



Date: April 7, 2021

From: Lillian Durán, Associate Professor Special Education and Clinical Sciences, College of Education, University of Oregon

Re: Opposition to SB 596

SB 596 is a short sighted bill that severely limits the state's ability to document the development, growth, and educational needs of young children in Oregon. Access to high quality early educational opportunities improves the lives of many young children and sets the stage for academic success. An important driver in early education is accurate testing to determine where children are functioning across domains including gross and fine motor, receptive and expressive language, and social-emotional development. Additionally, pre-academic skills in early literacy and numeracy are critical for the state to monitor as these skills are predictive of academic performance.

With the burgeoning Preschool Promise programs in Oregon, it is critical that we have a rationale and scientifically based assessment plan in place that allows the state to collect data about the developmental needs of young children. Without direct child assessment how can program developers, administrators, teachers, and policy makers understand the actual needs of children to best initiate programs and approaches that will meet their needs? Additionally, how can the state adequately monitor the progress of children enrolled in state and federal programs such as Preschool Promise, Early Childhood Special Education, and Head Start without adequate assessment protocols that do not overly burden young children, but provide empirical data on their progress. We need child data to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and to broadly ameliorate any challenges young children may be experiencing in development. This is particularly important for vulnerable populations in the state that experience higher rates of developmental delays such as children growing up in poverty, those who are unhoused, or who are experiencing trauma or neglect. We must be cognizant of the critical role direct child assessment plays in designing effective instruction and programming.

Of course, there are issues with some assessments that are currently in place, but to prohibit any assessment is short sighted and a severe over reaction. Tests that are developed for use with young children are developmentally appropriate and take into consideration children's limited attention spans and need for manipulatives and engaging experiences. Testing should be brief and easily administered in natural contexts both at school and at home. I am a scholar who has had nearly a decade of funding from the US Department of Education to develop preschool assessments of language and early literacy in Spanish. I am intimately aware of the considerations and importance of testing in early childhood. As an expert in the field of early childhood education and assessment I find this legislation troubling and extremely narrow in its focus.

In short the state will severely limit its ability to adequately and effectively serve young children in the state if little to no testing is conducted until 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. These early years are foundational

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and if we do not use testing to inform instruction or program development we are missing a critical window of opportunity to intervene effectively and early to adequately address any learning or developmental concerns that might arise. I understand that this legislation does not prohibit diagnostic testing, but many children are not referred for that level of testing and instead testing conducted in general early education settings is the only data that will provide broader population level data on children's level of functioning.

I oppose this bill and hope that legislators will think through the consequences of such sweeping actions. Without adequate assessment data how will the state move forward with serving some of the youngest and most vulnerable citizens in the state? If early development and kindergarten entry skills are not documented across the population how will Oregon investigate growth on these metrics and better understand the skill levels and needs of young children entering elementary school? I urge you to think through these issues and unintended consequences carefully as you vote on this bill. Children's futures are in your hands.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lillian Durán".

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\*\*Views expressed in this letter are personal and represent my scholarship and do not represent the position of the University of Oregon or the College of Education.