

TO: Chair Wagner and members of the Senate Committee on Education  
FROM: Carol Greenough,  
SUBJECT: Support of SB 1572

I am writing in support of SB1572. In the discussion of Oregon graduation rates, we rarely mention one of the probable causes of failure to graduate - Oregon has the toughest graduation requirements in the nation. Our requirement of 24 credits to graduate plus an additional essential skills requirement is not only difficult, but also demonstrably inequitable.

The state of Oregon requires students to gain 24 credits to graduate along with approximately 12 other states. No state requires more. The average number of credits required to graduate across the nation is 20.3. Iowa, with the highest graduation rate in the country requires 13, although school districts seem to require around 20.

But Oregon also has an essential skills requirement. Imagine yourself as an Oregon high school student. You have completed all of the 24 credits, but cannot graduate because you have not completed this. Of those 13 states that require 24 credits to graduate, only Oregon and New Jersey put this additional hoop in front of you. This can be fulfilled in a variety of ways. The easiest way is to pass the SBAC that is administered to all consenting 11th graders. But, based on DOE statistics, 52% of students meet this requirement in math, 63% in writing, and 70% in math. And we know that Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and economically disadvantaged students disproportionately fail and need to find another way to demonstrate their proficiency.

Oregon does provide an alternative to passing the test. But this is determined by district, is costly to administer, and also probably reflects equity biases in who succeeds. Talking to school districts, they say that few students fail to graduate because they haven't met the essential skills requirement - but that some students have to give up electives and take a special course if they don't pass the initial test. The Oregon DOE identifies 215 students who completed 24 credits but did not later earn a diploma during the 18-19 school year. The reasons for this are not recorded. We also have no idea of how many students would stay in school if not discouraged by this requirement. In California, more than 30,000 students became eligible for retroactive diplomas when their graduation test was abolished because of demonstrated inequity.

The eventual goal is to require demonstration of mastery of 9 essential skills. There is no timeline for this.

As someone who worked as a psychologist in the schools for many years, I do not oppose the other requirements for graduation. The Personalized Learning Education Plan and Profile is a viable part of changes implemented through measure 98 and the Student Success Act. I do oppose the essential skills requirement as magnifying the inequality already seen in our summative assessment, the SBAC.

High quality education is imperative. This occurs in the classroom. Essential skills are essential. These are acquired and assessed in the classroom. If our students pass their courses - this should be sufficient for awarding them a diploma. This is the equitable solution, this is the fair solution, and this is the effective way to let our students move on as adult citizens of our state.

Thank you.