TESTIMONY RECEIVED via E-Mail

REGARDING STATE SCHOOL FUND DISTRIBUTION FORMULA

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Hi Jan,

Please consider this email as written testimony for the hearing on school funding next week.  I’m writing to encourage TAG funding.

I’m the parent of two TAG-identified children in Portland Public Schools.  While schools write up building TAG plans, in reality there is no TAG in my school.  The only money dedicated to TAG amounts to tiny amounts, perhaps $1,000 per year.  It’s not enough money to do anything meaningful, and not enough to divide among the students, so it generally goes unused.  In the eight years we have been in PPS, seven since my older child was first identified as TAG, there was one year when a local company was brought in to do challenging science with my kids.  Other than that, there has been no difference between how my TAG kids are treated and any other child.  My younger son used to ask when TAG started, because he sees that nothing is different for him than the rest of his classmates.  They both loved the science, were engaged with the hands-on projects in small groups, and would really benefit from more of that.

Money talks.  TAG funding tells the schools that TAG is important, and they need to challenge these kids.  Likewise, the lack of funding has been telling them for years that it doesn’t really matter, and they are far more focused on bringing up test scores than anything else.  Since my kids both exceed on the OAKs, scant attention is paid to their gains each year.  Sadly with the number of ESL students, and low-performing students, TAG kids get left to fend for themselves.

Funding needs to be at a level that allows schools to provide meaningful differentiation and grouping and instruction to meet the needs of faster-learners.  I would love to see a dedicated TAG person in my school who does nothing but help time-pressed classroom teachers with ways to engage these kids.

Thank you for your attention.

Maria Sosnowski

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Yes please!  Teachers could use some extra dough to support our fully-capable learners.  Support for TAG programs would mean that some of the brightest, but most emotionally sensitive children, could get the attention they need to blossom and grow.  These kids will be the next Bill Gates and the next Steve Jobs, if we can help them and reach them early enough in their school career.  Please don't waste the opportunity to get these kids on the right track.

Amelia D Vaidya

Ms. McComb,

I'd like to present the following as testimony for the Oregon School Funding Task Force.

All children in Oregon schools deserve to have their intellectual and academic needs met. Each child deserves to learn new material each year they are in school. Supporting the varying needs of our children require funding, both for teacher training as well as special programs. That is why our public schools have funding for ESL learners, speech therapy, special education, and so on. But one group of children get no special funding and little in the way of support for their needs. In addition, teachers rarely get special training in accommodating their needs. These are our gifted and talented learners and I'd like to speak out for them. Research shows that children with the most potential are at significant risk without help. They give up, underachieve, act out, and even drop out. Their gifts are lost, a loss for them and for our community and nation. Each child deserves to learn at the rate that's right for them, yet concerns about socialization coupled with zero funding for accelerated classes or differentiation mean that children are held back -- kept from learning all they can. We need funding for our gifted and talented learners, funding for classes and teacher training. And we need to acknowledge that the purpose of school is to learn and all children must be given the opportunity to do so.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Best regards,

Venecia Rauls

Dear School Funding Task Force Member,

I am writing to give an written testimony in advance of your task force meeting next week.

I am a parent of 3 students in Portland Public Schools. 2 of my children are TAG students and I want to express to you the great need that Oregon schools have for TAG funding.  TAG students are getting the short end of the stick when it comes to education in Oregon.  Their potential is not being reached by a long shot.  They tell me they aren’t learning in school, it’s too easy and it’s boring.  They don’t get picked to answer questions because their teachers knows that they already know the answer (almost every time).  They are given an online math program this year and told NOT to do any math that was not assigned to them, because the teachers next year would have nothing to teach them.

The classroom works at the pace of the slowest student, and therefore TAG students have to wait, bored and frustrated while their slower peers struggle to catch up.  I am not sure how this is serving the struggling students or the TAG students.

In math, my son has taught himself more at home, than he has learned in the classroom.   He spends hours at home reading math books and watching tutorials on Kahnacademy.org.  He is thirsty for knowledge and he’s not getting it at school.  As a PPS student, even though he passes the “pre-test” for a math unit with flying colors, he still has to sit through the whole math unit at school.  It is very demoralizing.  Wouldn’t his time be better spent learning a new skill?   Sometimes he is given “extensions”, but where PPS fails TAG students is in compacting curriculum.  They are not at all meeting the rate and level of learning for their TAG students.

