

Dear Committee Members:

Having worked in two public school systems for over 12 years as an elementary teacher in the Portland area, I can attest to the damage standardized tests have inflicted upon my students. Some of my students came to the US with no English and no previous schooling whatsoever and were still expected to pass standardized tests aimed at native speakers after one year. When a critical mass of such students were unable to pass the tests, my school was branded as a failing school despite the impressive progress these students made.

The Department of Education's policy of secrecy around the tests, ostensibly to protect test security, is a major hindrance to fair and effective testing. The Department of Education has no accountability for the content of the tests. Teachers are forced to sign waivers to never look at the tests even after they have been administered. This is because the tests are full of errors and other flaws that make them both unreliable and invalid (the latter meaning that the tests do not really assess with they intend to assess). How do I know? It's a long story but part of the answer is that, ironically, I was required by state policy to read math test questions aloud to any student who requested this, since, despite being language-dependent and thus invalid, the math tests are meant to test math ability and not language or reading ability. When I asked an official in the Department of Education why I was required to sign an agreement to never read any test content when I was also required to read math test items aloud, she said, "You can read the test items, but you can't think about them." This from a person high-up in the Oregon Department of Education!

The Oregon Department of Education has a history of not being transparent and this needs to change. In addition, the outrageous amount of money spent on standardized tests would be put to better use if it were used to support students and their families. I understand that this bill proposes a mere minimization of standardized test implementation and therefore is only a baby step in the march towards fair and valid assessments in our public schools. Yet it is urgent that the unsupervised and irresponsible administration of these tests be curtailed.