



September 27, 2018

Dear Members of the Joint Interim Committee on Student Success,

As the founding board chair and executive director of College Possible Oregon we are writing to you today to update you on the current progress of the state's investment in our college access and success program and request the state continue to invest in Oregon's low-income, first generation students. Thanks to investments by the State of Oregon and others, College Possible has grown significantly in serving students in urban and rural Oregon. Now is the time to build and sustain a formal partnership with the State of Oregon and College Possible to increase post-secondary educational success and remove systemic barriers for our state's low-income students.

It takes both a strong education system and community partners who deliver quality programs and measurable results to improve student outcomes. College Possible is a natural extension of Oregon's investments in education and workforce development, and funding will increase the number of students and schools served. We believe this investment will be a preventative approach to avoiding future social needs/costs, help students transition to and complete both a high school and college education, and better prepare them for the workforce of tomorrow.

In addition to the oral testimony you heard tonight, we wanted to include some details of our program and the return on investment for the \$700,000 the state has contributed to College Possible Oregon over the last two biennium budgets. Below is a breakdown of both our program results and our strategic growth of the program including expansion into rural Oregon and a commitment to scaling our program to serve students where they have little or no access to college access and success support programs.

What we do

We deliver programming in three core areas: core high school program serving students in east Multnomah County, the statewide initiative pilot program serving rural students across the state, and the college program, which serves students until they earn a college degree.

High school programming covers the following topics: an introduction to the benefits of college, individual academic support, intensive ACT test preparation, campus visits, college selection and applications financial aid consulting, financial literacy and planning, and the college transition and enrollment process. After graduating from high school, students transition to our college program which serves students in a technology-based platform. Key priorities for college coaches include helping students with financial aid renewal, registration for the following



term, new and renewing scholarship opportunities, understanding tuition statements, developing study skills and connecting with resources on campus.

In all program areas, direct services are delivered by AmeriCorps members, who are recent college graduates themselves. AmeriCorps members serve as full-time coaches to students in high school and college, providing one-on-one and group guidance to students through every stage of the college process: from preparation to application to graduation.

Current students served in six large east Multnomah County high schools, eight small rural high schools, and colleges (including 12 partner Oregon colleges)

- 527 low-income junior and senior high school students in east Multnomah County;
- 150 low-income juniors and seniors served throughout the statewide initiative pilot program;
- 823 current college students;
- 14 high schools, 12 districts, and 12 partner colleges are in place; and
- Serve low-income (100%), first generation (90%), students of color (69%), and women (71%)

Excellent Outcomes

- Average ACT increase of 24%;
- In 2018, 96% of seniors completed the financial aid process and were awarded \$1,049,575 in scholarships;
- 97% of high school graduates earned admissions to college; and
- In 2018, 85% enrolled in college immediately, and 82% of first year students persisted to year two.

How we have met and will meet further Oregon needs

- Opportunity – we set high expectations using AmeriCorps coaches creating opportunities for low-income students to persist to graduation through College Possible's innovative and proven approach;
- Equity – we serve primarily students that come from cultural, economic and racially diverse groups, with the majority of students being first generation college students, women and students of color;
- Program Scale – partially due to Oregon's 2015-19 investments in College Possible we more than doubled the number of low-income students served in Oregon; and
- Leverage – the State's investment in other programs will be leveraged by College Possible through not only stronger results for more students, but also through donations from other donors.

Return on Investment (ROI)

The State's investments in College Possible of \$700,000 during the biennium budgets of 2015-17 and 2017-19 was instrumental in our growth and ability to serve more students in Oregon—doubling the number of students served. An investment reduces state and local social costs by breaking the cycle of poverty, including the impacts of multi-generational poverty. For each \$6,000 investment in our students (two years of high school and up to six years of college), graduating from



college vs. high school lowers their risk of unemployment from 5.2 percent to 2.7 percent and increases their annual earning potential from \$32,600 on average to \$56,700 on average (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Additionally, they will likely earn over \$1 million dollars more in their lifetime than their peers who did not earn a bachelor's degree.

Three-year Vision for Strategic Growth

College Possible Portland is poised to scale in the next three years. All three of our programs, core high school, college program and the statewide initiative pilot program have experienced exponential growth over the last few years and we continue to struggle to meet the exceeding demand in our State.

Our three-year vision is to scale our statewide initiative program out of the pilot phase and move into another region in Oregon. We currently serve students in Eastern Oregon, in Umatilla and Morrow Counties, and in the Northwestern corner of the state in Columbia and rural Washington County. We are hoping to deepen our relationship and presence within these communities to serve more students. We are also evaluating the next region of the state to begin serving additional students and are looking towards moving south of Portland Metro – deeper into the Willamette Valley and possibly the northern coast.

At the same time, we expect to continue to grow the core high school program by starting a partnership with the Beaverton School district in Washington County – we will begin recruiting our first class of rising juniors in the spring of 2019 at Aloha High School. We have several communities who have requested our program including: an additional cohort at Reynolds High School, Salem Keizer School District, Tigard School District among others. The college program will continue to grow with each additional graduating high school class and we expect to go from serving 823 college students in the 2018-19 school year to 1,560 college students by 2021. The total number of students we expect to serve in the next three years will grow from 1,488 total students in 2018-19 to 2,450 low-income students across the state of Oregon in 2020-21.

Program Growth Benchmarks

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*	2020-21*
Juniors	170	202	270	265	265	325	365
Seniors	130	159	202	256	250	250	305
Statewide			76	151	150	185	220
College		130	289	491	823	1,125	1,560
Total Students	300	511	842	1163	1488	1,885	2,450
# High Schools	5	5	13	14	14	16	18

*Student numbers for 2019-20 and 2020-21 are projections based on expected growth.



Conclusion

Despite decades of focus on the achievement gap, Oregon has the third lowest high school graduation rate in the country and there are disparities in college enrollment and completion along socioeconomic lines. A recent study found that 69.1% of middle and upper-income high school graduates in Oregon go on to enroll in college, compared to just 50% of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch (US Department of Education, 2015). Additionally, only 12% of low-income students who graduated high school persist all the way through college degree completion. While the causes of the educational attainment gap are complex and interwoven, students from low-income families commonly face similar, multiple barriers to college success. They are frequently first generation college students who do not have access to the resources they need to navigate the complex college admissions process and support them through the social and cultural transitions to college. Rural students in Oregon face additional barriers – they are 10% less likely to enroll in college than their urban peers.

College Possible is interrupting the cycle of poverty for hundreds of low-income youth in Oregon by empowering them to pursue their dreams of higher education. College Possible is a natural partner for the State of Oregon to ensure that all students in Oregon have the same opportunity to earn a college degree no matter their race, zip code or socio-economic status. It is our hope that the State will continue to invest in College Possible programming to ensure that all students have access and the ability to attain the education level they desire.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to Oregon's low-income students. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

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