February 13, 2012

Governor Kitzhaber and Members of the Board

My name is Kathleen Jeskey. I've been a teacher for 25 years and my main concern with this plan is that it appears to be more of the status quo: NCLB on steroids. Our current reliance on multiple choice tests to assess student achievement at the state level does not address critical thinking skills. Better, more authentic assessments are needed, performance tasks for example. But the state has already dropped the statewide math problem solving assessment and more recently the state writing assessment due to lack of funds. If we continue without funding, how will we be able to pay for these authentic assessments that are needed? We currently spend a good deal of money on incomplete assessments that give us a very narrow definition of student achievement. Perhaps like the writing assessments, we could again trust classroom teachers to authentically assess their students.

This brings me to the question of local control. How much input will local schools and districts have about curriculum and budgeting decisions under this new plan? Or will this be another move further away from local control towards a top down education establishment, where an appointed state head of schools enforces curriculum and expenditure priorities handed down from the state and federal level? Will our local school boards become obsolete, as has happened in other states which have followed similar paths? Will all our students, urban, suburban and rural be expected to march to the same drum?

And speaking of drums: since this plan appears to continue the current system of reliance on multiple choice assessments delivered online, how does this address the other sad consequence of NCLB: the narrowing of our curriculum? What's the plan to restore art, music, physical education? Or will we only restore them when we find a standardized test to measure these things as well?

What has happened to the QEM? Have we just abandoned it? A great deal of time was spent developing that plan. This plan is being pushed through much more quickly. Will it soon end up gathering dust in a corner along with the QEM? Or could we maybe just take QEM out, dust it off, and figure out how to adequately fund our schools?

In the Executive Summary, I read this: "We must find ways to improve the teaching and spark the learning of all students, now and every year hereafter." As a teacher, it is and always has been my goal to spark students' minds, to make them love learning and want to learn more, now and every year hereafter. An ever more specific prescription for instruction, narrowing of curriculum, rising student poverty, and decreasing school funding have made it increasingly difficult to do that. I see nothing in this plan that gives me hope for a change in those circumstances.

Please provide adequate funding so that my grandchildren are able to enjoy the kind of education I was able to receive as a child growing up in Oregon.

Sincerely,

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