

# HB 2655 Testimony of Imelda Cortez

Buenas tardes, Chair Roblan and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to speak with you today.

For the record, my name is Imelda Cortez. I'm a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Adams Elementary in Eugene, Oregon and I am a parent of two sons in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

I am here today to support House Bill 2655 as a parent and as a teacher of 11 years. As a parent, I am confident that there will never be a standardized test in existence that will indicate to me how successful my sons will be in life. As a Latina who went through the Oregon education system I know just how harmful the effects of these assessments can be. I remember as a high school student being told that I would live up to the statistics for Latino student success, which meant that I would likely not perform well on standardized tests, which would in turn, effect my success in college and in life. Not once did my high school counselors or teachers mention to me the prospect of attending college. I remember an adult telling me that I would be lucky if I scored more than a 600 on the SAT as this was the expected level of achievement for minority students. This was heartbreaking to me as a student on many levels. Being the first in my family to attend college and receive a degree was a huge dream that not only I had for myself, but so did my parents who are Mexican Immigrants who unfortunately only received an elementary education. They had made numerable sacrifices so that their children would not have to work as hard as they did to make a living. The last thing that I want for my own children is for them to be told by an inequitable assessment that they are failures. I know that education is a ticket to a better life and I want nothing less for my own kids and the students I teach.

This is why as a parent, I made the tough decision after several weeks of consideration to opt my fifth grade son, Marcos, out of the standardized assessments. This was not an easy decision for me nor did my school district make it any easier on me. I had to read through the six pages of verbage on opting out in my school district's form, which was also not very easily accessible through their

website. If I as a teacher in my school district struggled to find the form, think about how difficult it was for families without internet access or the means to navigate our system successfully.

As a Catholic, I battled with the idea of having to claim a religious exemption, but in the end I decided that my moral beliefs that subjecting students to a test that can ultimately kill their self-esteem and their potential for success were strong enough to opt my child out. I am one of the few lucky Latina parents out there who is educated enough about what these assessments mean as well as their potential negative impact on students that I was not only able to make an informed decision, but also had the tools to access an opt out.

On the other hand, while making this decision, I also struggled with the fact that many of my family members and close friends would not be able to make this same decision because their trust in our education system is so strong that they will not question anything that we say. In the Latino culture, educators are highly respected and revered. We do not tend to question decisions made by our children's teachers because we believe that they have their best interest in mind. As I have been administering these assessments, which have taken countless hours away from authentic learning and authentic assessment, I cannot help, but think about not only the second language learners that I have in my classroom currently, but also those that I have worked with over past years.

From my perspective as a teacher, the negative effects of these assessments far outweigh the benefits. The test is confusing and long; it takes far too many hours away from instruction, I have spent at least 15 hours on these assessments and have only completed two of five of them; it widens the achievement gap; it sends a message to many students, especially the minorities that they lack what it takes to be successful in life. As an educator, I cannot morally support an assessment that promotes a culture of fear, that demoralizes students, and educators and I hope that you will take a stand with me as well by supporting HB2655. Let's work together to

put the emphasis back on classroom teaching and learning. Let's give every student a fair shot at being successful by having authentic teacher created assessments drive instruction and by giving every one equal access to opting out of standardized assessments.