

March 15, 2017

Testimony in Support of HB 3015

By Betsy Salter, Portland Public Schools Parent

I support HB 3015 to the extent that it will allow Oregon school districts to eliminate using the Smarter Balanced Assessments (SBA) to demonstrate proficiency in Essential Skills for high school graduation and instead use another “Nationally recognized high school assessments in mathematics, science or English” such as ACT or SAT. However, it is imperative that Oregon maintain the option of using work samples or other appropriate tests to meet the Essential Skills graduation requirement.

Further, I would encourage HB 3015 to be amended to allow grades 3 - 8 to also consider replacing or dramatically scaling back on SBA testing - it is an expensive waste of taxpayer funds and instructional time for which our children are already being short-changed due to the Legislature’s chronic inability to fully fund the Quality Education Model.

I hope that HB 3015 will direct ODE to review the evidence based statewide student assessment models that are reported on by Fairtest.org entitled, “Assessment Matters: Constructing Model State Systems to Replace Testing Overkill.” For example, while New Hampshire still uses SBA, students do not take the SBA annually.

<http://www.fairtest.org/assessment-matters-constructing-model-state-system>

In June 2016, the Springfield School Board passed a resolution, “Calling the test (Smarter Balanced Assessments) an “ineffective measure of student growth and accountability,” the five member board unanimously approved a statement recommending that parents and guardians “strongly consider exercising their right” under state law to “opt out their student from the Smarter Balanced test.”

<http://projects.registerguard.com/rg/news/local/3447293575/springfieldschoolboardurgesparentstookstudentoptoutofstatesmarterbalancedtests.html.csp>

In January 2016, five Oregon school district Superintendents wrote to ODE and Governor Brown’s Chief Education Office to urge them to consider seriously reforming Oregon’s State wide Assessment system. “As the leaders of some of Oregon’s largest school districts, we are keenly aware of the importance of student achievement data. We value the information provided by valid, reliable, standards-aligned assessments that are administered consistently to all groups of students in order to provide critical information to educators, parents, students and the public about our students’ knowledge, skills and learning needs. **However, our current statewide assessment system carries high costs in instructional time, impact on graduation preparedness, and student and educator attention all of which detract from the benefits of the system.** (emphasis added)”

<http://www.oregonsaveourschools.org/2016/03/oregon-superintendents-decry-time-spent.html>

I believe it is also notable that last week, the U.S. Congress recently overturned the ESSA Accountability rules and the President has signaled his intent to sign it. I am not a supporter of this President or the current majority in Congress, but I welcome this particular act. Hopefully, the new ESSA guidance will eliminate the misuse of standardized tests to label and punish students, teachers and schools and dramatically reduce the number of standardized tests taken by public school students. Personally, I support reducing summative standardized tests to once in elementary school (e.g., 5th grade), once in middle school (e.g., 8th grade) and once in high school (e.g., 11th grade). Even more preferable would be to use the National Assessment of Educational Progress on a random sample of students in the tested grades so that not every student had to be tested. It would still allow you to compare schools, but not waste instructional time for all students in the tested grades.

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/09/us/everystudentsucceedsactessacongress.html?_r=0

Please consider amending HB 3015 to also allow replacing the annual Smarter Balanced Assessments for every child in grades 3 - 8 with an assessment system that Oregon teachers have determined actually supports student learning. I hope this assessment system is similar to one of the models described in the Fairtest.org report titled, “Assessment Matters: Constructing Model State Systems to Replace Testing Overkill.” (see above reference for link)

Thank you for your consideration of support for HB 3015 and my suggestions for how it can be improved to better serve all Oregon public school students to have a successful public education experience and graduate high school ready for college or career.

Sincerely,

Betsy Salter
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