

Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I write in support of SB 456 to remove Oregon's "Barrier to Graduation". I am a retired middle school teacher and I am very concerned about what has happened to public education in Oregon. In fact, it breaks my heart.

Since the "No Child Left Behind Act" was passed in 2001, the corporate "reform" model of education has been the dominant force in public education. It is described as "outcome-based", "data-based" and "standardized testing-based".

As a teacher, I watched it produce more damage every year. Beginning in elementary school, kids are treated like "data points". For some students, usually from families with access to resources, standardized testing is relatively easy. They are the students who are supposed to succeed. For other students, with fewer resources, it is an anxiety-producing nightmare. Some learn soon enough to give up, no longer trying. Perhaps that might be considered a rational response to an irrational system. Nonetheless, those students still experience shame and labeling and tracking.

For those students, and for all who don't "test well", Oregon erected one more barrier to graduation. It added insult to injury. Even if students passed all of their classes and completed the required number of credits, it wasn't enough. It was enough for past generations, but no longer. Only 11 states in the U.S. still have such a repudiated mandate.

Consequently, the state of Oregon has played a measurable role in pushing countless students to drop out. The state of Oregon has turned far too many counselors into test-taking coordinators, rather than mental health professionals and mentors. Many counselors spend precious hours desperately trying to keep students from dropping out as they help them navigate the convoluted ESS system. It's all lose-lose. Nothing of true value is gained. So much is lost.

Where on earth are the students in all of this? What do they feel and experience as they are reminded regularly that they are deficient and then given one more pre-ordained failure obstacle to hurdle? How would you feel?

This data-based model of education has been an unqualified failure. So much taxpayer money has been squandered and so much damage has been done to students, teachers and families. We've truly lost our way.

Please have the courage to be the leaders who finally say, "Enough!" Support SB 456. Be the ones who lead the way toward a more sane, rational and equitable schooling experience for Oregon students and teachers.

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