

Excessive Standardized Testing – Consequences and Alternatives

Oregon’s standardized testing regimen no longer improves instruction; instead, it robs substantial learning time. The Eugene school district’s own audit reveals at least 120 standardized tests per pupil throughout their k-12 experience, while most of us adults took only a total of 3 or 4. Now standardized tests, pre-tests and practice tests take place all year long, culminating in an entire month of spring assessments. As any administrator will tell you, this leaves students too drained to focus the rest of the year. Worst of all, the testing frenzy hasn’t raised NAEP scores one iota, even pre-pandemic. We need a new approach.

Here is a May testing calendar from a Eugene area school (pre-pandemic):

SB English 2 hrs	SB English	SB English	SB English	SB English
SB Math	SB Math	Break	SB Math	SB Math
OAKS Science + Makeups	OAKS Science + Makeups	Break	Other Tests + Makeups	Other Test + Makeups
Holiday	Other Test	EasyCBM Reading	EasyCBM Math	EasyCBM Math Other test
EasyCBM Make-ups	EasyCBM Make-ups			

This includes the state mandated Smarter Balanced math and English tests (which consume 6-11 hours each), as well as DIBELS, TIMMS, Kinder, OAKS science, and others. Note, English learners take all those plus ELPA to re-re-re-assess their fluency.

Today's plethora of spring tests requires building-wide preparation and re-organization: train teachers, cover bulletin boards, reschedule classes, find rooms (i.e. shut down libraries and computer labs), find and train proctors, hire substitute teachers, log-in students, take away personal electronic devices, read instructions, inventory and shred scratch paper, schedule make-up times, and find rooms for absent or unfinished students, etc., etc. 105 pages of such details are described in this ODE assessment manual, which administrators say doesn't begin to cover it all. https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/assessment/Documents/test_admin_manual.pdf

Here's a transcript of what it takes for one Portland area school to reorganize teachers, rooms and subjects for February through April testing.

TESTING schedule 2017-2018 - 2017-2018

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday

February 19-23 no school ELPA21 February 20 ELPA21 2/21/2018 ELPA21 2/22/2018 ELPA21 2/23/2018

9:00-10:00 6th grade: Teacher MJ am group(#14) **TIM** 9:00-10:00 6th grade: Teacher MJS am group(#14) **TIM**

NAME in red is the person leading the test in the computer lab. 10:30-11:30 5th grade: Teacher OC am group(#10) **TIM**

12:00-1:00 6th grade: Teacher MJ pm group(#12) **TIM** 12:00-1:00 6th grade: Teacher MJS pm group(#12) **TIM** plus anyone from AM who has not finished

1:00-2:00 5th grade: Teacher OC pm group/Teacher AO (#17) **MM/DD** 4th ELD **cancelled** 1:00-2:00 5th grade: Teacher OC pm group/Teacher OC (#17) **MM/DD** 4th ELD **cancelled**

February 26-Mar2 ELPA: February 26 ELPA: February 27 ELPA: February 28 ELPA: March 1 ELPA: March 2

9:00-10:00 2nd grade: GG (#11) **DD/MM/KR** 2nd ELD **cancelled** 9:00-10:00 2nd grade: Teacher GG (#11) **DD/MM/KR** 2nd ELD **cancelled** 9:00-10:00 2nd grade: Teacher PL (#12) **DD/MM/KR** 2nd ELD **cancelled** 9:00-10:00 2nd grade: Teacher PL (#12) **DD/MM/KR** 2nd ELD **cancelled**

10:00-11:00 4th: Teacher AP am and Teacher NA (#18) **DD** 10:00-11:00 4th: Teacher AP am/Teacher NA (#18) **DD** 10:00-11:00 3rd: Teacher WB am (#11) **MM/KR** 10:00-11:00 3rd: Teacher WB (#11) **MM/KR** assembly

12:00-1:00 3rd: Teacher WB pm (#10) **MM/KR** 12:00-1:00 3rd: Teacher WB pm (#10) **MM/KR** 12:00-1:00 3rd: Teacher WB pm (#10) **MM/KR**

1:00-2:00 4th: Teacher AP pm(#11) DD 1:00-2:00 4th: Teacher AP pm(#11) DD 1:00-2:00 4th: Teacher AP pm(#11) DD

2:00-2:45 1st: Teacher BH (#13) DD/MM/KR Kinder ELD cancelled 2:00-2:45 1st: Teacher BH (#13) DD/MM/KR Kinder ELD cancelled 2:00-2:45 1st: Teacher BE (#11) DD/MM/KR Kinder ELD cancelled

2:45-3:30 K: Teacher JGP (#10) DD/MM/KR 1st ELD cancelled 2:45-3:30 K: Teacher JGP (#10) DD/MM/KR 1st ELD cancelled 2:45-3:30 K: Teacher MS (#12) DD/MM/KR 1st ELD cancelled

March 5-9 ELPA: March 5 ELPA: March 6 ELPA: March 7 ELPA: March 8 ELPA: March 9

9:00-10:00 2nd grade: Teacher CO (#12) DD/MM/KR 2nd ELD cancelled 9:00-10:00 2nd grade: Teacher CO (#12) DD/MM/KR 2nd ELD cancelled 9:35-10:20 2nd/3rd grade finish up

