



April 7, 2021

Chair Michael Dembrow
 Vice-Chair Chuck Thomsen
 Members of the Senate Education Committee

RE: [SB 596 – Relating to Assessments for Prekindergarten through Grade Two](#)

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

Our organizations are writing to express our concerns regarding Senate Bill 596 as currently drafted. Senate Bill 596 would prohibit Oregon’s State Board of Education from developing or requiring state-level assessments for students in prekindergarten through second grade, and prohibit school districts from administering most assessments at these grade levels.

After such a turbulent year, we need to better understand what Oregon’s young children need, and how our system is working to meet those needs. Many of us are witnessing firsthand how COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting historically underserved children who already endure longstanding inequities. As schools reopen, students will bring a myriad of unique needs to the classroom—some of which may not yet be known, anticipated, or understood.

We agree that current assessments can be problematic if used or interpreted improperly. However, with dedicated reflection and improvement, we believe Oregon can and should use reliable and unbiased assessments as an effective and meaningful tool during the COVID-19 recovery and beyond.

Even for our youngest learners, culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate assessments can empower students and families to be active participants in shaping their learning experience. They can also shed light on system-driven disparities that impact specific student populations and help Oregon ensure our education system does not leave children behind.

Under SB 596, we are concerned that educators will be constrained from getting the classroom information they need to support children—especially Black, Indigenous, and children of color, children experiencing disability, emerging multilingual children, and children navigating poverty—during their critical early years of learning and development. Banning the use of assessments without a clear alternative would limit how early learning providers, school districts, state administrators, and policymakers gather data to inform equity-focused, system-wide improvements. Families also deserve access to data that helps them better understand their child’s progress relative to peers and whether the school system is adequately meeting their child’s needs.

Rather than an overarching ban that will have unintended consequences, we would recommend that historically underserved families, educators, and community-based partners be engaged in an equitable and inclusive review of assessments at all levels. Our organizations would gladly partner with the Legislature to thoughtfully rethink how assessment can support every child in Oregon to learn, grow, and thrive.

Sincerely,

Anthony Castaneda, Latino Network
Amanda Manjarrez, Foundations for a Better Oregon
Bridget Cooke, Adelante Mujeres
Coi Vu, Pacific Islander and Asian Family Center - IRCO
Dalia Avello, Oregon Montessori Association
Dana Hepper, Children’s Institute
Dianna Hansen, Central Oregon Disability Support Network
Donna Schnitker, Oregon Head Start Association
Inger McDowell-Hartye, Unite Oregon
Iris Maria Chávez, Oregon Coalition of Community Charter Schools
Kyle Ritchey-Noll, Oregon Business Council
Kylie Grunow, Early Literacy Success Alliance
Lanea Olsen, APANO
Leslee Barnes, Preschool and Early Learning Division, Multnomah County
Molly Day, Early Learning Multnomah
Roberta Dunn, FACT Oregon
Rose Rezai, Social Venture Partners Portland
Sara Stearns, Oregon Association for the Education of Young Children