

Submitter: Judith Smith  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Measure: SB5506

Co-Chair Steiner, Co-Chair Sanchez, Co-Vice Chair Girod, Co-Vice Chair Gomberg, Co-Vice Chair Smith, and Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means:

I am the parent of three adult children who were identified as gifted and participated in programs in their schools in CA. Two of them now live in the Portland area and are the parents of my four grandchildren who are students in OR public schools. I moved to OR in 2006 when my first grandchild was one year old. At that time, I knew little about public education in OR except that I had not heard much that was positive. I had been an advocate for TAG while my children were in school and continue on behalf of gifted children here. I was initially encouraged by the existence of a mandate in law to identify and serve TAG students. I have been disappointed ever since by the lack of funds to support their education.

I have learned that TAG spending as a percent of state education funding has declined steadily for the entire time my grandchildren have been in school and now represents one-tenth of one percent of the entire education budget. There are wide disparities in identification and the services available between districts and between schools within districts. In most cases TAG identification does not reflect the racial and ethnic demographics of the district student population. Nearly half of districts either identify no TAG students or spend no funds on the services TAG identified students need.

I was shocked and appalled to learn that according to the ODE and the State Board of Education "Lack of access to programs for academically gifted and high-achieving students does not constitute facing academic disparities." This declaration stripped TAG students and high-achieving students out of the portions of the Student Success Act that were designed for students with special needs. This appears to punish TAG students for being cognitively different from their age peers and requiring educational services "beyond those normally provided by the regular school program." ORS 343.395 (4) "Talented and gifted children"

My TAG grandchildren have college educated parents who are economically able to provide an enriched environment for them. That is not true for thousands of gifted students in Oregon. Rural, economically disadvantaged, multi-lingual, and racial and ethnic minority students suffer the most from Oregon's failure to invest in identifying and serving TAG students.

SB 596 as amended would require ODE to report data about student achievement in ways that are easily accessible. This would shed light on the existing disparities and encourage effective instruction for all students, including the talented and gifted.

Investing in education has dividends for individuals and society.

Respectfully,

Judith Smith