

February 11, 2020

Chair Rob Wagner
Vice-Chair Chuck Thomsen
Members of the Senate Education Committee

RE: Senate Bill 1572

Dear Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Thomsen, Members of the Senate Education Committee,

We write today to express our concerns regarding Senate Bill 1572, which repeals the Essential Skills requirements that Oregon high school students must demonstrate in order to receive a high school diploma, and removes the State Board of Education's authority to set graduation requirements statewide.

While we welcome the Senate Education Committee's renewed examination of the Essential Skills requirements, we urge the Committee to consider conducting a deeper review of Oregon's current diploma requirements with a diverse group of stakeholders to ensure the requirements are meaningful, culturally responsive, and aligned with historic investments like the Student Success Act.

Senate Bill 1572 proposes significant reforms to Oregon's public education system without engaging the voices of impacted students, families, communities of color, and other education stakeholders who may be disproportionately impacted by this legislation. The Essential Skills requirements were adopted after an extensive public process to give students flexibility in demonstrating that they are able to 1) read and comprehend a variety of texts, 2) write clearly and accurately, and 3) apply mathematics in a variety of settings. Rather than implementing a one-size-fits-all approach, the requirements offer multiple methods for evaluating Essential Skills, including a variety of standardized tests and work samples. As the Student Success Act rolls out across Oregon, this is an opportune moment to revisit the Essential Skills requirements with a thoughtful, transparent, and inclusive process that identifies appropriate evaluative tools for assessing students' competencies as they approach graduation.

If the Essential Skills requirements are repealed without a clear and consistent alternative to measure what high school students have learned, state level administrators and policymakers risk losing access to key data that guides system-wide improvement. Without this data, how will the state examine how groups of students are learning over time at the school, district, regional, and state level, especially students of color, low-income students, students with disabilities, and emerging bilingual students? How will the state ensure that our education system is accountable to providing all students with an equitable opportunity to be successful or that students are able to access supports and accommodations tailored to meet their unique learning needs? With graduation rates on the rise, particularly among students of color, school districts and the state must remain accountable to ensuring all students are prepared for life, career, and post-secondary education.

We are equally concerned about the various potential unintended consequences of Senate Bill 1572 that have been brought to light. Unresolved questions include how these proposed changes might affect Oregon’s compliance with federal requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), how they could impact the four-year district-level plans that are currently being submitted to ODE under Oregon’s Student Success Act, or how higher ed institutions might respond to an Oregon diploma with varying levels of rigor and requirements. The legislative short session does not provide ample time to fully assess and understand the unknown impact of removing Essential Skills from our graduation requirements and repealing the State Board’s authority in this area.

We are committed to working with lawmakers during the interim period to review the state’s graduation requirements and their impact on Oregon students. Without question, we share the Legislature’s determination to ensure that Oregon evaluates student learning with tools that are clear and consistent across school districts, and that uplift historically underserved students.

Sincerely,

Whitney Grubbs, *Chalkboard Project*
 Andrew Thomas Ayala, *KairosPDX*
 Ricardo Lujan-Valerio, *Latino Network*
 Roberta Dunn, *FACT Oregon*
 Anthony Deloney, *Self Enhancement, Inc.*
 Inger McDowell-Hartye, *Unite Oregon*
 Bridget Cooke, *Adelante Mujeres*
 Nathaniel Brown, *Oregon Business & Industry*

Toya Fick, *Stand for Children Oregon*
 Jenny Lee, *APANO*
 Mark Jackson, *REAP, Inc.*
 Iris Maria Chávez, *Oregon Coalition of Community Charter Schools*
 Annalivia Palazzo-Angulo, *Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality*
 Duncan Wyse, *Oregon Business Council*

