

Good afternoon, Chair Dembro and members of the committee. My name is Peg Cornell and I have been in public education for 36 years as a high school science teacher and am the current president of the Corvallis Education Association.

I am here to speak in support of SB 602, which removes the sunset provision of HB 2655. It is important that parents or adult students maintain the right to opt out from summative standardized tests if they determine the test is not right for them.

With the US Dept. of Education mandating that standardized tests be taken, districts are forced to use precious in-person instructional time to prepare for and administer these tests. In this pandemic year, it is very clear how important it is that we have the opt-out ability. As students return to school, staff need to be able to focus on their academic and mental well-being, rather than spending time on test administration. In my experience, standardized tests tend to cause anxiety, and when we consider how many of our students have experienced trauma during this pandemic, the last thing we want is for school to become an additional source of trauma.

The amount of time students spend in a combination of test preparation and test taking is significant. In my district of Corvallis, the test, even with the relaxed requirements this year, will take up approximately an eighth of all time in the classroom this year. It is clear that parents need to be given the right to make the best decision for their child, especially after such a hard year.

The trend locally at the high schools has been a steady increase in the number of students opting out. Many students have chosen to do so because they have already met their essential skills requirements in the areas being tested. Even more common is that students don't want to miss classroom instruction.

The number of staff hours it takes to administer the tests is staggering. At my school, one person coordinates testing as one of the job responsibilities. They spend 4 hours/day from the start of the year until Spring Break on test preparation and student practice, and then 8 hours/day from Spring Break to the last day of school on the actual administration of the tests. As the number of students opting out has increased, this person is able to use more of their time supporting classroom instruction, which is a benefit to all.

Research shows that standardized tests are not an objective measure of student progress, but are instead indicators of which students are good at taking tests. The tests still often contain question prompts that discriminate based on race, socioeconomic status*, and gender**. I have even seen science MC questions that do not actually have a correct answer. Even if the question is eventually tossed out, the stress this causes some students is very real.

In addition, these tests are simply not the most reliable indicators of future success. Parents need the option to make decisions that allow their children to display their learning in ways that are meaningful. I can assure you that what our students have missed during this pandemic is NOT the standardized tests, it is instead the wonderful world of curiosity and learning that happen in the classroom.

For these and other reasons, it is important to retain the option of families to opt out of these tests.

On behalf of students, families, and educators, I would ask you to pass SB 602.
Thank you for your time and consideration.

*There is correlation between test scores and property values.

*The use of idioms in question prompts such as "keys to the kingdom"

**Question prompts that have male characters, societally "male" topics (sports like football, etc.)

**Fewer open-ended questions, which females tend to do better on than MC

**Males tend to guess when they don't know the answer, females tend to leave questions blank because the instructions tend to advise against guessing