

Senators of the Education Committee:

There are several reasons why it is important to keep the 5th year program for future students. First, many of the students who participate in the 5th year program would probably not go to college without it. Rural high school students go to college in much lower numbers than urban students. According to The Oregonian, in 2011, 70% of high school graduates went on to college. This is compared to 59% of Albany students and less than 50% of Scio and Lebanon students. Without the 5th year program in these rural towns, it is likely that this number would be even lower.

Second, the 5th year program has special supports in place that help students stay in college their second year and eventually graduate. The fall to fall retention rate for urban students is 68%, but for rural students it's about 58%. Because schools with the 5th year program have hired coordinators at the high school who work with special coordinators at the college, at least 71% of students in the 5th year program are retained for their sophomore year. This shows up in higher graduation rates. Students in the 5th year programs graduate in higher numbers.

In addition, rural students who try to go to college a few years after high school graduation have a very low persistence and graduation rate. The retention rate for urban students is much higher. One of the reasons is the lack of part-time jobs in rural areas that allow college students the needed flexibility to attend college. It's important, therefore, that rural students are provided an opportunity to start college immediately after high school and are given the support they need to succeed once in college. It's not enough to tell the rural high school students that they can go to college, we need to provide the supports critical for their success.

The 5th year program also persuades students to finish high school. High school counselors tell students that they won't be able to participate in a free year of college if they don't get serious about their education. Students who would not go to college have more confidence that they can succeed because the threat of the high cost of college doesn't put them off. Instead, they go to college for free their first year, find out they can succeed, and then have enough confidence to get financial aid in order to complete their programs. But without this first free year, the students would not have the personal conviction that they can do college.

The argument for ending the 5th year program is that the urban schools can't participate or it would "break the bank" of the K-12 budget. But Oregon can't afford to keep rural students off a college path. There are now few jobs that can support rural families who don't have the advanced skills provided by college degrees. And because of this shift in the economy and the low college success rates of rural students, the 5th year program is not about an inequitable system for urban students, it is about getting the rural students the same advantages currently enjoyed by urban students. The 5th year program is about providing equity for rural students.

We need to keep the 5th year program funded, so students have their tuition, fees, and books paid by the school systems for the first year out of high school.

Thanks for your consideration.