

Dear Member of the Senate Committee on Education,

I am the Principal of Network Charter School in Eugene. I strongly support SB 744 and hope that we can eliminate the essential skills requirement for students to graduate. I serve some of the most underprivileged and underrepresented students in Lane County. Many of my students come from poverty, homes with high level of abuse and neglect, and are currently houseless and living in crisis and with trauma. Almost 50% of my students either have a 504 or IEP, and ultimately, the essential skills requirement is a barrier for many of my students to graduate. They have overcome great odds to attend school and pass classes and then we are forced to focus our time and energy teaching to the test and testing and coaching students through high levels of test anxiety, when what we should be focusing on is creating an equitable, trauma-informed, safe school environment where students feel nurtured and supported. As the testing coordinator, I spend far too much of my time training teachers on how to proctor tests, scheduling tests, communicating with all stakeholders about testing, and then administering the Work Keys, Work Samples, and state tests. Every spring, as my juniors and seniors take their tests and see results, I sit with students who are crying, breaking down from the high stake tests and the stress they induce. Some facts:

- \* Oregon is one of only 11 states that still have a testing requirement for graduation.
- \* Such testing requirements increase the dropout rate, especially among low-income students, English language learners and students of color.
- \* These tests take an inordinate amount of school counselor time away from counseling by necessitating unnecessary testing coordination.
- \* These testing requirements force teachers to teach to the test, rather than engaging students in authentic and meaningful learning.
- \* Many studies show that such requirements do nothing to raise achievement, improve employment prospects or ensure college success.
- \* In the past few years, eighteen states have ended such testing requirements.
- \* Seven states have also granted retroactive high school diplomas to students who were denied them based on test scores.

Oregon has some of the strictest graduation requirements in the country and we simultaneously have one of the lowest graduation rates. These testing requirements hurt students and our school community. Please pass SB 744 and let Oregon and its students join the majority of the country in doing what is right, fair, and humane and get rid of these essential skills testing requirements.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa Palma  
Principal of Network Charter School