

Submitter: Judith Smith  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Education  
Measure: SB736

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Webber, Members of the Committee:

I am the parent of three adult children who were identified as gifted and participated in programs in their schools in CA. Two of my children live in OR and are parents of TAG identified students in public schools. I have been learning about gifted characteristics and needs and advocating for services for nearly 40 years. The brains of gifted students process information differently from neurotypical students. This difference requires that they have access to instruction that differs from what is usually provided for grade level students of their same age.

Support SB 736

This bill requires a study on the availability and access to advanced courses. TAG students frequently are capable of work far in advance of other students of their age and grade. Expecting proficiency is a low bar. Expecting excellence and equity must be twin goals. I am very concerned that some districts are eliminating advanced courses in the name of equity. That will lead to more inequity as only those families with resources will find enriching experiences outside of public education for their children.

Beginning in elementary school, TAG students often learn to underachieve because they don't encounter any work that requires effort. It is impossible to learn persistence in the face of difficulty when there is no difficulty. Some TAG students encounter difficult work when they enter middle or high school. Others are in college when they finally are challenged. Without study skills and never having had to ask for help they are at a loss and may give up. That was my experience in my small rural school in Michigan in the 1960's. I graduated first in my class and had full scholarship to a selective college. I left after one year. Years later when I learned about giftedness, I realized why I thought I didn't belong in college. It wasn't lack of ability. I had never developed study skills or received encouragement to reach for excellence and extend my performance while in my public school.

I believe gifted students in Oregon today too often don't encounter challenging work because they aren't expected to be able to perform at high levels by uninformed educators and a system focused on mere proficiency. They are adversely affected, and their future opportunities are diminished. Many of them are from demographic groups that are known to be under identified as gifted and underserved. Gifted and high achieving students need the opportunity to experience challenge throughout their school years. A study as required by SB 736 would shed a light on the missing opportunities and how to overcome them.

Respectfully,

Judith Smith