

January 31, 2011

To: Senate K-12 Committee
From: Robert Vaughan, Manager, Advanced Learning, Seattle Public Schools
Re: SB 5475 and Proposed Delay in Making Highly Capable part of Basic Ed

Seattle Public Schools receives approximately \$400,000 per year via the highly capable grant. This funds how we identify students. It also funds four infrastructure positions (the advanced learning manager, a support analyst, a consulting teacher, and administrative support) as well as curricular support.

If our state government follow through on eliminating the highly capable grant and delays making services to these students a part of basic education beginning next September, these decisions threaten to decimate our advanced learning programs. We at SPS believe strongly that a public education should be appropriate for a broad cross section of students, and that means ensuring that students who qualify for highly capable programs get identified and tested and placed in these programs. We use these grant funds to evaluate about **5,000 students** each year who are nominated by parents, staff, and others. This identification process is broadly leveraged in our district to inspire students and staff in all our schools to higher standards. Our programs serve not only the kids who qualify, but those who come close. We are working with the top 10% of students in schools with low average achievement to help them reach the top. We are partnering with non-profits like the Rainier Scholars program that raises private money to help children of color to elevate their scholarship to qualify for highly capable programs en route to earning admission to college.

Seattle funds neither teachers nor a majority of our curricular materials with Highly Capable funds. We believe strongly that the highly capable program is a part of our obligation to provide an appropriate education for these students (which, of course, is why it should be considered as part of basic education, as it is in many states), so teachers and materials are provided to students as a matter of course—in the same way, for example, regular 3rd grade is provided. This means that we use baseline or other grant funds for these instructional positions. With the State's imperiled HC funds, we focus on the student identification because we believe that more students brought into advanced programs is the best use of the grant

Not funding highly capable programs now ... not making this funding a part of basic education as you had intended, will pull the plug on what is now being accomplished. Trying to resurrect our work later with all new staff will be a hard, inefficient slog in comparison to keeping things going, somehow, in the interim.

In President Obama's State of the Union address, he referred to this being our nation's "Sputnik moment." To you, our leaders, I submit that this is also our Sputnik moment. Students served by these programs are the seed corn of innovation and technical excellence vital to our state's knowledge-based economy. The programs we offer help attract and retain parents with high technical talent to join our industries and to build our future. Please, find funds. Do not delay your wise decision to make highly capable part of basic education.