

Submitter: Tanya Sinko
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB595

Esteemed Legislators,

I speak as an advocate for students in the Talented and Gifted population. Part of my current role involves serving as the TAG coordinator for the Coquille School District. TAG students are exceptional, just as students experiencing disabilities are exceptional. We have made a strong, financial commitment to support students experiencing disabilities (and rightfully so,) yet we receive little to no financial support for students with academic talents and intellectual gifts. TAG students manifest their gifts in diverse ways and need individualized programs of instruction to enhance their talents. Funding is needed to purchase curricula for TAG students, to provide training for teachers who need to differentiate instruction for TAG students, to extend accelerated or expanded learning opportunities, and to provide for their mental health as well. Additionally, working to identify students who are twice-exceptional or multi-exceptional can be a long process that merits additional testing that is not routinely provided to students (such as the WISC-V). Indeed, a student's identification as Intellectually Gifted often comes from external testing. Thankfully, we are in a place in education where deeper attention is being paid to TAG students. We are recognizing them as autonomous humans who require more enriching learning opportunities. It is not acceptable to assume that a TAG student wants to tutor their peers or do all assigned coursework PLUS more. TAG students' instruction must be tailored to their needs and include annual, measurable goals, just as an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is written for students experiencing disabilities.

My two (graduated) TAG children both experienced suicidal ideation in their junior years from not receiving services, from having to tolerate disrespectful and off-task peers, and from not receiving the fuel their gifts needed to flourish. In a time when we are focusing on mental health more than ever in education, we have to realize that TAG students need extra support as they deal with the reality that they ARE different from their peers, that they ARE emotionally intense, and that they ARE allowed to experience failure. Funding does not solve all issues, but it is a start toward better serving the TAG students of Oregon.