



Testimony submitted to the Senate Education Committee, March 21, 2023
Oregon Association for Talented and Gifted (OATAG)

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber and Members of the Senate Education Committee

I am very happy to have this opportunity to speak to you about our Talented and Gifted students—one of Oregon’s most important but often forgotten resources.

This year, we have learned about the importance of returning children to classrooms where they can learn at an appropriate pace. Many of our TAG students have been waiting for that opportunity not just since the COVID-19 shutdowns began, but for all their years in school. Although we have a very well-designed state mandate for services, Oregon has failed to provide any state funding for TAG programs, leaving it up to districts to determine how to fund state-mandated programs and services. Students in some districts receive well-designed services; students in other districts receive nothing at all and may not even be acknowledged.

In 2021, only about 31,000 students were identified for TAG—a number that has fallen sharply since solid data were first collected in 2004. This year, Oregon adopted a new identification rule based on district-defined criteria for “outstanding” students in grades k-12 instead of statewide test score cutoffs so these numbers are likely to change.

Over the past 15 years, as state education spending for nearly every other category of student and nearly every program has risen steadily, TAG spending in real dollars has fallen, in both absolute and *per capita* terms, from \$191.00 per TAG student in 2004-5 to \$162 in 2020-1, the most recent year to be reported. In 2020, 103 districts either did not report *any* TAG spending or did not identify any students. The students most likely

to be missed or short-changed are rural, low income, or culturally and racially diverse students.

Numerous reports have raised this problem. For example, in 2011, the Senate Education Committee commissioned a study of TAG services. The *Quiet Crisis* report, submitted in 2012, found widespread and severe problems with the provision of TAG services and made recommendations to address the issue. Those recommendations were never carried out.

<https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/201711/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/149672>

In 2018, the Joint Legislative Committee on Student Success report again recommended categorical TAG funding and also suggested improvements to data collection and reports.

Yet those recommendations were also overlooked, even as new funds have been allocated for many other educational purposes. In fact, last year, the State Board of Education decided that gifted and high-achieving students in Oregon were not among the groups viewed as subject to “academic disparities” in the Student Success Act. This has had far-reaching consequences because it eliminated both funding and data reports concerning these students from the SSA.

The data I have submitted shows many “academic disparities” that actually do affect high-achieving and high-potential students in Oregon. Among them are students who have not been identified due to a lack of training and support for the staff responsible for this process. However, identification in and of itself is completely pointless unless it is accompanied by appropriate services. The fact is that we are trailing the rest of the country in the support we provide to our advanced students. Moreover, the support that districts to provide is not equitably distributed. This lack of support causes social and emotional distress in addition to wasting the talents and energy of our children.

To address the problem, OATAG is supporting three bills on your agenda today: SB 595, SB 596 and SB 736. We have also sought advice from experts and are supporting amendments to make them more effective.

These bills were intended to complement each other and function as a package. SB 595 provides the funding for equitable services and to support implementation of the work in the other two bills. SB 596 ensures accountability and reports on students' learning gains. SB 736 will help ensure that our efforts are equitable. Together, they will improve equity, support our economic development, increase access to advanced instruction for all students, and reverse decades of neglect for our hard-working, ambitious, and capable children.

[SB 595](#) : allocates one percent of the State School Fund for TAG.

--One quarter of that would go to the Oregon Department of Education for technical support and grants "as provided by rule of the State Board of Education."

-A second quarter goes to ESDs serving small and rural districts to provide technical support, identification and assessment services and professional development.

--The remaining half would go to districts based on their total weighted average daily student enrollment. This half would be distributed "as provided by ORS 343.399." That statute governs the distribution of TAG funds.

Amendments:

The dash-1 amendment creates regional programs for rural and small districts housed in ESDs and allows them to provide services in addition to technical advice and removes a "maintenance of effort" clause.

The dash-2 amendment removes the "emergency clause" to allow for a year to prepare for implementation.

If we assume that the state education budget is about \$9 billion per biennium, or about \$4.5 billion per year, this bill would allocate \$45 million. That's still a small fraction of the funding allocated for ELL students (\$220 million) or Special Education (\$1.3 billion). For comparison, Washington State allocated a little more than \$30

million for its “High-cap” program in 2020-1.

The bill distributes spending by total district enrollment, not by number of identified students. There is no incentive for districts to over- or under- identify students .

Nineteen Oregon districts currently spend more than \$500 per TAG student (in addition, Bandon was at \$499) so this represents a realistic service budget. Many of the highest-spending districts were small districts trying to do the right thing by their students. These districts would especially benefit from access to regional support. Other districts are simply ignoring the need to the detriment of their students.

[SB 596](#) addresses issues related to TAG data reporting at the state and district level.

The bill concerns two different buckets of data: the first concerning TAG programs and services; the second concerning the learning gains of all students. This bill will not require any additional student assessments. The achievement information is already available.

The first bucket creates district and state TAG report cards that break down the representation of TAG students by income, ethnicity, ELL, and Special education status, compared to the overall population in a district. It also calls for qualitative reports on spending for services, student performance, course taking, FTE and staff credentials, and results of parent surveys "on the adequacy of instruction provided to talented and gifted children,"

The dash -2 amendments update language in some sections of the bill to reflect current terminology and add a section that will report the learning gains of students broken down by ability and subgroup. This follows the recommendation of the JCSS working group and research-based advice. Currently, Oregon collects these data, but does not report it in an accessible fashion.

Reporting on student achievement *scores* is like measuring the height of students in a classroom—it reflects the entirety of their past but not the adequacy of their current diet. Right now, achievement scores show that students lost ground during COVID but do not reveal how well our schools are helping them recover or whether certain groups of students have been recovering more slowly. To determine whether our interventions are working, we need to measure the change in

achievement scores—just as measuring the increases in height would tell us whether students were still eating enough. Data on student learning gains pinpoint areas needing more attention and provide actionable information for policy makers that will benefit all Oregon students.

This bill was in part triggered by the declaration of the State Board of Education that stripped TAG students and high-achieving students out of the portions of the Student Success Act designed for special needs. Ignoring the comments by the Student Success work group concerning the neglect of our TAG students, and the evidence showing major differences in spending and services from one district to another, the Board declared that: *“Lack of access to programs for academically gifted and high-achieving students does not constitute facing academic disparities.”*

This referred to a section of the SSA that lists groups of "underserved" students experiencing disparities who will have separate SSA plans. Several other parts of the SSA and even other laws, and rules reference this section, so when excluding TAG students from this section of the SSA. also left them out from other accountability plans.

[SB 736](#) creates a study to find out how to *increase* access for advanced instruction.

In large districts with several high schools, a district may claim to offer advanced classes without noting that they were not equally available in every high school. The study can also address issues such as access to advanced classes in middle school and the implications of Oregon's new recommended math sequence. There is evidence that access to advanced classes beginning as early as middle school makes a difference to students' success in college and career. There is also evidence that access to advanced instruction is inequitably distributed. Education Northwest provides helpful data but it only applies to high school students, the smallest unit is a district, and it only reflects what has happened....not how to improve it.

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