10:00-11:00 3rd: Teacher WB (#11) MM/KR 12:00-1:00 Make ups DD 10:30-11:30 5th grade: Teacher OC am group(#10) TIM 10:30-11:30 5th grade: Teacher OC am group(#10) TIM

12:00-1:00 Make ups DD 2:00-2:45 1st: Teacher AS (#12) DD/MM/KR Kinder ELD cancelled 2:00-2:45 1st: Teacher AS(#12) DD/MM/KR Kinder ELD cancelled

2:00-2:45 1st: Teacher BE (#11) DD/MM/KR Kinder ELD cancelled 2:45-3:30 K: Teacher MCR (#13) DD/MM/KR 1st ELD cancelled 2:45-3:30 K: Teacher MCR (#13) DD/MM/KR 1st ELD cancelled

2:45-3:30 K: Teacher MS (#12) DD/MM/KR 1st ELD cancelled

March 13-17 STAMP: March 13 STAMP: March 14 STAMP: March 15

STAMP--6th grade 9:30-10:45: Teacher KJ AM group KJ/DR/TB 12:00-1:00: Teacher KJ AM group KJ/DR/TB 12:45-2:00: Teacher KJ PM group KJ/DR/TB

12:45-2:00: Teacher KJ PM group KJ/DR/TB 2:30-3:00: FINISH up---pull from either group KJ/DR/TB

March 20-24 Science : March 20 Science: March 21

SCIENCE-5th grade 10:35-11:35: Teacher OC AM group OC/TB 10:35-11:35: Teacher OC AM group OC/TB

1:00-2:00 Teacher OC PM group AO/OC/MM 1:00-2:00 PM groups AO/OC/MM

April 3-5 ELA/CAT -3rd grade: April 4 ELA/CAT-3rd grade: April 5

3rd ELA 10:00-11:00: Teacher WB AM group WB/EB/KR/MM 10:00-11:00: Teacher WB AM group WB/KR/MM

12:00-1:00: Teacher WB PM group WB/EB/KR/MM 12:00-1:00: Teacher WB PM group WB/KR/MM

April 9-11 ELA/PT-3rd grade: April 9 ELA-CAT: 4th grade: April 10 ELA-CAT: 4th grade: April 11

3rd/4th ELA 10:00-11:00: Teacher WB AM group WB/KR/MM 9:00-10:00: 3rd Teacher WB AM group WB/KR/MM 10:00-11:00: Teacher AP am/Teacher NAAP/NA/DD

12:00-1:00: Teacher WB PM group WB/KR/MM 10:00-11:00: Teacher AP am and pm/Teacher NA AP/NA/DD

12:00-1:00: Teacher WB PM group WB/KR/MM

April 16-20 ELA-PT: 4th grade: April 16 ELA-5th grade: April 17 ELA-5th grade: April 18 ELA-5th grade: April 19

4th/5th ELA 10:00-11:00: Teacher AP am and Teacher NA AP/NA/DD 10:30-11:30: Teacher OC am OC/TB 10:30-11:30: Teacher OC am OC/TB 10:30-11:30: Teacher OC am OC/TB

1:00-2:00: Teacher OC pm(Teacher VA am)/Orozco: OC/AO/MM 1:00-2:00: Teacher OC pm(Teacher VA am)/Teacher AO: OC/AO/MM 1:00-2:00: Teacher OC pm(Teacher VA am)/Teacher AO: OC/AO/MM

April 23-27 ELA-6th grade: April 23 ELA-6th grade: April 24 ELA-6th grade: April 25

6th ELA 9:00-10:00: Teacher MJS am MJS/TB 9:00-10:00: Teacher MJS am MJS/TB 9:00-10:00: Teacher MJS am MJS/TB

12:00-1:00 Teacher MJS pm (KJ am) MJS/TB/DD 12:00-1:00 Teacher MJS pm(Teacher KJ am) MJS/TB/DD 12:00-1:00 Teacher MJS pm(Teacher KJ am) MJS/TB/DD

April 30 -May 4 Math-3rd grade: April 30 Math-3rd grade: May 1 Math-3rd grade: May 2

MATH-3rd grade 10:00-11:00: Teacher MP am MP 10:00-11:00: Teacher MP am MP 10:00-11:00: Teacher MP am MP

12:00-1:00: Teacher MP pm(WB)am: MP/DD 12:00-1:00: Teacher MP pm(WB)am: MP/DD 12:00-1:00: Teacher MP pm(Teacher WB)am: MP/DD

Logramos: 4th April 30 Logramos: 4th grade: May 1 Logramos: 5th grade: May 2 Logramos: 5th grade: May 3

