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State Superintendent Susan Castillo criticizes a proposal to eliminate Oregon writing assessment

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By **Kimberly Melton, The Oregonian**
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This morning **State Superintendent Susan Castillo** spoke publicly for the first time about an effort among state legislators to further reduce the Oregon Department of Education budget for 2011-13, taking issue with a proposal to cut the state writing test.

In behind-the-scenes talks, lawmakers have asked the department to consider a number of additional reductions that go beyond **Gov. John Kitzhaber's** recommendations.

In his balanced budget, Kitzhaber proposed the department make about \$3.6 million in reductions to

what the department said it needed to maintain current services. But some state lawmakers say they must identify more cuts, including scraping the state writing assessment, a move they say could save the state nearly \$3 million.

Writing is the only state assessment not required by the federal government.

Castillo told members of the State Board of Education today that she believes there are serious consequences should legislators move forward with that proposal. She said not assessing students in writing could impede students' ability to meet the higher graduation requirements being implemented over the next three years and the state's effort to move towards nationwide common standards and assessments with other states.

"It's an inefficient way of treating a system that's been paid for by the taxpayers for years," Castillo said in an interview. "It's absolutely the wrong time to step back from writing when we know we'll need to build up the assessment to meet the higher standards of a common core curriculum."

The Oregon Department of Education submitted a list of potential cuts to legislators on the budget committee that would reduce the budget by 25 percent. Among those were items

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that would eliminate fourth and seventh grade writing assessments.

Castillo said it was never the department's intention to propose or even discuss eliminating the high school assessment. The Department of Education's operations budget -- \$120.3 million -- represents less than 2 percent of Kitzhaber's proposed K-12 education budget.

The three co-chairs of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means and the three education subcommittee chairs admit they are seeking more cuts from the department but say they are still in confidential talks about how much and which specific programs and positions would be eliminated.

But both **Rep. Peter Buckley, D-Ashland**, co-chair of the larger joint committee and **Rep. Betty Komp, D-Woodburn**, co-chair of the education subcommittee did confirm that they have asked the department to consider eliminating the elementary, middle and high school writing assessments among other cuts.

"I think we're trying to see whether this would be a cost-shift to school districts or whether they would do this type of assessment locally anyway," Buckley said. "If they would do that, the loss is really being able to have your kids compared to other kids."

Komp said that with limited funds, the state must at least consider limiting assessments to only the ones requirement by the U.S. Department of Education.

Sen. Richard Devlin, D-Tualatin, co-chair of the larger Joint Ways and Means committee, said they are not asking for more cuts from the department compared to other agencies but he acknowledged that the proposed cuts for the education department are likely far deeper than the department expected.

-- Kim Melton

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 **nwpdx** May 19, 2011 at 12:41PM [Follow](#)


Let legislators and union set the education standard, no wonder we sux vs other countries.

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 **markus** May 19, 2011 at 12:53PM
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Is this the same superintendant who's department ok'd the use of computer spell check on student tests?

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 **tombdragon** May 19, 2011 at 1:05PM
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Castillo is right. If we test it is not just to qualify for federal funds. Education is suppose to benefit the student, not some political mantra or agenda.

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 **chronicvoter** May 19, 2011 at 9:07PM
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The state writing test is not a great assessment, but writing is a critical skill. And one that a preponderance of the people who comment on education articles here failed to master during their skoolin...

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 **jebediah01** May 19, 2011 at 1:05PM
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...and the same superindendent who failed to seriously pursue federal Race to the Top funds for our schools out of deference to teacher unions, which won't consider real teacher performance-based reviews. This bureaucracy should be defunded entirely so we can start over from scratch. Give the \$120 million directly to the school districts until then.

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 **chronicvoter** May 19, 2011 at 9:09PM
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Race To The Top is a bad program and not in the best interests of kids or education in general. I was glad Oregon took a pass on it. Sometimes the strings attached to funds coming from the ignorant blowhards in Washington make it a bad deal. This was one of those cases.

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 **peek7777** May 19, 2011 at 9:51PM
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YEAH, IT MADE TEACHERS LOOK BAD, no question about it.

