

To the House Committee on Education in support of SB 736

I'm writing in strong support of SB 736 to study ways to increase access to advanced instruction to better meet the needs of students. I want to share a couple of examples from my personal experience with my two sons, both of whom were TAG-identified and both of whom had issues with getting the instruction they needed.

1. My older son, who could easily work ahead in math, was denied that opportunity because a compacted middle school curriculum that was available at some middle schools was not available to him at his K-8. He spent the first several months of the school year repeating material he had already learned while I advocated for the school to offer this compacted math class. That process took months to get the testing done to show he needed this class (along with other students who were tested), the district authorized hiring a .2 FTE teacher for this class, and the school struggled to find a qualified teacher willing to take the position. I was told by multiple teachers that my advocacy resulted in a number of kids being allowed into that class, where they did 3 years of math in 2 years (or in their case, in about 1.5 years given the process to get this in place). Had this advanced instruction been available, my son would have had a much more appropriate math education.

2. High schools routinely list AP classes that they offer. Unfortunately, they don't actually offer the classes they say they do. There are classes that are offered only once in a while. There are classes that they say there is no demand for, so they are not being offered, without seeming to realize that there is no demand because students and parents don't know that they are supposed to clamor to administration to get the class offered and get other kids to do the same.

3. My younger son was able to get his high school to do an "advanced physics" class at his school by hearing about it from a teacher, talking with the administration, and then starting a petition to get enough kids to say they would take the class. It shouldn't be the responsibility of children to investigate what the school says they offer but don't and then figure out how to try to get it for their school.

4. One way to increase access to advanced instruction is to stop treating every student the same. Our high school required that all kids take AVID as a year-long class. For a student with good study skills and a motivation to learn, this class was a complete waste of time. It was also an endless source of frustration and anger that a credit was being spent on a needless class which could have been spent preparing for additional AP classes.

5. One great thing in our high school was the engineering class, which allowed kids to learn about 4 different kinds of engineering. That class allowed my older son to discover mechanical engineering and realize what a good fit it was for his skills and interests.

Both of my sons are in college now. One will graduate with honors from OSU in March with a degree in mechanical engineering and manufacturing. The other will have finished his second year at Carnegie Mellon University studying human-computer interaction by the time of this hearing. Both of them are excelling despite multiple ways they were held back by lack of access to advanced instruction at many points during their schooling. But I wonder how their journey would have been different - it could have been easier for them to get what they needed, they could have left high school less jaded by the experience, they could have graduated earlier from college, etc.

I went to high school in a large school (4,000 students on two campuses) with lots of access to accelerated instruction, leveled instruction, and AP classes. The school offered core subjects in 5 levels from remedial to AP/honors. Classes fit the needs and abilities of the students - I took level 4 math but level 5 English, for example. I had access to accelerated math in grade school. I had enrichment projects. I had all the AP Classes I could fit in my schedule. And I had earned enough credits in 2.5 years in college to graduate, as I started college with a full year of credit and took a heavy course load in college. My boys lacked the same opportunities.

Kids at our high school and the schools feeding into it are facing the same issues today. I speak for those kids with parents who haven't gone to college and obtained advanced degrees, who don't feel comfortable challenging the system and demanding more, and who aren't aware that their kids can be offered a more appropriate education. Please pass this bill, study

Thank you.

Maria Sosnowski

Portland OR