

To the Honorable Senators of the Senate Committee on Education:

I am asking for your support of SB 456 which would eliminate Oregon's testing barrier for graduation. I am a retired Special Education teacher and administrator from Portland Public Schools. I have witnessed many situations where students have worked hard to pass all their classes and to earn all their credits only to be heart-broken when they couldn't pass Oregon's required tests. This test failure blocks them from walking across the stage with their friends at graduation and also erects a barrier to future employment. Most work applications ask for an applicant's educational background. Students without a high school diploma are viewed differently by employers, friends and the community. They are "less than" everyone else.

Constant testing does irreparable harm to students who can't pass the tests. At an early age they begin to think they aren't as smart as their friends. In high school the pressure is relentless, because students have to keep testing over and over until they pass. Many students become depressed and give up on doing their classwork, because they feel their classes and credits don't matter if they can't pass the tests. In addition, they miss hours of valuable class instruction. After failing tests year after year their self-esteem is non-existent and many students turn to smoking, drugs and alcohol. They start hanging out with other students who have "failed" school.

I still substitute teach in the high schools and it upsets me every time I have to send a student out for testing. Their time would be better spent getting instruction, so they can pass their classes. They come to the following class and they're behind. It also takes extra teacher time to help students catch up.

In my opinion, the State testing is one of the main factors that contributes to Oregon's low graduation rate. Only eleven other states have the same type of testing requirements, so that puts Oregon at a statistical disadvantage. Please consider dropping the requirement for Oregon students to pass the Essential Learning Skills tests in order to graduate. Our students will be more productive in classes, and our graduation rate will accelerate.

Thank you for working on this important issue.

Best regards,

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