

To members of the House Education Committee:

I wish to add my support to House Bill 2318, “Too Young to Test”.

I am an instructor in Philosophy at the University of Oregon, where my undergraduate students lead philosophical discussions with children in second through fifth grade classrooms in Eugene city schools.

In bringing philosophy to classrooms, I have learned that children have a natural desire to ask profound questions about themselves and their world. They are capable of developing skills, even in the primary grades, to express opinions supported with reasons, to revise their own thinking when confronted with contrasting ideas, to explore complex issues that defy easy explanations, and to evaluate their ability to engage in effective group discussions with peers.

Not one of these higher-level thinking skills is effectively measured by standardized tests.

As both a university instructor and classroom teacher, I have observed children thrive in discussions and units of study involving topics like: the nature of reality and identity (metaphysics); the moral choices that define friendship and fairness (ethics); the difference between knowledge and belief (epistemology); and the ways that we experience art and music (aesthetics). Our university outreach this winter term, for example, involves second graders at McCornack Elementary, who meet weekly to explore issues involving race, equality, gender and moral choices.

Standardized tests do not furnish teachers, students or administrators any useful information about how children interpret their world as thinkers and learners in response to units of study like the ones described above.

Educators in Oregon public schools need more support in the form of funding, curriculum and in-service opportunities from our state legislators to nourish critical thinking in our children. Standardized tests, especially in the primary grades, will never provide useful information about student growth in higher level thinking and collaboration. The best assessments for measuring student engagement and success as learners will always come from teachers and grade level teams who know best how to evaluate their student’s progress.

I urge state legislators to support HB 2318.

Sincerely,

Paul Bodin, Instructor in Philosophy, University of Oregon

