

Jereme Nickell OTR/L
7230 SE Market St
Portland, OR 97215
jeremes@earthlink.net

House Bill 2318
Oregon State Legislature
House Education Committee
900 Court St. NE H-282
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Respected Members of the House Education Committee,

I am reaching out to you today as a concerned parent, professional and fellow Oregonian. Thank you in advance for listening to my testimony and incorporating my voice in regards to HB 2318, Too Young to Test. As the daughter of a former Washington State Representative, Dawn Morrell, I truly value and respect the importance of this process, so thank you for your time. I am the mother of 3 children, ages 16, 14 and 6 so I have been immersed in childhood education for many years and am starting to see the fruits of an Oregon education as my oldest, a junior in high school sets her sights high towards college. I also have a kindergartener so I feel fortunate to have the perspective of the PreK-12 experience at my fingertips. To compliment my parenting experience I am also an Occupational Therapist thus have direct education and experience in child development and the use of standardized assessments. I am asking you today to support HB 2318 as there truly is a time when it is "too young to test." Although I value the need, time and place for standardized testing, PreK-2 is not the place for routine and lengthy testing of this kind for many reasons:

1. Children entering public school for the first time are young, come from different backgrounds and have most often never been exposed to the expectations of the full day classroom experience. My Kindergartner's first concerns were "who do I ask for help, how do I find the bathroom and do you think I will find friends." When she met with her teacher for the first time for a half hour before the start of school, the teacher was required to complete a 30 minutes OAKs assessment which left no time for laying the much needed foundation of trust in the student/teacher relationship. Although her teacher was able to give her a quick tour of the classroom, there was no time to answer questions that would leave my daughter feeling ready for kindergarten, instead she felt more anxious and concerned that she "didn't know the answer to the test questions" My daughter's kindergarten teacher is doing a wonderful job with a large dual language classroom, and only a half time aide. I trust her ability wholeheartedly. The average time it takes to currently administer the required testing for entire class is 2 weeks. This is done one on one with the teacher thus the rest of class is having free time, no instruction and limited supervision. This is done every quarter, therefore 8 weeks of an already short school year are taken up with testing and instruction is at a bare minimum if at all during this time. School is a shock socially for most kids and teachers need the time to not only teach them academic skills, but they need to foster their emotional and social needs by building a classroom that is safe, grounding and available for learning. Without the time to attend to the emotional, developmental and social needs of these young students, most children will never build the foundation needed to be active learners and thrive in a group setting. Our preK-2 teachers are educated and skilled in early education and know how to foster a community of young learners but they need to have the time to use their skills and create this strong foundation

or many kids will be left behind and fight against the label of “being not smart.” We all know how stress affects the brain and the ability to learn. Young children that haven’t been given the support they need to find their footing in the school system simply can’t learn or perform on testing. If we really want to give kids the fullest opportunity to succeed academically we need to give them the emotional, social and developmental support they need so they can fully engage, feel successful and soak up all the information their brains are wired to do. In today’s overcrowded classrooms we don’t need to use up all of our teacher’s time during these critical young years testing, it does not serve our education system, educators and most of all our future generations. Kids that do not have a chance to learn valuable social and emotional skill go on to have difficulties that prevent them from an education they deserve. Bullies are created and mental health crisis develop which stop learning dead in their tracks and impact all students negatively. Protecting our kids mental health is vital to a successful school system. When interviewing parents I learned that most parents that have the means transfer their kids out of public schools not because of academic concerns but because of social problems with peers and lack of staff to support these issues. I am asking you to give our most vulnerable little students a chance to feel successful, feel safe, learn empathy and how to support their peers. With this as their base, learning will naturally be off the charts.

2. Testing and data gathering is expensive and run by for profit companies. We already have an extremely underfunded public education system. Dollars spent on expensive data points and testing is money spent that could be used for more teachers and activities that directly benefit the students. Research shows again and again that academic outcomes are directly related to the teacher:student ratios. Teachers need a chance to really know their kids, their strengths and weaknesses and how to build on their strengths and empower them to be curious and work harder. Lengthy testing and data collecting for the youngest students takes a large portion of this time (up to 20%) from teachers that already know how to track students progress, identify kids that need extra help or those that need more of a challenge. We need to trust that our teachers are skilled and talented and know how to keep kids engaged and learning without lengthy and expensive tests. Testing for special services and Talented and Gifted would not be negatively impacted with this bill, thus those that need testing and additional services will get the testing that makes sense. Blanket testing is expensive and detrimental and teachers know how to identify those that need extra without costly and time draining standardized testing of the entire young student population.
3. As an Occupational Therapist I understand the value of objective information to track progress, this being said, health insurance companies also trust me to use my expertise as a licensed professional to use my judgement and therapeutic use of self to create positive outcomes for my clients as standardized tests often can’t capture the true growth of an individual. Give teachers the time and respect to do what they know how to do, nurture kids and inspire them to work collectively with others and create their best selves. If we don’t allow them to do this during these young, impressionable years we will continue to lose valuable, smart kids with so much potential in our already overcrowded and unsupportive public education system. Give teachers the chance, time and resources to create these important foundational skills at this young age instead of putting teacher and students through the stress of lengthy testing that is not developmentally appropriate for these young minds with so many other skills to learn. Save standardized testing for a later age when kids can truly focus, perform and give valuable data. If higher tests scores are truly what we are after, then constantly bombarding our kids who have varying learning styles with standardized tests instead of allowing our teachers to creatively teach and inspire is honestly the wrong approach. Test when it is developmentally appropriate, streamline the process and don’t take away from valuable teaching time when we have so many wonderful teachers in this state, my kids are examples of that.

Thank you again for providing me this opportunity to speak to this issue. I truly believe that if we continue to question why?, listen to our educators and parents while always keeping our kid's best interests in the forefront we can make wise and progressive choices together for the State of Oregon, that is why we all live here. Please do what is right for the kids and teachers and say no to standardized testing in PreK-2, HB 2318, the benefits simply don't outweigh the detrimental effects on our kid's education.

With Much Gratitude,
Jereme Nickell