

Comments on House Bill 2318
February 2, 2019

To Honorable Members of the Oregon House Education Committee,

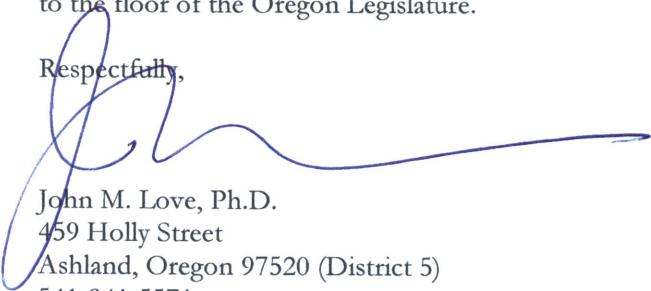
I oppose House Bill 2318. Unfortunately, early childhood assessments are particularly easy to “get wrong.” As other commenters have noted, they can’t assess everything, can lead to “teaching to the test,” can be used for labeling children, and can be misinterpreted. But this doesn’t have to happen. Every problem with early childhood testing can be avoided when tests are thoughtfully designed, carefully developed, and appropriately used. Oregon’s schools, teachers, and especially our youngest students are fortunate that the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment has been designed and is administered to avoid these pitfalls.

For most of my adult life, I have worked on projects that have appropriately—and effectively—assessed children between the ages of 14 months and 8 years. I prefer the term “assessment” to “test” because appropriate assessments for young children comprise multiple methods, as does the OKA. For example, the important domain of Approaches to Learning (interpersonal and self-regulation skills) includes ratings by the children’s teachers to indicate the extent to which children are flexible in their thinking, are curious about the world around them, are creative and use their imagination, and can manage their emotions. The sections on Early Math and Early Literacy are not timed, so there is no pressure on the children. The “test” administrators are carefully trained to interact respectfully with the children. This statewide training also ensures that we can rely on the results to be equally meaningful across Oregon’s diverse school districts.

The OKA data provides much useful information. One example is that it helps our Early Learning Hubs identify children needing special services. Over time, tracking OKA results can help Hubs understand how their pre-k and other early childhood services are improving. The 2017-2018 OKA results demonstrated a clear correlation between entering kindergarten performance and third grade achievement. Now we know that when OKA scores improve, there’s a greater chance that third grade performance will also. Or vice versa. Either way, it’s important to know.

I have talked mainly about the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment because I am not aware of any other statewide assessments administered before children reach third grade. If this is correct, it is absolutely essential that this bill *not* become law. House Bill 2318 seems to be a solution in search of a problem. I strongly urge you not to take this bill to the floor of the Oregon Legislature.

Respectfully,



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I retired after 40+ years studying children’s development and conducting rigorous evaluations of early childhood programs, such as Head Start, Early Head Start, state pre-k programs, and child care. I have extensive experience developing, using, analyzing, and interpreting early childhood assessments. I am a member of the board of directors of ZERO TO THREE, a national nonprofit organization providing programs and services to families with infants and toddlers. I have been a member of the Society for Research in Child Development for 56 years, and recently I served with an advisory group helping with the development of the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment. I believe I am pretty well acquainted with a variety of early education programs, and I appreciate the value we gain by assessing the benefits they provide for our youngest citizens. I am happy to address any questions you may have about my comments.