

To: Senate Education Committee

From: Dana Hepper, Director of Policy & Advocacy, Children's Institute

Date: Wednesday, April 7, 2021

Re: Opposition to Senate Bill 596

Chair Dembrow and members of the Senate Education Committee, I am the Director of Policy & Advocacy at the Children's Institute. Children's Institute's mission is to ensure every child in Oregon is prepared for school and life. We are writing to voice concern about the current version of SB 596.

Common assessments are an important tool for systems to advance equity.

HB 2318 has a potential negative impact on Oregon policymaker's ability to prioritize critical investments in early childhood and early elementary to the communities, schools, and children who need them most. This information is important for the Department of Education, Early Learning Division, and Legislature. For advocates for children and education, reliable and valid assessments give us one piece of information we need to make the case for investments in young children and families before kindergarten, and ensure these investments are created and distributed to promote equity. Until the creation of the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment, the state did not have child data before 3rd grade to inform addressing systemic gaps. Waiting to have data on these disparities until 3rd grade too often results in K-3 approaches that are too late to close achievement gaps if we haven't also invested earlier. While K-3 efforts are important, they are hampered by lack of equal access to early learning opportunities before kindergarten entry, a critical window to eliminate disparity.

Common assessments are an important tool for educators.

As a former teacher, I valued knowing I was using the same assessment tools as the teachers next to me, that we had been trained in how to use that tool effectively, analyze the data, and use it to inform our instruction, and that the tests are reliable and valid. When used correctly, common assessments can facilitate teacher collaboration. They provide information to inform improvements and investments at the program, district, and state level. This legislation risks undermining the appropriate and effective use of assessment in preschool through 2nd grade.

Common assessments are an important tool for parents.

As a parent, I see firsthand the value of early and appropriate assessments for children and parents. Common assessments are one piece of information parents can use to understand how their child is doing relative to peers and advocate for adequate services for their child.

Assessments are imperfect, but a ban is extreme and unnecessary.

Additional information

1) Oregon Kindergarten Assessment.

We thought it could be useful for Committee Members to know what is entailed in the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment as it is currently administered. The assessment has three components:

- Letter names and letter sounds. Children are shown letters and asked to share whether they know the name of the letter (upper case and lower case). Then they are shown letters and asked if they know the sound of the letter. This portion of the assessment should last about 3 minutes total.
- Early Math. Children are shown age-appropriate math questions, then asked to pick what they think is the answer from 3 possible answers. For example, a teacher might show the child a picture of 2 circles and ask “how many circles are there?” Then the child could pick from the answers 1, 2, or 3.
- Social-Emotional Development & Approaches to Learning. The teacher responds to a list of 15 items, i.e. “child engages in cooperative play with other children,” and selects from 5 options ranging from never to always. The teacher determines the best response by observing the children working and playing in the classroom.

The assessment is administered by the child’s kindergarten teacher. The direct assessment of the child should take about 5-10 minutes total. This assessment we use is the Easy CBM, which is the tool that Oregon had already adopted as an optional formative assessment, and teachers across Oregon had been trained in and were using this tool already with children. This is not a comprehensive assessment, and most teachers and some districts supplement with additional tools. All three pieces of the assessment are predictive of third grade outcomes, and the social-emotional development and self-regulation tool has been shown to be the most predictive of later outcomes. There are no stakes for children or schools associated with the results of this assessment.

2) Other examples of common assessments used in Oregon and in districts.

- Head Start programs across the state use the TS Gold formative assessment as a foundation for creating individualized learning plans.
- Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education programs use the AEPS assessment to monitor child progress and meet federal requirements.
- Many school districts use DIBELS as a 2-3 minute progress monitoring tool as a piece of a comprehensive assessment approach to inform reading instruction and the creation of reading groups. Some districts also use a more comprehensive progress monitoring tools, including DRA, MAPS, etc.
- Portland Public Schools implemented a district-wide Talented and Gifted (TAG) screener in 2nd grade in response to concerns about underrepresentation of children of color in the TAG program.

We are concerned that districts who have taken the time to work with educators to develop common tools to use across classrooms will be undermined in their ability to implement these tools effectively if HB 2318 is passed.