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To: Oregon House Education Committee  
Re: Support for SB 2419 – State Funding for TAG Education  
Date: 02/23/2017

I am writing today as testimony in support of SB2419. I serve as a co-chair of Portland Public School's Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC). In that role, I routinely see what years of lack of funding for our accelerated students has accomplished: a literal lack of a program and hundreds – if not all 6,200 identified TAG students - in PPS alone who are not learning daily at their rate and level. I am also a mother of two children. My eldest is 9 years old. Two years ago, I was fighting back tears in a small room with a stranger, my child balled up in a corner, refusing to engage. Our pediatrician had sent us to this emergency therapy session to determine if my child—a first grader at the time—was suicidal or merely depressed. He had changed from an intense but happy child into a very angry one who routinely suffered hour-long outbursts at home. He became despondent, saying, "I don't want to live like this anymore." The first diagnosis was depression triggered by anxiety, later revised to high-functioning Autism.

That day I was advised to reduce as many stressors as possible and focus on what he loved best — in his case advanced math and geography. I looked at the therapist and said "how can I reduce his stressors when the very thing he loves — learning — is also his biggest stressor — school?" The therapist replied "if you have any educational options you haven't explored, you need to look at them now."

When I returned to the staff at my son's Title I school, they were puzzled. He was fine in their eyes—more than meeting grade-level requirements. Although they added non-fiction reading choices and offered to implement a "math journal," they refused written requests for disability testing. They also had no program and no funding to engage my son with his gift. You see, despite his struggles to spell to this day, his spatial skills are at or above 99.5% of children his age. But geography is not taught in first grade. In fact, the school doesn't even have funding to put together and plan an advanced math packet for him weekly. He felt school was a complete waste of time and started to refuse to go to school. Needless to say, my son's life did not improve.

People often associate the talented and gifted (TAG) label with automatic success. But for every stereotypical TAG student in our school system, there is an accelerated learner whose learning and emotional needs are unmet. Maybe that child has an underlying or hidden disability or is black or brown, and thus not expected to succeed or even identified as TAG. Children whose needs are not met in the classroom tend to check out or act out. **Oregon requires all districts to identify students with "unusual academic ability" as measured by a 97th percentile score on a nationally-normed test of cognitive aptitude or academic achievement. This "TAG" label doesn't mean these kids are better than others, but should prompt educators to design and differentiate curriculum around their specific and somewhat unusual academic needs. To do so, they need resources. Countless times, as I've advocated on behalf of a child only to be reminded that this is an "unfunded mandate." This session, you have the opportunity to change that.**

After 2 years of pushing, including filing an administrative complaint with PPS, I was finally able to get my son placed in a public school program geared towards gifted students with his needs in October 2016. In January 2017, three separate people who knew him before the change in schools asked me "is he *really* as happy as he seems?" One even said "he was skipping out the school door the other day and waved to me while he said hi!" We have worked hard with weekly occupational therapy and different parenting techniques at home over the past two years. However, the largest difference was the ability to learn at his rate and level every single day. **Please make daily rate and learning possible for all accelerated learners in Oregon by allocating funding to match the TAG mandate the legislature has already approved.**

Sincerely,



Nicole Iroz-Elardo, PhD