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Chair Doherty and members of the Committee,

My name is Jessica Bedolla and I am a sophomore at South Salem High School. I have a 3.97 grade point average in Honors classes at South Salem High School. I was the first runner-up for the OATAG Gifted Scholar award in Oregon my 7th grade year. I get free lunch at school. I am fluent and read and write both Spanish and English, although Spanish is my first language. I want to be a bilingual lawyer when I grow up.

I am one of the 10% of Latino TAG-identified kids in Oregon. The percentage of Latino kids in Salem is about 40%, and the percentage is around 20% statewide. At best, Latino kids are identified as gifted at half the rate of others. There is something really wrong with those numbers. I am a bright, hardworking student, but there are many kids who are not TAG-identified that are just as smart or smarter than I am. I didn't do as well as I wanted on the PSAT. Doing really well on an English test is much harder for me. I qualified for TAG on my fifth grade math test. I had been close to TAG qualifying in third and fourth grade as well, but it is really hard to have the level of work you need when your Title I, ELL class is far behind the work you can do. I didn't get the instruction I needed to show I was TAG before, but I always was gifted. I studied specifically for the fifth grade math test and qualified as TAG that way.

The OAKS test isn't available anymore, and that was the best test available for ELL kids to do well on and show that they were TAG. The SBAC requires a lot of English to do well and will miss a lot of kids, especially mathematically talented kids. I suggest that school districts use some of this proposed TAG funding to fund alternative tests to find other Hispanic gifted kids. 10% is a very low number!

We also need to do a lot of work in identifying more kids like me, in more types of schools, that are ready for more advanced work. In my Title I elementary school, very few kids were allowed to go ahead in math. When I got to middle school, I realized that kids that came from wealthy schools were allowed to take advanced math in 5th grade. And they had a bus from school to math class and back!

I am glad I am in high school now, at a good school with an honors program. We are lucky to live in the South Salem High district, because South is the most rigorous school in the district and kids transfer and take the bus to come here. There were no honors classes available in elementary or middle school, and I was really bored. I am a nice girl, and my Latino culture forbids that I should act out in any way, but it was boring and a waste of time for me and other kids to sit through regular classes.

Teachers do need to understand that just because you don't act out, doesn't mean you aren't bored and don't need extra challenges. And that extra challenges doesn't mean extra work, but harder work. Maybe you should be referred for TAG testing even though you don't act like an anglo TAG kid, and maybe you should be given a test where you can excel. I would spend some of this proposed funds to teach teachers what TAG kids act like, and how they might act differently coming from other cultures.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.
Jessica Bedolla-Yepes