

Committee Chair Sen. Wagner, Vice-Chair Sen. Thomsen, members Sen. Hass, Sen. Gelsler, and Sen. Heard:

I am Larry Lewin, a retired Eugene 4J teacher and a member of OPEN - the Oregon Public Education Network.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of SB 1572.

In 2016 I was asked to volunteer at North Eugene High School in the Essential Skills course for seniors who had not yet passed their Essential Skills graduation requirement. The Essential Skills coordinator for the North Region was a long-time colleague of mine, and I admired and respected her, so I knew her ask was important.

The course was composed of maybe 25 students - the majority Latina/o -, and it was required of them to take it instead of an elective class of interest. The goal was to complete a writing work sample with proficient scores to prove their ability to write. I taught ELA for decades, and I know some things about teaching writing. I said Yes, I'll help these kids.

As you know, currently in our state, high school students must meet this Esst Skills requirement in reading, writing, and math -- even if they already attained a sufficient GPA in their required and elective courses. And, as you know, they can do this in 5 different ways including a work sample.

Problem was, even though the work sample option is at least better than a standardized tests option, the topic (called the prompt) from the ODE via the Ed Ctr was terrible -- very generic and boring. Trying to fire up the seniors to muster the energy to put pencil to paper (or fingers to keyboard) required a Herculean effort from their teacher and me, the volunteer. They already seemed defeated. And if they failed the work sample, no graduation, no walking with their classmates, no diploma. Talk about high stakes testing.

We have a chance to eliminate this barrier to graduation: it is SB 1572, co-sponsored by Sens. Hass and Wagner, and it will remove the state requirement and make it optional to local districts. This is one very good way to help you meet your goal of reducing student testing. The bill will also include notifying former students who did not receive their diploma of a procedure for getting it retroactively.

In my local school district Eugene 4J, the School Board, in its annual retreat last summer, identified eliminating the Essential Skills Test as one of its top priorities for this year. Board member Gordon Lafer sent a statement to Sen. Wagner urging its passage and Board member Jim Torrey will speak today in this hearing.

Thank you.

