

Honorable Senators

It is well past time that the state of Oregon stop requiring students to demonstrate the academic proficiency necessary to receive a diploma by passing a test. For a larger body of Oregon students than most Oregonians seem to think exist, this requirement presents a burden that serves more as an impediment to success than as a reasonable challenge to overcome. Invariably, it is those students most at risk of graduating in the first place who suffer disproportionately from this onerous expectation: students of color, students with low socio-economic status, and second language learners. Ironically, we ask the best and brightest amongst us to reach agreement over what constitutes a well-balanced education and they describe their consensus through written standards and an adopted course of study, presuming anyone who successfully completes that coursework with passing grades has already demonstrated proficiency. Such a process has been in place in Oregon for generations without us experiencing undo catastrophic social consequences, and yet in our persistent search for greater accountability and “proof” that learning has taken place, we have simply added one more barrier for students to overcome over the last few years. It is time to put an end to this well-intentioned but ill-informed effort.

There are virtually no empirical studies showing that passing this test improves student achievement or makes a student more employable. There is no correlation between passing the test and success in college (other than the negative correlation that students who do not pass the test do not succeed in college, because they are denied entrance). As a matter of fact, there is no evidence that universities use a student’s score on the test as an admission criteria. Along with other criteria not necessarily related to academic performance, colleges and universities continue to rely on the quality of completed coursework and the grades received in those classes as their principle considerations.

Eighteen other states have already agreed to end the use of such testing requirements. Six states (most famously, California) have additionally agreed to retroactively reward diplomas to students denied them because of the testing requirement in place when they dropped out of school. This bill does not include such a provision, though we may wish to add something like it in the near future, but the fact that six states have gone to extreme measures to correct a wrong suggests just how harmful the original provision was.

It is time that we do the same in Oregon. Please support SB 456

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