

Submitter: D M
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB596

A.B.C.D.E.F.G.H.I.J...

Are you bored yet? Not what you were hoping to “learn” today? Do you feel like your time is being wasted?

Compound that frustration and boredom by 100, and imagine feeling it throughout this entire hearing. And throughout the entire work day. And tomorrow, too. All week. Actually, make it all month. Now imagine you have the emotional maturity of a 6 year old. How do you think you would cope after a year? How about five years?

Welcome to the experience of a gifted student in Oregon public schools.

As my firstborn drew near to kindergarten, he was excitedly explaining to me things like the quadratic formula and the organization of the periodic table. Naturally, I began to look into TAG services and opportunities in our school district and state. I scoured the internet. I looked up Oregon statutes related to education. I called our local elementary school. And I learned that there was nothing available to my little lover of learning, save for a possible grade-skip, but even that wasn't generally recommended (nor did I feel grade skipping was an ideal solution).

In speaking with friends, family and acquaintances who are public school educators, I repeatedly was told, “Whatever you do, don’t put him in public school. They will only hold him back.”

Fast forward to today, I am homeschooling both of my children. They are brilliant and thriving. My now-4th grade son recently took the SAT, for fun. He absolutely knocked it out of the park. My daughter is in 2nd grade and has a stunning gift for language and art. She can’t get enough of Shakespeare at the moment, and is the artist I could only dream of being at her age.

I have found curricula and classes that meet them where they are at, and am constantly learning right alongside them. In many ways, it’s wonderful.

However, there are struggles. First, homeschooling is not a cheap endeavor, particularly specialized courses designed for gifted students. In the absence of TAG resources from our state, the cost of meeting their special education needs falls on me. I am a low-income, single mom, and the idea that my kids’ education might ever be slowed down to the pace that I can afford it concerns me.

Second, giftedness is usually a lonely road. While my son is friendly and social and we are part of a great homeschool community, he does not simply come across other children who “get him” the way that typical students might. After a focused, intentional effort on my part to look for other kids across the metro area who might want to discuss the changing probability of heads or tails with each flip of a coin, I finally found them: Other families with 9/10/11 year olds who think trigonometry is cool and geometric proofs are the neatest thing ever. We meet about once a month and I cry even now to know that my child feels that he has found his people. I can’t emphasize enough the need for TAG children, like any child, to feel like they have a place and people that they belong to.

We are all familiar with the bell curve. And we all agree that any student in the lower 2% should absolutely be given the resources and special attention needed to meet them exactly where they are at. There is no reason that the needs of Oregon students who fall in the 2% range on the other end of the curve have been neglected all these years. And I don’t just mean academically. Did you know that gifted individuals are at increased risk for existential depression? Did you know gifted individuals tend towards perfectionism, which can lead to excessive self-criticism, anxiety and burnout? Gifted students have unique educational and socio-emotional needs, and they are, to this day, being overlooked.

I’m urging you to be the committee that finally *sees* these amazing Oregon students, truly supports them, and cheers them on.