

In Support of Senate Bill 456

Nick Highfill, a senior at West Lane Technical Charter High School in Veneta will get his earned diploma next month and graduate. He wasn't confident this would happen -- he had failed his standardized math test since the 6th grade, including last year in 11th grade. He figured no graduation with a diploma for him. "Test taking," he told me, "tripped me up. How is this year going to be different?"

But then, in one last try earlier this month, he took the test, and he passed. He said, "I didn't think this day would ever come. A 40-pound weight fell off my chest. I can breathe again. My mom and I no longer have to worry and argue about it." Now he doesn't have to wonder if he is smart enough to graduate.

Nick is plenty smart. In fact he owns and operates his own media business - Highfill Media with services in cinematography and photography.

Nick can now move forward with his life, to develop his career, and to become a successful, productive adult. He said, "This test can no longer hold me up... I have clients to serve!"



In Oregon high school juniors must pass the Essential Skills Requirement - a menu of test choices - but it will be eliminated if SB456 passes. This bill "Prohibits the State Board of Education, a school district or public charter school from requiring students to pass a test to demonstrate proficiency in Essential Learning Skills in order to receive diploma." Additionally, it would require local school districts to notify former students that their diploma is finally available to them. This would remove our state from the remaining 10 that still require a test -- down from the original 29.

Nothing in this Bill prevents school districts from assessing their students' learning in math, reading, writing, in any subject. It only prohibits using a standardized test to do this. School districts can - and should - develop classroom-based, curriculum-embedded, teacher-created, colleague-vetted performance tasks to measure student achievement. Imagine if the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) moved some of the \$27 million spent on Smarter Balanced standardized tests to helping teachers and principals do this.

Nick knows this would be a better way. "I want to demonstrate what I know, not use a cookie cutter test. I want to be able to explain in my own way. I want an assessment that generates a spark."

Imagine that.

Larry Lewin
Retired Eugene 4J teacher
Member of CAPE - the Community Alliance for Public Education