

I'm Deb Mayer, retired teacher from Portland, Oregon, testifying in favor of SB 456.

If Oregon is so intent on raising graduation rates, there is one easy thing it could do. Eliminate the Essential Skills requirement. If a student takes all the classes required to graduate and passes them, that student should receive a diploma. The Essential Skills mandate is essentially an exit exam. Exit exams are old-fashioned relics. Let's get rid of it as most other states have.

Expunging the essential skills requirement would boost Oregon's graduation rate immediately. It would cost nothing. It would be fair to many students who have passed all their coursework but because of a stupid law can't graduate. The Essential Skills requirement is cruel and deprives many of the happy graduation they deserve.

It's time for Oregon to emerge out of the dark ages and give students the diplomas they've earned. And while we're righting wrongs, let's make this new law retroactive. Let's give all students, who would have otherwise graduated except for passing a standardized test or some other random assessment, their diplomas. It's the decent thing to do. What a difference it will make in the lives of those kids – now adults – to have that one piece of paper that essentially determines their future.

If doing the right thing is not enough to sway you, here are some facts:
SB 456 ("Eliminating Oregon's Graduation Barrier") would:

- Prohibit the state of Oregon, local school districts or public charter schools from requiring students to pass a standardized test to demonstrate proficiency in Essential Learning Skills in order to receive a diploma.
- Any students who were not awarded a diploma due to not passing a standardized test, but who have met all other graduation requirements, will be awarded their diploma upon request to their school district or charter school.
- * Oregon is one of only 11 states that still have a testing requirement for graduation. Washington just signed a bill into law that eliminates their exit exam.
- * California eliminated their exit exam and retroactively awarded diplomas to around 40,000 students who had fulfilled all graduation requirements (passing grades/credits earned) except their state standardized test. Some had been without a diploma for a decade. Most of those former students were from marginalized groups: e.g. people of color, people of lower socioeconomic status, people for whom English is a second or other language
- * Many studies show that such requirements do nothing to raise achievement, improve employment prospects or ensure college success.
- * Such testing requirements do increase the dropout rate, especially among low income students, English language learners and students of color.
- * These tests take an inordinate amount of educator time away from other tasks by necessitating unnecessary testing coordination. (i.e. special performance task assessments or repeats of a standardized test)
- * These testing requirements force teachers to teach to the test, rather than engaging students in authentic and meaningful learning.