

March 13, 2017

Testimony in Support of SB 351

By Alice Weinstein, Portland Public School Teacher

I am currently a full-time English Language Development (ELD) teacher, the only ELD teacher, at Franklin High School in the Portland Public School District. Franklin has a linguistically diverse student body with 40 plus different languages spoken. We have one of the highest populations of English Language Learner students of any high school in the city.

This month I was responsible for administering the English Language Proficiency Test 21 (ELPA 21), developed by the ELPA 21 Consortium, of which Oregon is a member. I would like to briefly highlight how this affected my students. For 7 school days, on March 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, I stopped teaching, and instead took my classes to a school computer lab and administered the ELPA 21 to them. In total, I spent 28.5 hours testing different classes of ELL students instead of teaching them. I wasn't finished by March 10, but because that computer lab was booked for other teachers to start administering the Smarter Balanced Assessment to all our juniors, those of my students who didn't finish the ELPA 21 with me last week, will have to wait until March 22 when that lab becomes available again to finish.

During testing sessions, students at different levels of proficiency had to test in the same room at the same time because of the tightness of time and of computer lab space. As a result, my students who are more fluent finished the test before my less fluent students, but were stuck in the lab with no options other than silent reading or doing work for other classes. My less fluent kids, particularly my newcomer level students, some of whom have been in the U.S. for a very short time, took markedly more hours to complete the ELPA 21 because they struggled so much trying to comprehend items that were beyond their fluency level. What particularly bothered me, as it does every year I have to administer standardized tests, was watching my ELL students who lack foundational literacy skills in their own languages. Not only do they have limited fluency in English, but they have never been taught to read or write until they came to this country. I can see their frustration on their faces, and I watch them walk away from the test feeling deflated.

I urge you to consider passing SB 351, sponsored by Senator Lew Frederick. I believe that an audit is necessary to allow citizens to finally see how much instructional time is lost to standardized tests like the ELPA21. My immigrant students need more time, not less time, to master the English language.

Sincerely,

Alice Weinstein