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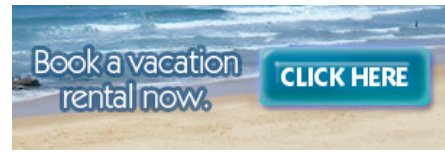
 **exxxperiencedd** May 19, 2011 at 1:21PM
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I admit writing standards need to improve, thats a given. What Castillo fails to mention is the millions of dollars districts and the DOE spend on testing and the subcontracts related to designing, implementing and scoring of tests. Its been my experience as a former DOE employee mgrs wages are overinflated, hours of comp time are racked up by the PhDs in the testing dept, little if any leave taken by mgrs (increasing retirement payouts and future department liability.

Even in tough times and spending freezes, it only took Castillos signature and that of an

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asst. sup. to ok an off cycle pay raise to a mgr.

Let's remember too, that the DOE is saddled with legal fees and a multimillion dollar payout to a testing company. None of the mgrs involved in that contracting were ever disciplined for their poor judgements.

There can be a plentitude of savings, sufficient to support writing, if the DOE reigns in some of their costs.

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gonefromptld May 19, 2011 at 1:26PM

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if the public school put 10% of the students in private school it could make money. schools get about \$13,000 per student, private get about \$6-8,000 each. that would leave them with about \$7,000 to waste someplace, like board meetings at the coast, all expen. paid.

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No_More_BS May 19, 2011 at 1:35PM

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Right on Follow!!!!

Why is it that Private schools educate for 1/2 the money and nearly every student graduates.

Did you know 25% of teachers send their kids to private schools?

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grammarprof May 19, 2011 at 6:11PM

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BS! Public schools are legally required to take all students, warts and all. Private schools cost less because they can pick and choose the best students and turn away those with behavioral problems. A lot of private school teachers are there to avoid the problem students. Less money, but peace of mind. Not too hard to figure out if your mind isn't already made up against all government programs. There are, after all, many ways to look at things. Tunnel vision can be very debilitating. Open your eyes.

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grammarprof May 19, 2011 at 6:14PM

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...because they can pick and choose...

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chronicvoter May 19, 2011 at 9:13PM

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Right on. Anyone who doesn't understand why per pupil costs in public schools is higher than private is just ignorant of today's reality. I've seen it close up. They are simply no comparable. Public schools have to provide appropriate education for dangerous kids, kids with severe disabilities, etc. Take your tea-party crap elsewhere.

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ray May 21, 2011 at 8:59AM

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When was the last time you saw an ESL class at a private school? Or a special ed. class?

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drknow2 May 20, 2011 at 7:47AM

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As a teacher at a private school I would like to clarify that tuition at Oregon Catholic High Schools ranges from 7,000 to 10,000 but that cost per pupil is an additional 1,000 to 2,000. The difference is made up in donations, fundraising, and grants. While arguably more streamlined, Catholic schools also pay their teachers less, have lower healthcare and retirement benefits, and educate a relatively narrow spectrum of students. Education is expensive and important. If you are certain that you have a simple way to solve the problem I am equally certain that your solution is flawed and won't work.

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0915 Oregonian May 20 2011 B1, B10

Ax hovers over writing assessment

Hoping to save \$3 million, legislators may try to eliminate tests the state requires in K-12 schools

By **KIMBERLY MELTON**
THE OREGONIAN

SALEM — Oregon lawmakers have set their sights on the state writing assessment as they seek ways to reduce a looming budget shortfall.

After weeks of negotiations and

behind-the-scenes conversations, some legislators on the budget-writing committees have asked the Oregon Department of Education to consider getting rid of the assessment, currently required three times between kindergarten and 12th grade.

The move could save about \$3 million.

Writing is the only state assessment not required by the U.S. Department of Education. As legislators look for places to make reductions, Rep. Betty



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Komp, the Woodburn Democrat who is co-chair of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means education subcommittee, said it's natural for lawmakers to consider limiting assessments to only those required by the federal government.

But State Superintendent Susan

Castillo fired back at legislators on Thursday, saying the move could not only endanger the state's long-awaited move to higher graduation rates but also leave Oregon behind as states around the nation move toward a common curriculum and assessment.

"If these cuts go forward, we're not treating writing as a priority and therefore it will get less focus out in the field," Castillo said. "It's an inefficient way of treating a system that's been paid for by the tax-

payers for years. It's absolutely the wrong time to step back from writing when we know we'll need to build up the assessment to meet the higher standards of a common core curriculum."

Castillo shared her concerns with the State Board of Education on Thursday, just minutes before the board unanimously approved higher standards for the state reading test at elementary and middle school.

Board members said the boost

Please see **WRITING**, Page B10