

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

As someone who has taught language arts classes at all levels over 32 years and who has been involved in creating assessments and scoring student performance on a variety of assessments, I am dismayed to see first-hand, as a substitute for the High Desert Education Service District, how preparing students for mandated standardized testing in Oregon has distorted the education process.

I have used lessons printed from texts purchased for the purpose of helping students pass this test. Rather than allowing students to read a story together, the producers of these materials introduce students to a sentence from the story, followed by questions about the meaning of a certain term. Then, with a paragraph, out of context, students are asked to identify the part of speech that describes the function of a particular word.

By the time they are allowed to read the story, itself, most are so deflated they wonder why they should finish the exercise. Where is the joy? Where is the instruction? This assignment is typical of the hodgepodge approach to teaching that I have heard teachers tell their students is what they have been asked to do.

I see no sequence of instruction that helps students develop skills that will help them become more fluent in decoding text. Instead, I see word-searches, with boxes full of letters in which certain words might be found. Would it not be better to have word searches in poetry, where certain words with multiple meanings create a surprising subtext students can discover together as they discuss each line aloud. Instead, what I have observed is students working separately, on their own, except when they are listening to what they teacher has to say.

With all the focus on getting students to pass an exam that would show their teachers are succeeding seems like a hospital having nurses and doctors given their patients ice-cubes to suck on so their temperatures will be low enough to allow them to be released. SB 1583 breaks that cycle and frees students and teachers to discover together meaning in what they read and what they write independently and together. It allows sampling assessment, like that conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress that would provide the kind of demographic data that is needed to see where work is needed to improve outcomes for students not doing well.

In the space provided, teachers might share with each other lessons that work better than what they have been given to present so far.

I urge you to pass SB 1583 to free us from a test-taking mind-set that has taken the joy out of learning.

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