

Testimony submitted to the Joint Ways and Means Committee

April 21, 2021

Dear Members of the Joint Ways and Means Committee:

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Oregon Association for Talented and Gifted (OATAG) a non-profit, non-discriminatory statewide membership organization.

This year, we have heard a great deal about how essential it is to return 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 many years. Indeed, Oregon has failed to provide state funding for TAG programs for several decades, 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.

Oregon identifies students in grades k-12 for Talented and Gifted (TAG) services when they are in the top 3% in any nationally-normed test of reading, mathematics or aptitude. In addition, districts identify students who have the potential to meet this criterion. Nearly 40,000 Oregon students are identified in one or more of these categories. The number has remained nearly the same since 2004, when the first reliable count was compiled.

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 has fallen, in both absolute and *per capita* terms, from \$191.00 per TAG student in 2004-5 to just \$152 in 2018-19, the most recent to be reported. In 2019, 85 districts did not report *any* TAG spending. 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 across the state and made a series of 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 noted that "Many parents spoke to the committee about the lack of resources for Talented and Gifted (TAG) programs."

Its High Quality Classrooms work group recommended the following measures:

*"Establish categorical funding and require the following elements of a statewide Talented and Gifted (TAG) program:*

- a. Universal screening prior to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade using the potential-to-perform eligibility standard, identifying TAG students at every school with consideration of the state's equity lens;
- b. Periodic ODE evaluation of TAG identification disparities in each school district with recommendations to remedy those disparities;
- c. Program requirements for schools and districts, including teacher training requirements and consideration of school schedules."

Yet in the sessions that have followed, no provision has been made for categorical TAG funding to implement these recommendations, even as new funds have been allocated for many other purposes.

Oregon's "Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act" promised that the Oregon Department of Education would "provide district and regional trainings to deepen understanding of strategies to identify needs and instruction to improve learning for students with disabilities, English learners, *students who are talented and gifted (TAG)*, and students with low literacy levels."

The plan also promised that Oregon would conduct

- “TAG regional trainings addressing: identification practices, historically underrepresented populations, social-emotional considerations, school-wide program models, and using data to inform policy and practice
- TAG instructional best practices in content-specific professional development
- Inclusive instructional best practices in academically diverse classrooms
- District level TAG trainings specific to needs of individual districts
- Regional and district level instructional training for typical gifted practices such as: acceleration (whole grade and subject), curriculum compacting, cluster grouping, enrichment, dual enrollment, personalized learning, and differentiated curriculum and instruction.
- Regional and district level training for twice exceptional populations [that is, TAG students who also have other learning differences or other exceptionalities]”

To date, no funding has been allocated to carry out these commitments. Oregon has one FTE TAG specialist at the state level. This is insufficient to provide adequate training in all these best practices to 197 school districts across the state.

The unequal and inadequate support for TAG services in Oregon contributes to inequitable access to college and career opportunities and acts as a drag on our state’s economic development. It hurts many Oregon students who are still waiting for a chance to learn. It creates social and emotional damage in addition to permanent academic harm.

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