As a parent, I am concerned that my TAG students will come to accept school as boring and a waste of time.  Then why even bother with college?  Sadly many TAG students fall short of their potential.  The cure for cancer or global warming could be housed in their starving minds.   Imagine what Bill Gates or Steve Jobs could have done if they had finished college?

Would you tell an athlete to run slower or score less touchdowns because his teammates need more practice?  Of course not.  So why tell TAG students to stop learning?

These kids have the potential to do great things in life and instead of pushing them down, Oregon Schools should be helping them succeed.  In the end it helps us all.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Alisa Pallister

Concerned Oregon Parent of TAG Student

Dear Members of the Oregon School Funding Task Force

On behalf of the Board of the Oregon Association for Talented and Gifted (OATAG) I am submitting the following evidence concerning funding for  talented and gifted (TAG) students in the state of Oregon that is relevant to your discussions of state education funding.

--Oregon Department of Education issue brief, 2004
--Oregon Department of Education state summary report (providing the data for the issue brief), 2004
--A recent (2013) national study using NCES data that discusses the problem of the "excellence gap"
--A summary of this study entitled "Talent on the Sidelines" from the Scientific American
--A copy of the report of the Oregon Task Force on Talented and Gifted education that was submitted to the Legislature in 2012 as required by Senate Bill 330
--A report on total spending by all Oregon Districts on Special Needs Students (TAG, ESL and Special Education) from 1999-2012, the last year for which that information is available
--A report on spending on TAG by Oregon Districts

Below are the most important conclusions that are drawn from these documents.

According to the Statewide Report Card, in 2012-13, Oregon had 39,534 identified TAG students, a number that has fallen steadily since 2006, when 42,517 identified students were reported.  Overall in Oregon, student enrollment has risen slightly (from 553,279 to 563,715) in the same period.   The most reasonable conclusion from this is that districts that lack any funding to identify or serve students are not finding them in the first place.

In 2004, the Oregon Department of Education became concerned about the adequacy of TAG services and convened a series of statewide meetings to take testimony about the issue and develop recommendations.  This is the last time that the Department itself drafted policy recommendations concerning TAG.   Below is an excerpt from that report:

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***General Findings*** *Public reports from across Oregon indicated concerns for the TAG program in several areas including lack of funding, lack of
Department leadership and direction, and inadequate and inconsistent program services. Several suggestions were made
relevant to improving TAG programs such as regional support committees for staff, enhanced communication systems across
the state, and professional development.****Recommendations*** *1. Work with the Oregon Legislature to develop a budget package to adequately fund districts in implementing program
services for TAG students.......

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--From 2004-5, the first year we have solid student population figures, to 2011-12, the most recent, TAG spending *per capita* has fallen by $61 from $191 per student to $130 per student.

--While per capita funding for TAG has *fallen* by about one-third, spending for other special needs students has increased.  Spending for English Language Learners has *increased* by $230 per student and spending for Special Education students has *increased*  by $2,058 per student.  To put it another way, the increases alone for each ELL and Special Education student have been substantially greater than the total overall spending on each TAG student.

--TAG students are less likely to drop out than other students, but nevertheless about 10% of all TAG students did not graduate with regular diplomas.  This puts a substantial dent in the state's 40-40-20 goals, as the overwhelming majority of TAG students would be successful in 4-year colleges if they had access to appropriate instruction during their k-12 careers. If this percentage stays constant, about 4,000 TAG students, or about as many as are in three large Oregon High Schools, will drop out or receive a modified diploma or GED.

--The report of the TAG Task Force convened under Senate Bill 330 found major inequities across the state in the provision of identification and services.  It concluded that: "Even though this population of learners could be an easy success story under 40-40-20, Oregon fails to provide them with the services they need allowing many to fall through the cracks and some to fail to graduate from high school.   ... Funding at the current level is inadequate to support monitoring, evaluation and oversight of this population of learners..."

-- Although the Oregon TAG mandate requires schools to provide appropriate curriculum and instruction for TAG students, the overwhelming majority of Oregon's TAG students are assigned to  teachers who have no training for serving these special needs students.  Most districts do not have any trained staff at the district level either, so teachers have nowhere to go for support or training.

--Oregon's school administrators, who are responsible for ensuring implementation of the Oregon TAG mandate, also lack any training in the mandate itself or best practices for serving students.  As a result, myths and misunderstandings abound.  The most damaging myth is that gifted students will teach themselves.

