



April 4, 2021

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My Name is Jerry Rosiek. I am a professor of Education Studies at the University of Oregon. I am also a parent of a 15-year-old daughter who attends 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the Eugene 4J public schools. I submit this written testimony in support of the Too Young to Test bill (SB 596). It is a good bill. It exempts our youngest children from the imposition of *high stakes mandatory standardized tests*.

No educator objects to assessments. No one objects to the use of targeted diagnostic tests that help us identify students who need special supports. **This bill would not prevent either of those from happening.** What it interrupts is the excessive use of *high stakes mandatory standardized tests* in the early grades.

These are tests that do not sit lightly on children's educational experience. Instead they are tests that are designed to change the culture and professional priorities of teachers and schools. They are designed to shift teachers' attention away from the whole child to specific learning outcomes. Although these outcomes—like basic literacy skills—are desirable outcomes. The exclusive focus on these narrow learning goals has **very negative side effects** for children and teachers.

I am sure you will hear testimony from people who will argue against this modest bill (HB 596), because they believe we need to test students at every grade level in order to discern which students need help and which schools are failing to do their job. They will likely argue that the tests are the only or best means available to promote equity. Be careful please, when listening such claims. Everyone these days claims to be promoting educational equity. Be sure the people making such claims are not part of an industry that profits from the sale of the tests or the sales of books the tests make necessary. Make sure they can give a believable account of how these tests—which cost so much money and have negative side effects—will make students' education better.

The idea that more tests help us hold schools accountable for improvements sounds plausible. However, in this case it is false. The *high stakes mandatory standardized tests* used in the early grades are not that reliable. They do not provide teachers with useful information that can help them adjust their teaching to individual student needs. **I'll repeat, the tests are not designed to help teachers understand their individual students' needs.**



The tests are, instead, designed to provide information to be used at the district and state agency level. Ask people advocating for these tests how, exactly, they see these tests leading to better practice. Their answer will not be persuasive. Because it presumes that it is worth diverting considerable time and resources away from instruction to gather information to funnel test data it into a poorly funded and somewhat chaotic state educational bureaucracy (ODE). Using this data somehow that bureaucracy will generate a policy? A minimally funded intervention plan? An unfunded mandate? A white paper? Something that will trickle back into classrooms and magically change teaching practice for the better.

This muddled promise that ultimately delivers no results is supposed to be worth the time, effort, curricular narrowing, and student anxiety caused by these tests. It is not. In the meantime, by making the schools less flexible and less personal, it works against the promotion of equity. Worse, the whole vision carries with it the implicit assumption teachers and local schools are the source of our educational problem causing citizens to lose faith in schools. Here is an alternative diagnosis—many of our problems are caused by the overreach of centralized state education agencies that lack the funding or organizational coherence to do more than suppress innovation and be a cloying distraction.

This bill comes to you at a moment when the entire national commitment to high stakes mandatory standardized testing infrastructure is in a process of collapse. Parents and teachers across the nation are exhausted with state leaders who fail to fund schools, blame the resulting struggles on teachers and kids, and then act as if they are going to fix things by “getting tough”, imposing tests, and monitoring the educational crisis they have created. The longer individual legislators support this failing policy fashion, the worse it will look for them. **This modest bill presents an opportunity to acknowledge that our state leaders understand parents and teachers are frustrated**, that they understand 30 years of high stakes testing has not produced the results promised, and that it may be time to step back just a bit and listen to what parents and teachers have been saying for a long time now.

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