6122 SW Riverpoint Lane
Portland · OR · 97239
503·244·4288 office
www.HooleyNaito.com

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Oregon Education Investment Board
Testimony of Congresswoman Darlene Hooley

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about education reform in Oregon. Thank you for your service in this effort and a special thank you to Dr. Mark Mulvihill for his work on the Accountability committee.

Hooley & Naito represents a great Oregon nonprofit educational services organization. This is Northwest Evaluation Association or NWEA. The topic I am addressing today for NWEA is assessments and the waiver. We want to be sure the public has the opportunity to hear the message we have been delivering in meetings with you.

NWEA is a not for profit company and grew out of the research department of Portland Public Schools 34 years ago. NWEA is still is headquartered in Portland and provides over 400 well-paying jobs in Oregon. It is truly an Oregon success story and under the leadership of CEO Matt Chapman added 110 jobs last year.

The mission of NWEA is "Partnering to Help All Kids Learn." NWEA partners with school districts, teachers and parents. Most importantly, NWEA partners with over 5 million students around the globe to actively engage them in their academic growth.

Let me talk to you for a moment about assessments. I am a former teacher and know that the subject of testing is one that most people want to avoid.

There are different types of assessments for different purposes.

Accountability or summative tests, like the OAKS test in Oregon and the tests mandated by No Child Left Behind, provide a snapshot of students meeting grade level for schools, districts and states. For instance, the OAKS tests will tell you if a child is meeting 4th grade level work.
Formative tests provide information to teachers about the academic level of the child. These tests can determine if a 4th grade child is working at 2nd grade level or at 8th grade level. The information can then help the teacher chart a path of learning for that individual child.

NWEA launched the concept of using growth measures that are stable and clear to measure the academic growth of children using a computer-adaptive assessment so that students, parents and teachers can understand and celebrate each child's growth.

Last week you heard a presentation by The Chalkboard Project and focus groups they held. People in those focus groups preferred tests that help teachers determine more often and more accurately where individual students are in their learning and how they can effectively target instruction. These "better tests" are the type recommended by Learnworks last summer. These "better tests" are exactly the type of assessments that NWEA provides.

Oregon is preparing to seek a waiver from the punitive aspects of the federal requirements No Child Left Behind. We applaud this. In addition to waivers from the punitive aspects, we urge you to be bold about your ask and seek waivers from the unnecessary assessment requirements of No Child Left Behind.

The summative or accountability tests required by No Child Left Behind do not improve student learning at all. These tests provide a snapshot of whether the child is doing grade level work. We don't need to keep taking snapshots when we know what the picture is. Unfortunately, the picture in Oregon is not good. In fact, many would argue that the current focus on accountability testing in Oregon and around the country is harmful to education because teachers need to teach to the test and students can get discouraged, tune out and drop out.

We have an opportunity here and today to turn Oregon to a different direction. We agree with the Governor that our education system should be centered on the student. Let's ask the federal government for a waiver on the accountability testing.

Specifically, Oregon should request that local districts or regions be allowed to choose a new direction, a direction centered on the student, in either of two ways:

1. Limit the accountability tests required by No Child Left Behind to once every four years and invest the dollars saved in formative assessments that help students learn.

2. Allow districts or regions to adopt a blended assessment. NWEA has recently passed federal peer review in Utah with an assessment that is approximately 1/6 accountability assessment and 5/6 formative.

Either option allows for local innovation and local decision-making.

There are those who say wait and want Oregon to wait for the next generation of accountability tests to be developed by the large consortium of Smarter Balanced, which is building a national test largely based on the OAKS test. These tests will not focus on individual students and their growth. They are expected to cost Oregon even more money. This is wrong direction. The focus should be, has to be centered on the student.

The time is now. Change is difficult, but unless we change, we are shortchanging our students.