--The TAG students most harmed by neglect are low-income students, minority students and students with disabilities.  Title 1, Special Education and ELL funding do not meet the needs of TAG students in these populations when the staff who administer and deliver these services have no additional TAG training.   Students in these populations are also under-identified, in part because of a lack of staff training and support.

--The achievement gap among students by income and ethnicity is much larger at the highest achievement level than at lower levels.  This prevents low-income students from gaining access to an education that would enable them to fill middle-class, professional jobs.

--Peer-reviewed research funded by the Federal Government has repeatedly shown that the implementation of "best practices" for TAG instruction is extremely effective in increasing TAG student achievement and improving instruction for all students.

--TAG services can be provided in a very cost-effective manner once staff have been trained.  However, some funding is necessary for district-level coordination, staff training, teacher planning, student testing and identification, and curriculum and materials.  The current level of funding is inadequate to support these services or TAG student learning.

--Inadequate TAG services and untrained staff cause real harm to tens of thousands of Oregon students every year.

Thank you very much,

Sincerely yours,

Margaret DeLacy
Vice-President
Oregon Association for Talented and Gifted

Dear Task Force on School Funding:

I am the mother of a highly gifted 8-year-old girl in Portland Public Schools. She is now in 2nd grade.

Since she started Kindergarten, I have seen her natural love of learning crushed by the realities of her classroom experiences. She is forced to sit through lesson after lesson about things she mastered long ago, despite our continued advocacy and respectful attempts to work with the teachers and administrators at PPS.

She is bored, confused and feeling like an oddball because the lessons are simply not appropriate - and PPS seems incapable of meeting her needs.

She is far from alone. According to the 2013 PPS TAG survey, **80 percent of families say their child is not getting an appropriate education, and 80 percent feel their children do not get to work with academic peers.**

With the exception of ACCESS Academy (which has a long waitlist and no permanent home), Oregon public schools are clearly failing TAG learners. And why? TAG programming does not have to be expensive. There just has to be a will, proper training, and an understanding that teaching these students is not elitist, it is merely *respecting them as learners* the same way we respect every other student in public school, from struggling students to the kids who are in the middle of the pack.

Our family is full of public school teachers and public school success stories. We hoped that our local schools would ignite our daughter's love of learning and did not want to send her to private school.

But we have been saddened to learn that Oregon public schools neglect their highest achievers. Our child's principal openly mocks the Oregon TAG mandate. Teachers tell families they do not have time for individual TAG plans. Our local high school rations AP classes and dismisses the dreams of high-achieving, competitive college-bound students.

And yet families are supposed to believe that schools are teaching gifted children at "the appropriate rate and level." This is a fantasy and we all know it.

Please remedy the chronic neglect of gifted & talented students before it is too late for these kids. TAG programming is not elitist; in fact, **it is poor and minority children who lose out the most when public schools do not address their learning needs.** Wealthy families can supplement or look for private school. Others cannot.

Please allocate funding for TAG students so that teachers are trained and these kids do not grow up feeling isolated, out of step, and bored. Oregon frets because we do not have enough high-quality applicants for STEM and other jobs, yet there is so much untapped potential here - **if we could only give these kids what they need**.

Amy Mason Doan

PPS Parent

Past member of PPS TAG Parent Advisory Committee

Edweek, August 24, 2013

"But ***treating all learners as the same does not acknowledge their equal value as learners***. "Same" and "equal" are not congruent terms.

Each student is of equal value, therefore each is worthy of an education, of learning, growing, *being educated*. The learner's value as a learner lies in his or her right to an opportunity for and fulfillment of the pursuit of an education.

But one does not become educated through an ill-fitting education. One does not become educated when nothing new is taught to him."

<http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/unwrapping_the_gifted/2013/08/same_and_equal_are_not_congrue.html>

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This message is intended as testimony for the hearing on state education funding formulation.

I am a parent of three children in the Beaverton School District and wish to express the need for consistent TAG funding.  We moved to Oregon three years ago from Minnesota where our elementary school of 1000 students had two full-time TAG teachers on staff.  Children were challenged daily with pull-out classes which allowed them to explore topics in much more detail and helped them stay engaged with their schooling.  In Oregon, we have found there is no TAG teaching at the elementary school level.  Children are identified, but there seems to be no funding to engage those students in more challenging  activities.

