

Measure 58: A loud no Initiative imposes rigid limits on teaching English

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Measure 58 proposes an expensive fix for a problem that exists only in the head of its author, Bill Sizemore.

Sizemore, who makes a living cluttering Oregon ballots with mischievous initiatives, wants voters to believe the state's public schools intentionally delay teaching children English to squeeze additional money from the state.

The problem is Sizemore's justification for this measure has no relation to reality — and his “solution” would impose a one-size-fits-all mandate that would wrest control from school districts that know what's best for their unique and varied student populations. The measure would cost districts an estimated \$253 million annually for additional staff and resources.

Measure 58 would bar schools from teaching English learners in their native languages after a year of elementary school or two years of high school. The restrictions are arbitrary and unnecessary.

A recent analysis by The Oregonian newspaper found 85 percent of English learners are taught exclusively in English. The rest are taught partially in their native languages, depending on research and the needs of individual students.

As any parent can attest, children have an extraordinarily broad range of abilities and circumstances that determine how swiftly they learn. Children with learning disabilities or limited literacy in their native languages may require a different approach or time frame than other English learners.

Measure 58 would impose the same rigid limits on all children learning English, regardless of abilities or circumstances.

As with many of Sizemore's ballot initiatives, Measure 58 is poorly written and larded with unintended consequences. If it passes, the Legislature would have to interpret impossibly vague terms such as “English immersion,” as well as resolve potential conflicts with state and federal laws.

Finally, Measure 58 is an insult to educators across Oregon who have become impressively adept at teaching students English and whose goal, despite Sizemore's bizarre insistence to the contrary, is to help their charges become proficient as quickly and completely as possible.

Oregonians should vote no on Measure 58.