Submitter: Molly Matheny

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB934

Thank you for taking time to consider this bill in support of TAG students in our public schools. I currently have a 16 year-old sophomore at Cleveland High School in Portland Public Schools. Our experience receiving TAG services through this district has been dismal almost every year. My son was identified as TAG through outside testing in the first grade, including being profoundly gifted in mathematics. No teacher was able to, nor supported with, proving him with instruction at his rate and level. As previous ODE investigations have found, there is little to no meaningful in-classroom differentiation or TAG-level instruction provided at PPS. TAG students seem to be poorly tracked and just moved along year to year with the empty promise that their next grade will be more challenging. Which is what happened with my son. In 3rd grade, his teacher would let him read during math instruction because she had little to keep him engaged. Memorably, his 4th grade teacher provided him with coins worksheets after he doodled over the too-easy grade-level work. She didn't bother to look that he was TAG identified in math. That was the first year I asked for an individualized TAG plan, but was unable to get access to single subject acceleration for the next year because I would have had to provide him with transportation to and from middle school daily. For middle school compacted math, we were told he could not get a higher level or faster rate to meet his needs as the program was already accelerated. Finally approaching high school, my son was so excited for the potential of getting access to mathematics instruction that met his educational needs. He was quite literally devastated starting his freshman year when his geometry teacher refused his requests for rate and level appropriate instruction/materials. That teacher said to his face "I make no promises about TAG services in my classroom." (I subsequently filed a complaint with the district and my son was successful in advocating for himself to change teachers.) Unfortunately after 10 years in Portland Public Schools, I gave up fighting alone and hired a lawyer. At the start of 10 grade this past fall, we made a TAG plan in which the teacher would allow my son to work at his own rate through the materials (no instruction would be provided per usual). As has been the case in every year prior, my son grasped the concepts quickly and remained disengaged… until winter break. At which time, and after yet again proving to his current-year teacher that he is an exceptional leaner, she did permit him access to a higher level IB math analysis course materials offered to Jr and Sr's. My son found the concepts more interesting and appropriately challenging. He advocated for himself to be able to learn the first semester of this high level course in 3 weeks and if he passed the mid-term, the school would allow him to move up mid-year. This is the email from the administration saying that my son would be completely on his own for the endeavor: "Hi Molly,
We can have [teacher] provide [student] the same review sheet she is providing to

the class for the final. Beyond that, [student] would be responsible for reviewing topics and finding material appropriate to self study. This request is beyond the scope of what we traditionally offer to students so the responsibility would be on [student] to review topics found on the review sheet (Khan academy or other virtual resources can be of help). I will let [teacher] answer the question about the note sheet as it is her exam but in the past we have not allowed students anything beyond a formula sheet that they may be allowed to use on the IB exam. Typically, the expectation is that a student score an 85% or better on a final to demonstrate preparedness of material to access the second semester of a course. " With no instructional support, my son aced the midterm and is now in the higher level course. I can't imagine where he would be now if only…