

Chair Sen. Denbrow, Vice-Chair Sen. Thomsen, and Committee Members,

I am in support of SB 744 "Eliminating Oregon's Graduation Barrier".

In 2016 a teacher friend and former colleague asked me to volunteer at North Eugene High School in the Essential Skills course. Since I am retired from teaching, still interested in public education, and a big fan of hers, I readily agreed.

The reality was bad. The class was composed of maybe 25 high school seniors who had not yet proven their Essential Skills in writing - even though the students I tutored all claimed to have passed their English Language Arts courses, earned those credits, and held a competent passing grade point average. In other words, they had met the school's standard for writing. But due to our state's Essential Skills Graduation Requirement, all seniors must go beyond that standard and additionally pass one of five measurements - 4 standardized tests or 1 work sample.

I understand our state's desire to increase student competence, to raise the bar, to not accept mediocrity. But in the past two decades public education in the U.S. has been dominated by the philosophy that only testing will remove the achievement gap, will increase graduation, and will achieve equity. Since the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind law 20 years ago, the U.S. is overwhelmed by testing, and Oregon is no exception. The effects are devastating for students, teachers, and principals.

The students I tutored at North Eugene High School were largely Latinx kids, and to a one, they were resigned, fatalistic, and lacking any hope for graduating with their classmates. They knew the score - they knew they were losers in the system. No amount of coaching, cajoling, mentoring from me would inspire them to want to write better. The Essential Skills Requirement had already sunk them. I was not teaching how to write, how to communicate, how to use language for a purpose; I was test prepping them - again.

What these kids - our kids - need is not testing upon testing for accountability. They need smaller classes, more energized and re-professionalized teachers, more creative and independent principals, more community input and support.

You have the opportunity to fix this injustice. SB 744 will:

- Suspend for the next two years the state-mandated Essential Learning Skills assessment requirement in order to receive a high school diploma.
- Require Department of Education to review state requirements for high school diploma.
- Prohibit State Board of Education from requiring for high school diploma that student show proficiency in any academic content area if student successfully completed credit requirements.

Thank you,
Larry Lewin
2145 Lincoln St.
Eugene, OR 97405