We are grateful to have found the SUMMA program for Middle School and currently have two children in that program at Whitford Middle School.  This program is exactly what these children need and it was so disheartening to see the program lose some of its founding teachers with many years of gifted teacher training due to the budget cuts last year.  It is so important to have teachers with the training to guide these gifted children - many of whom are twice exceptional.  I am anxious to see what the High School has to offer next year for my incoming freshman.

Please be an advocate for TAG students.  They are so often cut from budgets because there is a perception that they can just help the kids who are struggling or work at a higher level at home.   We should be providing an environment at school where they are excited to learn and be challenged.

Stacey Erickson McCarthy

Dear Members of the Oregon School Funding Task Force:

I am the grandparent of young children. My oldest grandchild is a TAG identified student. The Oregon TAG Mandate states:

“Talented and gifted children” means

those children who require special

educational programs or services, or both,

beyond those normally provided by the

regular school program…….” (343.395 Definitions for ORS 343.391to 343.413)

By definition, these children need services not normally provided by the regular school program. In spite of this need, the majority of TAG students, like my grandson, are in regular classrooms with teachers who have no training in meeting their needs for advanced curriculum at the appropriate rate and level.

That my grandson was identified as TAG is mainly the result of having parents who were aware of both his advanced ability and the lack of suitable opportunities in his neighborhood school. They sought out a magnet program that they believed would better meet his needs and requested TAG testing in Kindergarten. Because of their advocacy he was accelerated by one grade level at the end of Kindergarten. Continued advocacy has been necessary, but not always successful, for appropriate opportunities within the magnet program.

It should not require parental awareness and advocacy to have a student’s educational needs met. However, without funding for TAG at the district level, there is little chance that students will be appropriately identified and their abilities developed. *The Quiet Crisis*, the report of the Task Force on the Instruction of Talented and Gifted Children as required by Senate Bill 330 (2011) clearly shows a lack of commitment to the most able students in Oregon. This lack of commitment disproportionally affects students who are not native English speakers, have disabilities, and whose parents do not have advanced education and/or economic resources. The number of students in one or more of these groups has been increasing in public schools in recent years.

The future of our communities, our state, and our nation depends on developing the abilities of **all** children, including talented and gifted. TAG students have different needs than the majority of students, and there is additional cost to identify those students and provide for their needs. Districts need additional funding specifically designated to meet the needs of high ability students. To continue to neglect their education is a tragic waste of potential for the students and society.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith C. Smith

Hello,

As a parent of an Oregon public school TAG-identified 8th grade public school student, I urge you to support increased funding for TAG services.  My daughter has been under-served her entire public school career. She has not received the support and curriculum needed to meet her potential.  This is due in large part to a lack of funding for TAG support staff and teacher training in supporting TAG students.  Large class sizes don't help teachers tailor curriculum to advanced students either.

I echo all that Margaret DeLacy says in her letter, included below.  Thank you for your commitment to helping all children in Oregon meet their full potential.  Under-achievement of TAG students is a terrible loss of potential for our society, not to mention for themselves.

Sincerely,

Kammy Kern-Korot

Dear Members of the Task Force on School Funding,

I am writing to you as a father of 2 Portland public school students. I am also writing to you as a successful small business owner, entrepreneur and concerned citizen. The opinions I express here are my own but I can assure you that they are shared by many. My opinions here are intended to be used as my public testimony. I respectfully request that you take the time to read and consider the comments I make below.

Educational analogies to sports are legion as they highlight both the wide diversity of natural talent in people, the discrepancies in resources and the necessity of providing training to facilitate positive outcomes.

Successful athletes do not just appear out of nowhere, successful teams do not spontaneously form out of the ether; successful athletes and athletic teams are the products of intentional design.

You will never see successful world class athletes that have not had access to some type of well-funded and supported athletic program.

As a state we will profess our desire to see students be successful and then leave our academically talented students to waste precious years of their lives floundering about without any program or training for them. Oregon’s TAG program is underfunded and under supported on all imaginable levels. Across the state there are incredibly bright elementary students who are being taught to fail on a daily basis. As an example of this, imagine the lesson a second grade student takes to heart when they are fluently reading chapter books at home and then they go into school and are put in a reading group with children who are still sounding out words? Or the student who is capable of learning a new math concept on first presentation yet is required to sit through lessons on that very same topic for the next two weeks as her classmates need the repetition? These children will struggle to even understand their own potential much less fulfill it. What these children are NOT learning is how to learn, how to challenge themselves, how to reach higher; they are not even rewarded for doing their best because they can get by doing so little.

