

Dear Legislators and House Committee Members,

I'm writing as a Portland Public Schools parent in support of House Bill 2419 and on behalf of those families (myself included) whose needs are not being met within the public school system.

I'm sure each of you know personally of families who have chosen to send their children to private school or are homeschooling. These are the lucky few with the means to make choices outside of the public school system. Others are constrained by socio-economic factors with no option to opt out. Instead they endure what currently passes as a "fair and appropriate education" but which routinely fails to meet their children at rate and level in the classroom.

Teaching to benchmark teaches to the average by grade and age. This means that students at benchmark and above are not, as a matter of course, taught to their potential. This has implications for all subjects but particularly literacy and math. This practice obviously fails students but it is also demoralizing for teachers.

Teaching professionals are increasingly called upon to contend with a host of behavioral issues commonly associated with a lack of appropriate curricular challenge in the classroom. A large percentage of gifted learners are impacted by a wide range of learning disabilities including: Asbergers, autism, ADHD and related spectrum behaviors, along a broad continuum.

They are often targets for bullying, and particularly in the later years, suffer depression and anxiety all of which negatively impact their future educational prospects. Many of their difficulties can be directly correlated to their experiences in the classroom as their weaknesses are seen as personal or familial failures and their strengths are overestimated. Far from "having it made" they represent a large and varied population of learners whose educational requirements have been willfully neglected. The cumulative results for those students whose needs are not met during their formative and later years do not by default suggest over-arching success.

Currently almost the entire TAG budget within PPS is consumed with testing, results and identification. There are no consistent TAG services in place district-wide for any accelerated learners, not even for math. What little additional funds there are within the PPS TAG budget are spent ad-hoc from building to building often on "enrichment" activities which fall outside of regular class time and cost families to attend. This practice is inequitable and unacceptable.

This is not for lack of a comprehensive system which *could* be put in place immediately. The TAG department has utilized The Scholars Program on a pilot basis at a handful of schools with positive result. That program is in limbo however for a lack of means and the fortitude to put it in place on a consistent basis district-wide.

A multi-tiered approach will be necessary to appropriately address the needs of gifted learners in the future and in the classroom. The new Superintendent will have to make it a priority to meet students at rate and level district-wide. The Regional TAG Director must be given authority to implement curricular changes across educational facilities. Building administrators must be instructed to work cooperatively and in tandem with the public and TAG facilitators. But this all starts with a commitment from you, our legislators and committee members, to make education a

financial priority for those Oregonians and their children whose educational opportunities are currently being squandered.

Thank you,

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