

October 22, 2015

Oregon State Board of Education, Chair Summer and Members
55 Capitol St NE
Salem, OR 97310-1300

My name is Rex Hagans, and I am a Co-founder of Oregon Save Our Schools.

Oregon Save Our Schools is a group of knowledgeable and committed volunteers, - concerned parents, grandparents, teachers, students, and community members. We were founded in 2011 to fight for:

- An excellent, well-rounded, and engaging education for ALL of Oregon's public school students.
- An end to high-stakes testing for student, teacher, or school evaluation.
- Teacher, family, and community input that informs public education policy.
- Equitable and well funded schools that support students and classrooms first.
- An end to corporate education models and top-down government mandates which threaten a strong, democratic, public education system.

Oregon Save Our Schools has no employees, financial backers or interests.

Oregon is currently in the midst of the most extended and volatile educational policy debates in the history of our state. Conflict abounds; Confusion reigns. And yet in the midst of this chaos, there is great opportunity. This Board is uniquely positioned to take direct actions that will take advantage of that opportunity. Oregon Save Our Schools calls upon you to seize this moment and provide the strong leadership which smoothes and speeds the path to a new vision for our schools rather than leaving us mired in the mud of dispute.

Oregonians are increasingly recognizing that the initial vision that drove us to this point, while well intentioned was seriously flawed. Championed by an even more flawed national leadership, and with a structure built by an arrogant national power group with little regard for on the ground realities of our schools, it was sold to our state (and others) with a noxious combination of federal bribery and threat, against the will and the best judgment of tens of thousands of teachers and parents. All across the nation, grassroots groups, including OSOS, have pushed back hard against a literal tsunami of money and federal power, at first with little success, but now with ever growing impact.

The reason that these local voices are increasingly being heard is really quite simple – the basic tenets of the reform leaders were wrong.

In spite of the beliefs of many reformers:

- Teachers are not the problem –they actually are both caring and highly effective professionals who know what is needed to truly serve all our children.
- Parents firmly believe teachers are their true and best partners in the quest for a quality education for their kids, and they trust the judgment of those teachers
- Changes in schools cannot be made by mandate – if teachers do not support them, they will always fail
- The fact that the state has the legal power to change the way schools operate does not equate to the power to force change
- High stakes testing is not the means to assure high quality education; it is in fact one of the biggest obstacles to achieving it.
- Money does matter and our schools have not had enough of it

Given the increasing recognition of these facts, Oregon Save Our Schools is dismayed by the extent to

which the ODE continues to behave as if the misguided policies and methods set in motion by the so-called reformers are the correct ones. We find the tactics in use to be far too similar to those long used nationally in order to prop up a fatally flawed strategy. In just the last few weeks, we have encountered such tactics in ODE:

- Explicitly discouraging parents from opting their children out of testing in direct contradiction of the intent of HB2655 to make parents aware that they have the right to opt out and should feel free to use it.
- Usurping the power to interpret the intent of the legislature in regard to which tests are actually subject to HB2655, and attempting to severely limit the rights of parents. This seems to us to be directly contrary to the spirit, if not the law, of following legislative intent.
- Making false and/or unsubstantiated claims about the value and usefulness of the SBAC
- Foot dragging and passive resistance to our attempts to determine exactly the extent to which classroom teachers were involved in reviewing the SBAC

While all of these examples are discouraging, by far the most serious are the recurring claims related to the as yet completely unknown benefits of the SBAC. Oregon Save Our Schools asserts that most of these claims are either untrue or as yet unproven. Let me highlight just a few here:

Claim 1 – A major benefit of SBAC is that we can now directly compare Oregon results with those of other states. This is a promise that the SBAC cannot possibly keep. Putting aside the very real technical difficulties even for states which are members of the SBA Consortium or members of its sister group, PARCC, the fact is that less than half of the 50 states are now even participating in either of these efforts. Some states never joined in the beginning, and at least 15 joined but have now dropped out. ODE knows this, yet as recently as a month ago, ODE staff at a public meeting repeated it again.

Claim 2 - Test results provide clear, meaningful and relevant feedback to students, parents and educators. It seems apparent that this claim is unfounded. In my home school district of Canby, parents will not get the results of last Spring's testing until the end of October, and teachers tell me these results are impossible to link to specific instructional questions and concerns that are discussed in parent-teacher conferences. One teacher told me that not a single parent of her 45 students asked about last year's SBAC results. Clearly these results do not provide any significant feedback that is useful for instructional planning.

Claim 3 - Test results identify a student's strengths and areas of improvement to make sure they are on track to graduate ready for college and career.

Actually, there is no evidence whatsoever that this statement is true. Dr. Rick Stiggins, a nationally recognized expert in Assessment says: "The Smarter

Balanced Assessment (SBA) is a new and untested product in Oregon. It's potential to contribute to the improvement of Oregon's schools is completely unknown. Oregon should not invest millions of dollars in this (or any) test until its ability to provide meaningful information to support instruction is proven."

Stiggins is an advocate of asking and answering the following specific questions before committing large amounts of public money to the long-term use of the SBA:

1. What specific instructional decisions and accountability functions are results capable of informing or serving?
2. What proportion of the common core standards do the exercises actually used on the assessment cover? What ones are included and which are left out?

3. What is the reliability of the evidence provided by SB for Oregon students?
4. Do specific cases emerge in which local educators use results to revise instruction and are subsequently able to demonstrate that such revisions enhanced student learning?
5. Are there grade level or student population sampling procedures that could be carried out to reduce testing costs with no loss in the quality of the results for the state overall or for specific subsets of the student population?
6. Does SB math and language arts coverage provide enough content coverage and sufficiently precise results to permit Oregon high school students to demonstrate mastery of Essential Skills for graduation?
7. Are there alternative sources of the evidence of student achievement provided by SB, including other published assessments or locally-developed assessments that can provide better coverage of Oregon standards with cost savings?
8. Are the specific exercises used in SB assessments at each grade level developmental appropriate for students in those grades?
9. What is the emotional and learning impact on students and teachers of high levels of failure on SB?

As ODE staff continues to pursue a “marketing” approach to an unproven product and to push ahead on the testing itself, the public image of the Department is rapidly deteriorating. A case in point was the September 23rd Public Forum “The Big Idea - Test Anxiety” sponsored by the Oregonian. I invite the Board to inquire as to the impression left by the ODE staff on participants in that meeting. During the panel discussions, they were unable to respond effectively to the points made by their critics, Rep. Lew Frederick chief among them. Gasps and laughter from the crowd were the order of the day. This unfortunate situation and others like it are bad for all of us – and especially so for our children. We all need credible and respected leadership from ODE.

You have an opportunity to put all such damaging nonsense behind us. That opportunity lies in the work done by a group of educators assembled by DOE in cooperation with OEA. With the assistance of Dr. Stiggins, this group has produced the basic blueprint for moving forward – “A New Path for Oregon: System of Assessment to Empower Meaningful Student Learning.” It is centered on teacher led and instructionally focused assessment.

But for this work to have real value, it cannot be treated as some distant goal, while we continue to spend \$27 million per biennium on an unproven SBA. Oregon Save Our Schools strongly urges the Board to declare a moratorium on further SBA testing until it has been thoroughly evaluated and divert the savings to immediately “kick starting” work on the “New Path”.

We recognize there will be challenges in taking that path, but we believe the benefits of bringing us all together again in common and inspiring work that truly focuses on support for instruction will provide great benefits to Oregon’s children.

It is the right thing to do, and we all know that true leaders do the right things.

