

House Education Committee Statement in Support of HB 2318

Having been a public school teacher for 38 years, I have witnessed the many ebbs and flows of educational research resulting in changes of policy and what have been considered best practices for elementary teachers and students. As with many transitions in the profession, gradual shifts in curriculum and programmed expectations for teachers and students, often occur without much questioning or concerns. However, the tides turned within the last 10 years to the point of irresponsible and disrespectful abuse of teachers and students. Gone are the days of “educating the whole child” and the resulting shift to “preparing students to compete in the global economy” has sucked the life out of teaching and learning.

I remained in my chosen and dearly loved profession longer than I had previously planned and was determined to continue for 3 more years. I wanted to make a difference in what was happening in our public schools. I was hopeful that the current realities could possibly be changed and served as a delegate to the Oregon Education Association and National Education Association’s Representative Assemblies for several years, advocating for my 4th grade and all students in public schools. Unfortunately the high stakes testing regime narrowed not only the focus of curriculum, but also the interest and engagement of my students and myself for what previously had been joyful teaching and learning. I had to leave what I had loved doing for so long. I could no longer, in good conscience subject my students to the current “best practices” which I felt were ridiculously inappropriate and abusive. My situation was due to federally mandated state standardized tests and I left, defeated and depressed. I knew what authentic and reciprocal teaching and learning looked and felt like and it was no longer part of my job.

When the same type of data-driven, relationship-disruptive policies and practices hit the primary grades (Kindergarten-2nd) for teachers and students, the future for our youth had dropped to a new and disturbing low. The developmentally appropriate curricular and personal focus for 5-9 year old students has gone by the wayside and have been replaced with testing for testing’s sake. Gone are the days of learning with joy, curiosity, discovery, cooperative interactions and the love of learning, in search of data for data’s sake. This is a sad reality for our state’s youngest students, especially the kindergarteners whose first school experiences involve standardized testing at a time they are just arriving to learn. We must change this extreme abuse of data collection and allow teachers to use their own professional judgement and skills to teach and interact with their students.

I strongly urge members of this committee to support HB 2318 in order to return the real “best practices” to what teachers know is appropriate, authentic, and reciprocal learning in relation to their students and classrooms.

Sincerely,

Colleen Hunter
Retiree from Springfield Public Schools, 2017