

Honorable Members Joint Committee on Student Success
INRE SB 456

Please vote in favor of SB 456 in order to prohibit the requirement that in order to receive their diploma students must pass a standardized test demonstrating their proficiency in Essential Learning Skills. Passing the test serves no purpose other than to add a separate hurdle that students must leap in addition to completing required course work with a passing grade and/or completing a project demonstrating their proficiency. Passing the test does nothing to increase achievement levels, has not been demonstrated to improve job-finding prospects, and seems to have no relationship as a predictor of college success. On the contrary, the test seems to inordinately punish students already at risk for not graduating, including English language learners, students of color, and students of low socioeconomic status. Instead of serving to engage students and to leave none behind, these exit exams appear to increase the dropout rate. As a result, most states have eliminated exit exams as a requirement for graduation.

Interestingly enough, most of you folks serving on this committee graduated from high school without having to pass such an exam. I know I did. Somehow, this country (and the job market) was well-served for generations more than adequately by kids who put in the time and completed all credit requirements in a satisfactory manner. We used to trust our teachers, who see students on a day-to-day basis, to honestly and accurately assess student performance. I see no reason why we shouldn't reaffirm that trust.

When I retired from teaching in California in 2005, the state was only one year away from implementing its high school exit exam. I had served as a teacher-advisor to the California Learning Assessment System (CLAS), abandoned in 1995 for a supposedly more "objective" form of assessment, and a trainer in its implementation. I had also served as a contributing member of the standards-writing committees in the late 1990s. As you might imagine, I was deeply involved, at a state-wide level, in assessment, teacher professional development, curriculum planning, and site-based management. From that perspective, I actively participated in the debate over how to best assess student achievement and growth. I strongly opposed the testing requirement, then, and felt some redemption in 2015 when California suspended use of the test, altogether. I hope that Oregon takes a similar step with enactment of SB 456.

Sincerely
Scott Hays (retired teacher)
Oregon City