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“When we look at our mission statement about what we do, and doing what’s best for kids, I would maintain that standardized testing is not best for kids,” Holman said.

She referred to the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium tests (SBAC), which test students for Common Core standards in grades three to eight and 11 in math and language arts. School districts must reach 95 percent participation and can be penalized by their state if they do not reach this level.

The tests are held via computer and require both time to take the test and to learn how to take the test — for both students and staff members.

As of press time, the federal government is still planning to hold standardized testing this school year, despite many schools still operating in comprehensive distance learning, hybrid and limited in-person instruction. However, Oregon Department of Education has been in touch with the US Department of Education about getting a waiver for the state to not hold the tests.

According to O’Mara, several states have already received similar waivers. At this point, it appears the federal government is deciding on a state-by-state basis. In addition, several other student assessments have been put on hold, including kindergarten and essential skills for seniors, until the next school year.

After hearing this, Holman said, “That’s hopeful. I’m grateful that there’s some prevailing wisdom around this year in particular. I don’t think it precludes us from being a proactive school board, because they’re talking about a short-term thing.”

Instead, she proposed that Mapleton School District take a firm stance on removing standardized testing — or at least encouraging school district families to opt out on their own.

The text of the resolution reads: “We, the Mapleton Board of Education, given our responsibility to safeguard and guide the education of Mapleton students, find that the administering of the SBAC at this time of pandemic to be inappropriate and harmful to students, their families and to the school community.”

The resolution continued, “It is therefore the board’s recommendation that Mapleton parents and guardians strongly consider exercising their right, under House Bill 2655, to opt out their student from the Smarter Balanced test.”

It also indicated that the tests create unnecessary stress; data would not be comparable to past years; the district could not control conditions for all participants; and that it would be difficult to reach the necessary participation rate.

Holman decided to present the resolution after meeting in a small group made up of board members from other districts as well as people involved in state legislation concerning standardized testing.

“This is for this year, and we may still get a waiver,” Holman said. “But this just shows that the board is on it and sees this as an issue and as protecting our kids.”

The Mapleton School Board then further discussed the issue. One person asked if removing the test would make students less prepared for taking the SAT or ACT.

Holman said that the testing already involved with curriculum should fulfill

that need, especially as some across the U.S. are suggesting the further removal of standardized testing for colleges and universities.

The board also consulted with Ricks as the student representative from Mapleton High School.

“I feel like a lot of people

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— Resolution passed by Mapleton School District Board of Directors on March 17

rely on standardized testing for answers on how students are doing when it’s not really the best option,” Ricks said. “It tries to make a ‘one size fits all’ for students when that’s not something that really works for every kid.”

He said that he has undergone standardized testing for school as well as taken the SAT to prepare for college admissions.

“Talking about the SAT, I’ve taken it twice, and it’s not something that’s all that easy to prepare for in general, even with other standardized tests,” he said. “It’s just something that’s nerve wracking and stressful no matter what you do. I feel like that’s something that shouldn’t be enforced on kids to set them up for things later on in life.”

In their discussion, the board considered the costs associated with the testing, including federal money and the chance to lose funding. Directors also considered waiting until other school boards acted.

“This is how change happens,” Holman argued. “One little district gets brave enough to put something like this out there and other districts see it.”

She said that one district being courageous would

encourage more districts to make similar resolutions.

“The more of us who get feisty about testing — and wasting taxpayer money and student and staff members’ time — it’s going to change. I do believe (standardized testing) is a dinosaur just waiting to die. But it’s going

to take some of us throwing the first dagger in Oregon,” Holman said.

All board members present were involved in the conversation, with Board Chair Mary Ellen Mansfield saying she thought the wording of the resolution was “a little strong,” especially if the first purpose of the resolution was to encourage families to opt out on their own.

O’Mara stated, “We already do notify parents of the opportunity to opt out. We have to.”

The board ultimately decided to refine the wording of the resolution and reduce the number of bullet points. Then, Burruss moved that the board approve the amended resolution, which was seconded by Director Andrea Milbrett and approved by those in attendance.

“This is a first step. Eliminating high-stakes testing remains the goal,” Holman wrote in an email announcing the resolution. At the meeting, she said, “For me, it is bigger than us. And while I’m a steward of this district in its entirety, I view my advocacy for kids as broader than Mapleton. ... To me, this is giving permission, and hopefully some kind of backbone, to other districts

to do the same kind of thing.”

The second big topic at the meeting was setting board goals.

After minimal discussion, and deciding to reevaluate goals next September, the board decided to adopt the following as goals:

- In the ever-changing COVID-19 environment, the district will continue to provide new comprehensive systems and support services to facilitate student and staff success, both academically and personally.
- Continue to support engagement with district community in the COVID-19 virtual environment (staff, students, parents) to elicit feedback that will help focus district direction.
- Support district staff efforts to continually improve classroom instruction and student success in all modes of learning, remote or in person.
- Continue to consider appropriate school mode based on county and state health metrics and local district needs.

The board also decided to evaluate O’Mara as Mapleton’s superintendent since the district missed last year due to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The timeline for this has yet to be announced.

The final big topic discussed by the board was regarding complaints submit-

ted. The first concerned the state of some of the areas on school district property.

Burruss said, “In my mind, this is not a policy issue and taken care of in day-to-day business. My feeling would be that this complaint would be best addressed by referring it to the maintenance lists.”

Holman agreed, saying that the board would pass on the recommendations to the maintenance supervisor.

“It’s also well known that we prioritize projects based on need and finances, and we have a wish list that’s as long as the school district boundaries that we just don’t get to address,” she said.

The second complaint was filed against O’Mara and Mapleton High School Principal Brenda Moyer, alleging that constitutional rights were denied. However, the complaint did not provide many additional details.

The board requested further information.

“If there actually is a violation, then we do want to know about it,” Mansfield said. “We’re certainly not dismissing you, but we can’t act on the complaint as written, because there’s not enough information.”

The board decided to set the issue aside until more information becomes available.

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