If you have the Trail Blazers playing an exhibition match against a high school team they are not going to play their best game as they won’t have to. If you took away the rest of the NBA teams then the Trail Blazers would never even have the opportunity to be there best. This is what the underfunded, unstructured program that is known as TAG is doing to our academically talented students every single day; leaving them with nothing.

If all of this was not bad enough you are also driving away the academically gifted students who are fortunate enough to have well off parents as these families make up a large number of the private school student bodies.

The Templeton National Report on Acceleration “A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America’s Brightest Students” was published 10 years ago in an effort to address exactly these topics, sadly, the report is as needed now as the day it was originally published.

Very sincerely yours,

Mark Daverin

We are parents of two Oregon public schools students, both of whom are advanced learners.

Finding services for our oldest child has been excruciating, as our oldest has been obviously gifted from an early age, doing higher level math without writing anything down (and saying things like, "if you take twenty minus ten and then divide that in half, that is how old I am!"), and reading the Little House on the Prairie series the summer before Kindergarten.

Our district's TAG office didn't care and wouldn't even discuss our child, who we wanted to receive services at our neighborhood school. They were hung up on chronological age, didn't want to talk about ability at all. Eventually we turned to a language immersion charter school to keep both children actively engaged. Even though the charter school does not receive TAG funding, they were flexible and accommodating (two things our current TAG structure is not) and they helped by doing things our neighborhood school was not prepared to do: they evaluated our students, for one (just asking for this was met with rejections). And while they had no TAG funding, they served our oldest child simply via grade advancement and providing differentiated instruction in another language. So our Grade One aged child is in Grade 2 and operating at a 4th grade level in another language, and thriving both academically and socially.

This is what it takes to keep our gifted student engaged and learning, and we are lucky to have this public charter school. Without this we would be looking at homeschooling, and we do not want to homeschool. We would love nothing more than to send our kids to our neighborhood public school and trust that their needs would be met. But this is not happening because our district has failed to meet even the most basic recommendations outlined in the US Department of Education's report, A Nation Deceived.

More funding for TAG students and adherence to the recommendations of the experts who wrote the report would make our neighborhood schools good places for TAG students. We strongly urge the committee to consider students like ours, who need and benefit so much from a more rigorous curriculum. We did not ever want to be part of the flood of gifted students fleeing the public neighborhood school system, but have been left with so little choice in this matter. Thank you for listening.

Name Withheld Upon Request

Hello,

I am writing to encourage the task force to adequately fund TAG programming. While some consider TAG programming elitist, there have been several articles in the news in the past year detailing the significance of supporting TAG students and especially low income TAG students. As the daughter of a gifted high school dropout, a one time low income gifted student and the mother of one identified TAG student and another child who will likely be identified once she is in school, I am well aware of the importance of giving schools the tools they need to meet the gifted mandate.

As a girl, I spent the longest stretch of my elementary education in one of the worst neighborhoods of Oakland. While at times I was frustrated, I encountered a few things that allowed me to thrive. First, my elementary reading program employed flexible grouping. This meant that although I started first grade completely unable to read, I was challenged all year and I was allowed to end the year in the top reading group. (There were six or eight groups, so it was a big spread.) I was then allowed to skip second grade and put into a third-fourth grade split. This, and some additional flexible grouping,  kept me well challenged in language arts. For math, we had a rare opportunity. A volunteer was available a few times a week. My teacher took her top math students and gave them to him and had him teach us at whatever pace we could keep. There were four girls in that math group. I've lost touch with two, but I became an engineer and another became CFO of a major corporation. For two girls from the inner-city, we did pretty well. Finally, when I was in the fourth grade, my babysitter was failing algebra and we wound up teaching each other. After my move to a less gifted friendly school, the memories of algebra and a time when I was learning would hold me through the next several years, when I learned very little at school.

