in pre-K through high school (The national average is 112 standardized tests).
- The continued constricting of professional development through overemphasis on testing-related training.
- The forcing out of the ranks of teachers many creative, innovative and dedicated professionals who can no longer countenance what has happened to our schools.
- The tragic and deep internalizing by many students that they are “nothing more than a failing test score” -- and the subsequent impact on high school dropout.
- The climate of fear in which teachers and administrators are afraid to voice their professional opinions about unfair and excessive testing.
- The unchanging “achievement gap” between white and non-white students.
- The generation-long elimination of shop, art, music, social studies, home economics and career education from our schools due to an overemphasis on Language Arts and Math testing.

Across the country, many hundreds of organizations, ranging from the national NAACP, the Oregon State Grange and the National Grange, and the Oregon Retired Educators Association, have called for an end to excessive high-stakes standardized testing.

Other States Are Leaving Oregon Behind

The new ESSA law provides for a number of states to apply to be “Innovation Assessment” pilot states. New Hampshire was the first. Now Georgia, Hawaii, Kansas, South Carolina, and Louisiana are applying. The Colorado legislature recently passed legislation mandating the state education chief to apply.

Among the many initiatives in states and districts across the country:

- Louisiana combines social studies and language arts into a series of locally-developed assessments based on classroom studies.
- Georgia is working on a system of locally-created formative assessments to produce a “summative” score for the year.
- In Colorado, a dozen districts are working together on a system of performance assessments.

It is time for Oregon to move beyond the failed models of accountability. Oregon should commit to applying to becoming an ESSA “Innovation Assessment” pilot state next year.

There Are Better Ways

The national gold standard of high quality assessment is the New York Performance Standards Consortium. For over 20 years, the Consortium has been highly successful in moving beyond standardized testing in assessing in-depth literacy, mathematical problem-solving, application of the scientific method, social studies research, a span of mediums for exhibiting learning, and a chance for students to have a voice and proud ownership of their work. It has been extensively studied for reliability and validity.

Oregon should commit to learning from the best assessment systems and move beyond the current failed standardized testing system.

“A New Path for Oregon” Needs to be Implemented

“A New Path for Oregon” (2015) was the groundbreaking joint research project by the ODE, the OEA and the OEIB to develop a balanced assessment system that would meaningfully engage students, empower classroom teachers and provide useful, valid information about student learning. The “New Path Recommendations” (2017) was the ODE-produced implementation plan. Both have been allowed to languish without the political will to realize them.

The high-quality “A New Path for Oregon” plan needs to be prioritized and implemented.

ODE Pilot Projects Need to be Reinstated and Expanded

In 2016-17, the ODE, WestEd and the Center for Collaborative Education implemented two exciting pilot projects to train teachers in developing teacher-led, curriculum-based assessments that are superior to current standardized tests. The Oregon Formative Assessment for Students

and Teachers (OFAST) provided funding for 9 schools and the Performance Assessment Demonstration Sites (PADS) funded 7 schools.

Funding for the 2018 school year was suspended due to ODE budget cuts. These promising and popular initiatives need to be reinstated and expanded in scope and prominence.

Oregon's Artificial Barrier to Graduation

Oregon is now one of only 12 states that still maintain an exit-assessment barrier to graduation.

Nevada, Georgia, Texas, South Carolina, Alaska, Arizona, Mississippi and California have not only eliminated their exit exams, they have also granted tens of thousands of diplomas retroactively to students who were not allowed to graduate.

Students who earn the required number of credits with passing grades should be allowed to graduate without jumping through this extra exit/testing hoop. Oregon should eliminate this unnecessary and harmful barrier to graduation.

Too Young To Test

In the well-intentioned drive to have all children reading at grade level by 3rd grade, the corporate "reform" model is now being applied to pre-school and Kindergarten students. The "testing-sorting-tracking" model threatens to do just the opposite of its intent. It may well teach the youngest students that they are not intelligent and to fear reading. Children learn to read at different stages. The "one-size fits all" approach is developmentally inappropriate and wrong.

Our children deserve to have their first years of public school filled with joyful learning. Oregon should prohibit the standardized testing of children from pre-kindergarten through grade 2.

Examine Screen Time in Schools

The move toward ever-increasing use of computer programs for teaching and testing is progressing at a tremendous rate. Schools should be cautious about contributing to the substantial amount of time that young people are already spending on digital screens.

A number of states are developing studies of "best practices" for the amount of time that digital devices are in use in school classrooms. Oregon should examine "best practices" for screen time and establish guidelines accordingly.

Oregon's Opt-Out Movement Continues to Grow

A continually increasing number of Oregon parents are clearly signaling their opposition to the standardized-testing model of education through opting their children out, rendering Oregon's SBAC high school tests statistically invalid. The ODE and local districts must not interfere actively or passively with parents' legal right to opt-out.

Smarter Balanced and PARCC Continue to Lose Support

Initially, 23 states signed up for SBAC and 23 states chose to use the other Common Core consortium test, PARCC. Now only 6 states administer PARCC and only 14 states administer SBAC. Oregon should learn from states that have abandoned these increasingly-discredited tests.

Broader Questioning of Standardized Tests

Over 1,020 U.S. accredited colleges and universities no longer require ACT or SAT scores for admission in large measure because certain students have access to all manner of test-prep resources, while many others do not. Additionally, multiple studies show that GPA, not test scores, is the best predictor of college success. Oregon should emphasize students' classroom accomplishments and success rather than test scores.

Now Is the Time for Change

No policy or legislative proposals to be formally recommended by the Joint Interim Committee on Student Success or any of its Workgroups should increase any forms of standardized testing. In many states and in many districts across the U.S., the pendulum is swinging back to more productive and equitable forms of assessing student success in school.

All Joint Committee policy recommendations should empower local districts, school communities, school administrators and school educators to take charge in addressing the educational needs of their communities.

The corporate "reform" model has been firmly in place for a generation. It has failed. It has caused great damage. It is time for Oregon to have the vision and the ethical courage to move in a new direction.

Respectfully submitted,

Oregon Public Education Network
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