

Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing in support of SB 744, which would ask that ODE review the state's graduation requirements. This is long overdue. Currently, our state requires students to pass some sort of standardized examination as part of the Essential Skills graduation requirement, essentially creating a single high school exit exam. This puts far too much importance on a single score on a single test and essentially negates all the hard work that students, their families, and their teachers put into their education over the four year course of their high school experience.

Students leave high school with a variety of goals and a variety of life circumstances and experiences. There is no one test that can tell us if all of them are ready for whatever may come next. There is no one test that can tell us if a student could be both a successful auto mechanic and a successful brain surgeon. There is no one test that can take the place of hours of discussions between students, families, and teachers and students' involvement in their high school coursework and extracurricular activities. There is no one test that can demonstrate how individual motivation builds success when students follow their dreams.

Many states, most notably California, have dropped these exams because they harmed many students by creating a barrier to graduation. Without a diploma, students face poor employment prospects and an increased chance of incarceration. Most of the students who were denied diplomas for not passing a high school exit exam in California were students of color, students who lived in poverty, and students for whom English is not their first language. This is really not surprising, as we know that most of these tests very accurately measure the socioeconomic status of a student's family.

Standardized tests favor students who are able to demonstrate learning in a very specific, narrow, standardized way. They do not allow for answers that are outside the box, do not allow for the give and take that takes place in a classroom and gets at deep understanding, do not allow for a project or other concrete demonstration of students' knowledge and ability to complete a task. The environment of administering and pressure of taking these tests harm students with various emotional and intellectual challenges, students with anxiety or other disorders, students with various learning disabilities, and students who fall on some spectra (such as autism or OCD). They favor students whose language and culture most closely mirror those of the test makers. They do not account for specific conditions and circumstances which individual students may find themselves in on the day the exam is given: loss of a parent or family member, being unsheltered or hungry, or any other number of things students might go through.

In short, standardized tests are inadequate and unworthy of being a sole determinant of such an important passage to the next step on a student's path towards college or career. This is not good enough for our kids.

A high school diploma should be awarded as recognition of four years of hard work and achievement. Students deserve to be recognized for that. We shouldn't be in the business of denying students who worked hard for four years a diploma nor negating four years of work because of one single test score. Please support SB 744. It is past time to reexamine Oregon's graduation requirements.