

Please Vote Yes on SB 456.

05.21.2019

Oregon public high schools are constantly shamed for our high school graduation rates, yet there is never any acknowledgement of the inane policy requiring Oregon high schoolers to pass an “Essential Skills” test of some sort. The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and most school districts push the “Smarter Balanced” Assessment, but there are other college prep or college admission tests that can be substituted or work samples scored using an ODE metric.

I consider the Oregon high school “Essential Skills” graduation requirement to be as illogical as the Oregon Kicker which is about to return \$1.4 billion in unanticipated revenue to taxpayers instead of paying down current state debts - like PERS or transportation repairs and maintenance.

My daughter graduated from a Portland Public Schools high school in the class of 2018. I started opting her out of the state standardized test when she was in 7th grade. She had always exceeded expectations on those tests, but when I realized how meaningless the test scores were and how the tests were biased against children of color and non-English speakers and how much instructional time was lost to such meaningless and biased tests - I decided to start opting her out. My daughter was happy to opt out because even though she always exceeded expectations, she found the testing experience stressful. Instead she could do any number of alternative learning activities while her peers were testing.

In high school my daughter met her Essential Skills graduation requirements by receiving passing scores on the PSAT and ACT paid for by the school district. She also passed English Language Arts (ELA) and Math Essential Skills requirements by doing work samples in her regular General Education ELA and math classes so that the work samples were tied directly to the classroom curriculum. No teaching to the test involved.

My daughter graduated high school with Honors and has made the Dean's List at the University of Oregon for the first two quarters of her First Year as a college student. The "Smarter Balanced" Assessment is a meaningless, biased, waste of instructional time and taxpayer funds.

If the Legislature wants to increase Oregon high school graduation rates - we need to support struggling students succeed in meeting their credit requirements and passing their classes with the highest GPA possible. This requires smaller class sizes, more counselors and access to tutors/peer students.

Oregon is one of only 11 states that still have a testing requirement for graduation. Washington just signed a bill into law that eliminates their exit exam. California eliminated their exit exam and retroactively awarded diplomas to around 40,000 students who had fulfilled all graduation requirements (passing grades/credits earned) except their state standardized test. Some had been without a diploma for a decade. Most of those former students were from marginalized groups: e.g. people of color, people of lower socioeconomic status, people for whom English is a second or other language

Many studies show that such requirements do nothing to raise achievement, improve employment prospects or ensure college success. Such testing requirements do increase the dropout rate, especially among low income students, English language learners and students of color.

These tests take an inordinate amount of educator time away from other tasks by necessitating unnecessary testing coordination. (i.e. special performance task assessments or repeats of a standardized test). These testing requirements force teachers to teach to the test, rather than engaging students in authentic and meaningful learning.

Please vote YES on SB 456 to:

- Prohibit the state of Oregon, local school districts or public charter schools from requiring students to pass a standardized test to demonstrate proficiency in Essential Learning Skills in order to receive a diploma; and
- Any students who were not awarded a diploma due to not passing a standardized test, but who have met all other graduation requirements, will be awarded their diploma upon request to their school district or charter school.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Betsy Salter, PPS Parent
Portland, OR