As a mother, my experiences in Oregon have been less positive. Kindergarten was OK for my son. He learned how to read in the first couple of months and quickly advanced to the top reading group and practiced a lot of writing. The social aspect of school was sufficient, and with a half day schedule he had plenty of time to learn at home. However, he became very frustrated in first grade. The second week of school, he came home and told me "The purpose of school is to waste your time so you can't learn anything!" Things became more and more desperate for him over the course of the year. He eventually started refusing to go to school, because he believed his teacher was punishing him for requesting harder work. As I worked with the school and talked with educators in other schools, I realized how desperately we need to instruct teachers and administrators about the gifted. There is a prevailing belief that gifted students "are really just lazy" so there's no point in helping them. I have no doubt that by high school this is true. My son has been taught every day of his elementary education to not try too hard. It isn't necessary to get the work done and only leads to more painful boredom. In addition, the school is terrified of allowing students to work ahead of the pacing guide, in spite of research that shows the benefits outweigh the risks. With no budget for early elementary achievement testing, the risks are magnified, because the schools lack a good, unbiased way to determine whether a students knows the material or not. With significant advocacy, I have been able to get him accelerated one grade in math (He is now doing work at school that he did on his own two years ago, but is significantly happier than he was in his grade level class.) and the school has adopted a more flexible reading program (probably not only because of my efforts.)

Will my son's experiences hurt him? I am doing what I can to avoid that. My father and uncle dropped out of high school, because they had learned to be lazy in elementary school and high school posed no challenge. Oregon has great laws that should produce challenge for gifted students, but lack of funding means  teachers and administrators don't have the information they need to make good decisions, so they only work for those who advocate well. Unfortunately, the lower classes often don't advocate well. So, lack of TAG funding is what actually creates an elitist situation in the schools.

Sincerely,

Melanie Johnson

We write as parents of a third grader who has been TAG identified.  He is one of several children at his school with this designation.  The school has told us that the program is addressed in each classroom by individual teachers providing differentiated instruction.  However, there is no funding for TAG programs.  While there is a special classroom set aside for those children with disabilities because their needs are not being met in a regular classroom, there are no special funding or services for our children who are TAG identified.  Our son is doing math which is not challenging to him.  His instruction has not been appropriately and regularly differentiated.  We feel that the directive to the teachers to provide such differentiated instruction is not financially supported nor sufficiently helped to achieve the rich environment that our son needs.  Further, in the atmosphere of scarce resources, where teachers are graded on whether their children meet minimum standards, our exceptional learners are not regularly challenged.

As with the underperforming, there is an obligation on the part of the school district to address the unmet needs of these TAG children.  However this is not funded.  This absence is not acceptable.  While it is appropriate to attempt to raise minimum levels, not all ships rise with teaching to such minimum standards.   While we value the relationships that our son has established in his current school, there are many of us who are beginning to question the value of this lack of differentiated learning to our children.  If a chunk of us moved, we would be further pulling out of a public system that we not only wish to support, but that would benefit long term from our children's more successful learning and probable graduation.  The public system cannot afford to lose such capable learners, but will need to devote more resources to maintain them and help them reach their potentials.

Judith Becher and Jeffrey Wallace, PPS parents

To whom it may concern

My son is 7 and a second grader at Edy Ridge. He has just been identified as a TAG student and he is also ADD.  He needs to be challenged by his curriculum or he will continue to be bored in school and as he gets older distract to other students.  He is very smart and without the needed funding for our school he will go without the type of curriculum he needs to stay engaged.

We as parents, and our children, depend on school to give them the best start possible in life.  Teaching them to love education at an early age is vital to the fabric of our society.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration,

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Nicole Morgal, CHA – Operations Managernicolem@lincolnandassociates.com |

Hello,

This message is intended as testimony for the hearing on Oregon School Funding.  I would like to request that more resources be dedicated to TAG funding.  My 2 TAG identified elementary aged children attend Portland Public Schools.  More seats at focus schools need to be available to provide opportunities for TAG and other gifted children.  At a recent information night for Winterhaven Elementary (a science & math focus school that admits children based on a lottery system), where the majority of the students are TAG identified, it was announced that there would be ZERO openings for students in grades 2-4, and only 1 opening for a 5th grader (since these grades are already full or close to full for next school year).  The demand for this type of program is much greater than the spots available when there is standing room only at 1 of 3 information nights.  What happens to all of the highly eligible children who need this type of enriched education who don't place high enough in the lottery to be admitted?

Similarly the PPS TAG focus program, ACCESS, needs to have more spaces available for qualifying children.  My son (highly qualified) would hugely benefit from this program, but was wait listed last year because again there are not enough seats available for all of the children who want to go there.  We will again apply for both programs this year, but if he's not admitted we will likely have to leave the public school system to find him the opportunities he needs through a private school.

