



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

House Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee  
900 Court St. NE, Hearing Room D  
Salem, OR 97301

February 10, 2014

Chair Harker and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today – over the last two years, I know you have heard a lot about this concept. As a reminder, HB 4116 seeks to establish the Aspirations to College Program and restore funding for community college grants throughout the state.

In the 2013-15 Governor's recommended budget, over \$70 million was identified for strategic investments in education. Last session, bipartisan support passed HB 3232 and HB 3233 to create those strategic investments - which allocated \$2.5 million dollars for Community Colleges and Workforce Development including the Aspirations to College program. At the end of last session, the investments that we unanimously supported went unfunded and community colleges in our communities didn't receive a single dime.

The Aspirations to College bill requests a funding restoration of 1.5 million dollars to be used for higher education and workforce development pilot programs across Oregon.

These funds will be allocated through a *pilot project* for the remainder of 2013-15 biennium to create a competitive grant program available to community colleges throughout the state that provide access and support to students from low-income and first generation college communities. The goal is to leverage our state investment by partnering with local business communities, the philanthropic community, and local governments to provide these students a chance not only to *go* to college, but be supported with the tools they need to succeed and thrive.

This past fall in Washington County, the Future Connect Program which is sponsored by Portland Community College and their partnership with the cities of Beaverton and Hillsboro supported a cohort of approximately 100 students through their first semester of college, and has helped them plan for the terms ahead. Students are guided through the FAFSA process; they're required to take a college success; and work one-on-one with a college success coach. After their first semester, both cities' programs have a combined 97% retention rate. That is remarkable. We have to create more opportunities like this across the state, so students from not just my district, but from districts across the state, can work for the tools to succeed.



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I've been working with the Department of Community College and Workforce Development and have introduced a -1 amendment that would allow them to turn considerations for competitive grants around as quickly as possible. Our goal here is to make sure the concept doesn't get bogged down in complicated rule-making as the Higher Education Coordinating Commission gets to work. The amendment language would allow maximum flexibility with very sufficient agency oversight.

From personal experience, I know how daunting it is to navigate higher education - half the battle is figuring out the system. Having support systems committed to your success is vital to the success of students. That is what Aspirations to College is looking to do in communities across the state.

As a professor and an administrator of academic programs, I know from personal and professional experience that these students need more than just recruitment and financial aide. For their success, there must be social support systems in place, as well as, supportive programs and faculty. The Aspirations to College Bill provides this wrap-around approach for students.

To do right by students throughout the state we need to think differently about how we're developing skills and providing critical services to a new generation of students. Now, more than ever, it needs to be our economic imperative that the next generation of Oregonians has access to college and to the workforce training skills to help our communities thrive, in order to cultivate a more prosperous Oregon.

Most Sincerely,

Representative Joe Gallegos