10:00-11:00: Teacher AL am 10:00-11:00: Teacher AL am 9:00-10:00: Teacher VA am/Teacher AO 9:00-10:00: Teacher VA am/Teacher AO
 2:30-3:30: Teacher AL pm and Teacher NA 2:30-3:30: Teacher AL pm and Teacher NA 1:00-2:00: Teacher VA pm 1:00-2:00: Teacher VA pm
May 7-11 Math-4th grade: May 7 Math-4th grade: May 8 Math-4th grade: May 9
MATH-4th grade 12:00-1:00: Teacher AL am **AL/DD** 12:00-1:00: Teacher AL am **AL/DD** 12:00-1:00: Teacher AL am **AL/EB**
 1:00-2:00 Teacher AL pm(Teacher AP am)and Teacher NA **AL/NA** 1:00-2:00 Teacher AL pm(Teacher AP am)/Teacher NA **AL/NA** 1:00-2:00 Teacher AL pm(Teacher AP am)/Teacher NA **AL/NA**
 Logramos: 3rd: May 7 Logramos: 3rd: May 8
 9:00-10:00: Teacher MP am 9:00-10:00: Teacher MP am
 1:30-2:30: Teacher MP pm 1:30-2:30: Teacher MP pm
May14-18 Math-5th grade: May 14
MATH-5th grade
May 21-25
MATH-6th grade
May 29-31
Finish up

How many lessons were cancelled for this? How many weeks were robbed from actual instruction? How many libraries and labs were closed to reading and research? How many test coordinators and substitutes had to be hired, and how many counselors, behavior specialists, librarians and nurses were laid off in exchange? And how many programs were coincidentally trimmed just as this flurry of expensive testing was begun? *In fact, Oregon's student-oriented programs and services were slashed by millions, leaving schools no way to address the very needs the assessments identified.*

Standardized tests impact not just the springtime, but the entire year. EasyCBM, for example, requires test coordinators to pull young kids from class all year long. Here's the math: 3-4 types of tests x 3-4 times a year x 30 students = hundreds of interruptions per class. That negatively impacts classroom concentration and instills anxiety in little kids not yet acclimated to school.

Meanwhile, the most successful countries in the world issue only one standardized test ever. As an exchange teacher in Germany, I learned they issue their one and only standardized test at age 15, which takes only about three hours, with results arriving within just weeks. Even Finland, the gold standard for successful schools, does the same.

Meanwhile, Smarter Balanced returns results *only after a year* – too late to help students who’ve already moved on to other teachers and schools. Also, it reports only total scores without details on specific skills. It doesn’t say whether Jose can multiply fractions or Gabi is ready for Algebra, only that they scored 1500 in math. Psychometricians say Smarter Balanced was only designed for ranking students, teachers and schools, and that it can never be retrofitted to become a diagnostic tool.

Unfortunately, rather than demand a replacement, districts added yet more tests to get a quicker and clearer picture of specific skills. Some districts pile on tests, claiming a “special relationship” with the makers. Some receive accolades for using students as guinea pigs for test development. And career advancement is possible through promoting these products, as some climb the ladder from district jobs to the testing firms themselves. But it’s a waste when teachers must ignore tests that are outmoded or poorly designed. By the way, test makers say it’s too expensive to make changes.

Courage is required to drastically slash excessive, overlapping, time-consuming, and expensive tests. Practical input from teachers is absolutely essential too. And contractualizing promises is also vital. Smarter Balanced promised to replace test questions every year, return results promptly and release the previous year’s questions and answers – which it never did. Test makers also falsely implied it produced more than a total score but could also diagnose specific strengths and weaknesses – which it cannot. Unfortunately, such promises were never put in writing and no one was ever held accountable. MOU’s and sales pitches are not enough.

Then there’s the question of assessment goals. If it’s for schools to track general progress and for legislators to justify education spending, then NAEP sampling is the gold standard. Alternatively, one annual standardized assessment in math and English would suffice to supplement the numerous content specific tests that teachers already issue throughout the year. Above all, a good assessment must serve as a diagnostic tool providing detailed information that students, parents, teachers and the state can clearly understand.

And let’s be honest. Employers and colleges don’t care about K-12 tests; they say GPA’s and transcripts reveal more about skill and dedication.

Consequently, it would be better to boost course quality and reduce class size to give students individual attention. Likewise, reinvest in equipment and teachers instead of adding yet another test, as happened with science. Not to mention, students desperately need electives to restore their love of learning and inspire lifelong vocations and avocations.

ESSER awarded Oregon nearly \$500 million. More funds could be redirected from the \$50 million that the ODE spent on expanded testing and data collection. (See the ODE's Race to the Top grant.) Even more could be redirected from district testing coordinators, data specialists, computer test technicians, help desks, proctors, tests, pre-tests, practice tests, and the plethora of related hardware and software – if there were only one universal test. We need to reinvest in librarians, counselors, nurses, behavior specialists, classroom assistants, and teachers. Our children are desperate for practical, emotional and one-on-one education support. Their future and the future of Oregon depend on it.

Rachel Rich

Now retired, I previously served on ODE committees writing standardized benchmarks and tests. Early on, I advocated for Common Core. I served either as the president, vice-president or board member for the AATG, OATG, PNCFL, and COFLT, as well as training teachers and presenting workshops nationally.