

Submitter:

Ana Araujo

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

Senate Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

SB1555

Hello,

My name is Ana Araujo and I am a constituent of Representative Rob Nosse and Senator Kathleen Taylor of Southeast Portland. I am a parent of two children, both of whom attend middle school in the Portland Public School district. Both of my children qualify as “gifted” or TAG (talented and gifted) students, yet both are on IEPs (Individualized Education Plans) for various learning challenges. They are very bright, but they often do not score well on standardized tests. Kids like mine are just one cohort of kids that demonstrate why teaching to the test and evaluating kids solely by their test scores is a bad idea – but that is largely what SB 1555 is set to do.

Senate Bill 1555 would replace Oregon’s current broad and well-rounded educational goals which include high expectations, safe learning environments, and the involvement of parents in schools (shown to improve childhood learning!) and replace them with a focus on standardized tests and other metrics. I have faith in our state’s excellent teachers and believe that we only thrive as learning communities when there are partnerships between parents and teachers. These partnerships allow us to set high expectations for our children. Teaching to the test not only removes creativity from the teaching and learning process, but it simply does not lead to better long term learning outcomes in terms of retention of skills and the ability to apply concepts to real world situations.

There are several problems with this bill. First off, it does not assure the equal and open access for all students to education opportunities no matter their background. Our students need an educational experience that supports their academic growth beyond mere test proficiency. Special education, compensatory education, culturally and linguistically appropriate education, and other specialized programs would be eliminated by SB 1555. But these programs are key to the success for many of our students who come from a wide variety of backgrounds and capabilities. Our students need to learn about how to be active and engaged citizens, both within their local communities and beyond in the broader world. But to do this they need to be able to apply their knowledge to real world problems while they are in school. Teaching and evaluating to the test simply does not allow teachers to focus on these broad learning goals.

Rather than the focus on narrow assessments and academic goals, how about we support and strengthen our existing school programs – many of which are underfunded? Schools and districts across Oregon are seeing devastating cuts right

now because of insufficient funding. But rather than address this problem, lawmakers who propose SB 1555 think that it is a good idea to spend public money on third-party contractors to develop “prototype schools”! I realize that is beyond the scope of this bill – but my point is that this bill doesn’t offer actual solutions to the challenges that our schools face many of which boil down to inadequate resources. Rather than solving any problems, this will likely damage the existing programs that are going right in Oregon public schools.

I’m calling on all our lawmakers to speak out loudly and firmly against SB 1555. It simply isn’t good for our teachers, students, or communities. I urge you, instead, to look to other long term solutions, such as funding and revenue reform, which will bring the necessary resources into our schools. Our kids are asking us to be the adults in the room and we need to step up.

Sincerely,

Ana M. Araujo