

Dear all,

As a teacher who works at an alternative high school designed to give students an opportunity to recreate their relationships to learning and higher education, it is absolutely essential that you consider voting yes to SB 1537. SB 1537 carefully ties the Post-Graduate Scholar Program (formerly known as fifth year programs) to improving high school graduation rates for at risk students. It is modeled off of the experience of districts who have been using this strategy to retain students at risk of dropping out and to engage students who previously dropped out of high school. The fifth year is the "carrot" that gives some students hope, and has helped many become first generation HIGH SCHOOL graduates. It also provides the space and time that some students need to successfully engage with education.

I cannot tell you how many students have shared with me that up until they began their '5th year', they had never seen themselves as someone who would go to college. This opportunity is one that rewrites the trajectory of students' lives and their opportunities. Many of our students also earn credits for college while in their 5th year which provides students who are impoverished an important financial and academic benefit as well as creates the momentum for furthering their education.

While teaching at ECCO (Early College and Career Opportunities) High School, I have come to learn that often students do not succeed in the traditional comprehensive setting due to illness, NOT ability, although GPAs do not reflect this reality. Supporting SB 1537 would create an avenue to education that our students with health issues greatly need.

SB1537 provides opportunities and access in ways that The Oregon Promise and Pell Grants do not. Providing that access is what we owe our children and the future. It benefits us all.
Please vote yes.

Sincerely,

Rena Dunbar
ECCO High School
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"Activism is my rent for living on this planet." - Alice Walker