

From: [Mary Bonner](#)
To: [JCSS Exhibits](#)
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To the Honorable Senators of the Senate Committee on Student Success

My name is Mary Bonner. I am the Essential Skills coordinator on the campus of Woodburn High School. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of SB 456.

I have worked in the Woodburn Public Schools for almost twenty years, ten years as a middle school language arts and social studies teacher, two years as a high school language arts teacher, and eight years as an instructional coach and Essential Skills coordinator. I am proud of the recognition the Woodburn School District has received for our graduation rates, some of the highest in the state of Oregon. Our teachers, support personnel, administrators, and of course students have all worked hard to obtain this recognition.

I would like for our students to continue to grow in their learning, to see their second language as an asset, to have the courage to face the challenges that are often in front of them, and to become the future leaders that we all will be proud of.

The requirement of passing the Smarter Balanced tests or the Essential Skills work samples in order to graduate, causes schools and students to focus attention on passing tests rather than practicing and refining the skills needed to meet the demands for earning the credits towards graduation. I am 100% in support of portfolios that guide instruction and monitor student growth and progress, which our current system does neither of those things.

Often the students most affected by the Essential Skills graduation requirement are students with learning disabilities and those who are English language learners. This adds an additional barrier as students not only have to focus on the credits required, but must also focus attention and time on passing these work samples.

I'd like to illustrate the devastating effects these tests can take on our children by sharing the story of a young man I'll call 'Martin'. Martin had a diagnosed reading and writing disability. Like so many of our students in Woodburn, I saw how hard Martin had to work in order to meet the graduation requirements to receive all of his credits. He was one of the hardest working students I knew. He played in sports, was respectful to his peers and staff at school, and his family worked with him on his learning.

One morning, while we were walking out to the testing lab between the buildings, he sat down on the curb, put his head in his hands and sobbed. *"I'm never going to pass this Bonner, I'm too stupid!"* We worked evenings, parts of the school day, Saturdays, and eventually he did pass the reading Essential Skills tests. He was the first of many students that I've since worked with—students who face enormous challenges in obtaining the necessary credits in

order to graduate while simultaneously carving out time to pass these tests.

I stand in support of SB 456.