Thank you,

Jennifer Russell

Senator Richard Devlin, Senator Fred Girod, Representative Betty Komp, Representative Sherrie Sprenger, Kelly K. Devlin, John W. Hayes, Jr., Claire S. Hertz, Steven G. Isaacs, Sena E. Norton, Bobbie Regan, John M. Rexford, Heidi A. Sipe, and Michael D. Wolfe:

I am writing today as a parent of 2 young children in Portland Public Schools.  I believe strongly that the state of Oregon has not acted sufficiently to fund the mandate of Talented and Gifted instruction for children who meet the criteria.  Budgets have been tight in the past 5 years due to the recession, but the TAG funding has diminished over the past decade by 25%.  As parents we suspect that the TAG allocation does little more than fund the identification of students without supports for enrichment or deeper learning. Class sizes are large, and teachers struggle to differentiate instruction in a meaningful way for children whose rate and level of learning is accelerated.  A survey of TAG parents was conducted last year in PPS which demonstrated the dissatisfaction that families are experiencing. I implore you to make this subset of students a priority in a thoughtful and productive way.

Thank you.

Suzanne Balleisen

I am a parent of a TAG-identified Portland Public School student, and urge you to support significant state funding for our Talented and Gifted students, currently numbering over 40,000. Public education should accommodate ALL learners. In our appropriate efforts to ensure children with disabilities or learning challenges meet benchmarks, we are leaving TAG students behind. The state mandate to differentiate instruction for TAG children, potentially our future leaders, means nothing if not backed by funding and programs.

My first-grader woke up the morning after the 100th day of school and bounded into our bedroom as usual. After a hearty good morning, he was uncharacteristically quiet. After a couple of minutes, he said, “Mom, I am not one hundred days smarter.” I replied, “Why not?” He responded, “Because Mrs. \* doesn’t teach reading and math to my level.” His words, and the emotion behind them, broke my heart. The day before, he had received a booklet containing a poem which included a line about being one hundred days smarter.] Before you suggest that we have put words in his mouth, he connected the dots on his own. We have been exceedingly careful to be supportive of his school, which is an excellent neighborhood school, and his experienced and caring teacher. His teacher works ably within the confines of the existing dysfunctional system. The system needs to change to support ALL learners, not just those who are struggling to meet benchmarks.

The almost laughable amount of funding our school receives for TAG education has been maximized by a dedicated group of parents, but their laudable efforts cannot make $1,000 come close to supporting every TAG student in the school. Before and after school activities are great, but our children need and deserve to be taught at their level throughout the school day, not during their free time. The state must put its money where its mouth is, and fund appropriate professional development for teachers and a challenging education for TAG children.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Tanya Schaefer

I will not be able to attend the School Funding Task Force meeting on March 21 but request that you consider this letter in lieu of my public testimony.

I write to urge the Task Force to give greater consideration to the needs of Talented and Gifted (TAG) children in Oregon and increase funding for TAG services and programs.

As a recent Portland Public School survey on Talented and Gifted (TAG) services illustrates, TAG instruction in neighborhood schools is failing: 80% of respondents feel that their TAG child does not receive appropriate learning opportunities and challenges as an individual. This is deeply disappointing, but not surprising, to me.

I have two TAG-identified children whose intellectual and academic needs are not being served by TAG instruction in an otherwise excellent Portland Public School. In fact, despite an extensive TAG building plan, no TAG services are provided in their school because no funds are available.  My kindergartener, who is well-able to do second grade math, spends much of his kindergarten math lesson coloring as he waits for his peers to catch up. He is bored and losing interest in school.

Under Oregon Law, school districts are mandated to provide to TAG students “*special educational programs or services, or both, beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society*…” In practice, this means that schools must provide TAG services to students scoring from the 97th percentile upward through differentiated, qualitatively different instruction linked to the student’s area of identification (intellectually gifted or academically talented in math or reading). This will not happen unless Oregon approves increased and consistent TAG funding for schools.  The State also needs to create and support more TAG programs like the Access Academy in Portland which serves the needs of highly gifted kids but, as I know from personal experience, has far few places available than are needed.

Thank you for considering my request for increased funding for TAG services and programs in Oregon schools

Sincerely

Sue Fisher