

Submitter: Holly Hofkamp
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB595

My name is Holly Hofkamp and I am a parent of 3 children (8, 7, and 5) in the Portland Public School system and a family physician who cares for families and children. Both of my school aged children have been identified as highly gifted. In both situations, getting them identified took a lot of advocacy on my part and we faced challenges with teacher's and even TAG facilitators understanding of the process. To me, this reflects a lack of training. Our oldest son is very introverted and was generally able to hold it together at school which led him to fly under the radar. However, throughout kindergarten-second grade, he really struggled with behavior issues and impulsivity at home and anxiety and boredom at school. During a conversation when I was trying to teach him how to ask his teacher for more challenging work he said "I just like when the computer teaches me because its at my level. I don't think Teacher [] can help, she's just too busy". We were lucky enough to be able to lottery into a new school that has been absolutely life-changing for him and our family both academically and socially. However, it came at the cost of having to leave our neighborhood school. We now face the decision about whether to move our daughter from her neighborhood school to this new school.

In my professional life, I've recently cared for a child dealing with ADHD. Within minutes of meeting him, I could tell he was extremely bright. Having personal experience with twice exceptionality (when a child has intellectual giftedness and struggles in other ways such as anxiety, ADHD, autism, dyslexia, etc), I asked his mother about his experience at school and it became apparent that the main focus was on his deficits and not his strengths despite being TAG. I believe this is an example of not serving the whole child and illustrates the need for more professional development for teachers to understand how to recognize when neurodiverse kids need differentiated instruction.

I support SB595 and SB596 because I believe that more data and funding could help 1) more equitably identify more kids that could benefit from differentiated instruction and 2) help teachers deliver appropriate education and services in neighborhood schools rather than pulling kids out of their neighborhoods through moves to specialized lottery schools, private schools, or even moving out of state. I know that TAG funding is controversial from an equity standpoint, but I believe these moves out of neighborhood schools seems to pose significant equity issues as more well-resourced families have better access to these options.