

Testimony for the House Education Committee on SB 478, SB 486 and SB 487

Submitted by the Oregon Association for Talented and Gifted, 5/18/2021

--**SB 478** Directs Department of Education to identify talented and gifted children in an inclusive manner.

Identification is essential to flag students who need modified curriculum and instruction. Without those adaptations, students quickly become disengaged.

We know that we are failing to identify many gifted students--in particular we are missing rural students, students from low-income families, students in certain ethnic and racial groups, students who are English Language Learners, and students with disabilities.

Our identification rules need revisions--in particular, the rule concerning the category of "potential" students. It is confusing to districts and produces inconsistent practices across the state.

There has been a lot of new research on sound identification practices and there are many new assessment instruments. It is time for a comprehensive review based on the best available information.

--**SB 486** Modifies requirements of plans of instruction for talented and gifted children.

The goal of this bill is to improve communication. The change in TAG planning was requested by TAG students themselves who want a voice in the decisions that affect them. A student voice will increase engagement and produce more meaningful plans. It will also require districts to provide the name of their TAG coordinator to the Department of Education and their communities. This may seem like a minor issue but this information is difficult to find online. This confuses and frustrates families who have TAG questions and makes it harder for our state TAG specialist to provide support to districts.

When this bill was heard in the Senate education committee, there was a series of misunderstandings about its language. The bill does NOT require that districts *create* TAG plans for the first time. These have been required since the Oregon TAG mandate came into effect in 1990-92. The bill does NOT change the current expectation that districts *implement* their plans. Districts are held accountable for this through oversight from the Department of Education. The bill does NOT change the requirement that districts *share* their plans with the Department of Education. This was mandated in 2007.

--SB 487 Directs Department of Education study the instruction provided to talented and gifted children

Barriers to advanced learning reduce career opportunities for students and drive up the cost of higher education.

More inclusive identification does not accomplish anything unless it is accompanied by services to identified students.

Inadequate and inappropriate school experiences frustrate students, place them at risk for social and emotional problems, increase disengagement, and waste time and resources. We have large disparities in spending, services and instruction.

Oregon's failure to support TAG weakens school districts, perpetuates inequality, wastes scarce education funding, and undermines our state's economy. We have many students who have been waiting for an opportunity to learn in school for many years.

It is time to address a problem that has been festering for decades.

Background:

Who are our TAG students?

Oregon identifies students in grades k-12 for Talented and Gifted 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. About 40,000 Oregon students are identified in one or more of these categories. The number of identified students has been relatively even for 15 years as our state's population has increased. TAG spending has fallen even as state education budgets have doubled. According to the most recent data, 85 of our 197 school districts did not report any TAG spending despite the state mandate to provide services. There are very large disparities from district to district in the services students receive once they are identified. Furthermore, there are significant disparities in the rates of identification between students of different income levels and ethnicities.

What do we know about Talented and Gifted education?

Below is research-based information about gifted and very high-achieving students (the Oregon TAG mandate includes both groups):

Gifted education is not elitist.

Most gifted students do not come from wealthy families. Giving children a chance to learn does not make them feel superior to other students. They do not lose the ability to feel concern for others when their own needs are met. The students most harmed by disinvestment in TAG services are minority and low-income students because low-income students depend most heavily on the instruction provided by public schools.

Gifted students don't teach themselves.

They do not succeed on their own. They need instruction that is adapted to their level of mastery. When gifted students are sprinkled evenly across many classrooms, they make lower learning gains than classmates who are not gifted, because the instruction is not appropriate for their needs. Low-income and minority gifted students make even lower gains in such classes than other gifted students.

Gifted students need acceleration and advanced classes.

A study carried out by Matthew Makel and his associates in 2016 has found that some students are even more advanced than we realized. They found that between 8% and 10% of students in 4th grade perform at the 8th grade level in reading. Between 2% and 5% are four grade levels ahead in math. Using only MAP data, they estimated that one in ten fifth grade students read at the high school level and nearly one in 40 fifth-graders is ready for high school math (2 ½%). (Because of the MAP test's computer-adaptive format and high measurement ceiling, these results, unlike paper-and-pencil tests reflect a ninth-grade content knowledge and skills, not the score a ninth-grade student would attain on a fifth-grade test.) In other words, our TAG students, who represent the upper 3% of our population, need curriculum that is *approximately four years* beyond grade level.

Providing access to instruction at an appropriate level does not harm other students in a school or community and in fact can benefit them.

Instruction that is not adapted to their needs can cause serious social and emotional problems including severe depression.

The risk seems to rise with the aptitude of the student. This is because the more gifted students find it more difficult to make friends who share their interests in a regular classroom.

Gifted students need well-trained teachers to thrive.

Yet most Oregon teachers have no pre-licensure training on effective, research-based ways to meet the instructional needs of TAG students.

Many gifted students are twice-exceptional.

TAG students are not the "model students" we sometimes see on television. All TAG students are asynchronous in their development. Many are also confronting other challenges including poverty, language learning, family dysfunction, homelessness, and learning disabilities. Educators need additional training and support to identify and serve these students.

Services to high-achieving students are an essential component of economic development in Oregon.

Oregon's TAG students are still sitting in the bleachers, waiting for a chance to show what they can do. Recommendations from decades of studies have never been implemented. 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 problem. 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. The High Quality Classrooms work group recommended a series of measures designed to increase the equity of TAG programs and provide a minimum level of service to all TAG students throughout the state.

For many years, OATAG has been sharing information with the legislature about the economic costs of neglecting our advanced students.

For example, a report published in 2010 by the Center for Evaluation & Education Policy warned that "the comparatively small percentage of students scoring at the highest level on achievement tests suggests that children with advanced academic potential are being under-served, with potentially serious consequences for the long-term economic competitiveness of the U.S..."

Just this week, Marc Tucker, president emeritus and senior fellow of the National Center on Education and the Economy noted that "Thirty countries now outperform the United States in mathematics at the high school level. Many are ahead in science, too. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the millennials in our workforce tied for last on tests of mathematics and problem solving. . . . We now have the worst-educated workforce in the industrialized world. Because our workers are among the most highly paid in the world, that makes a lot of Americans uncompetitive in the global economy. And uncompetitive against increasingly smart machines. It is a formula for a grim future."

According to the latest available data from the Office of Civil Rights, (for 2015-6) Oregon students lag behind this already low national standard in the number of science courses they take in high school and in the level of mathematics they attain before graduation.

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