

May 11, 2021

Members of the House Committee on Education,

We, members of the Oregon Public Education Network (OPEN), write this in strong support of SB 744-A, which would address the harm done to students through the Essential Learning Skill graduation requirement.

An unknown number of students have dropped out of high school because they assumed that they could not surmount this barrier to graduation. After years of failing to pass dozens of standardized tests since early elementary school, these students had no reason to believe that the Essential Skills assessments would be any different. They felt that, no matter how many classes they took and passed, they would not be allowed to graduate. This applies overwhelmingly to low-income students and students of color.

Despite sincere efforts by counselors, finding themselves forced to serve as de facto testing coordinators instead of emotional support professionals, far too many students still felt pushed out of school.

There is no credible evidence that graduation tests produce any positive outcomes, nor have they been found to have any predictive value of post-high school success.

The tragic narrowing of the curriculum produced by testing pressures in K-8 has increased in high school since the Essential Skills requirement was enacted.

In recent years, eighteen states have eliminated similar barriers to graduation. Only eleven states still have such barriers.

It is time for Oregon to change course. Members of OPEN ask you to pass SB 744-A and to actively encourage its adoption by the entire House.

Sincerely,

OPEN Steering Committee

Roscoe Caron
Robey Clark
David Crandall
Gregg Heacock
Larry Lewin
Liz Marlia-Stein
Ross Swartzendruber
Mary Thamann