



# MEMORANDUM

Prepared for: Representative Alonso Leon  
Date: September 2, 2022  
By: Matt Perreault, Analyst  
Re: Task Force Status Report

**LPRO: LEGISLATIVE POLICY AND RESEARCH OFFICE**

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This memo responds to your request for a status update on the Joint Task Force on Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education (JTUSHE).

## SUMMARY

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The Joint Task Force on Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education is a bicameral, bipartisan legislative task force that was created by [House Bill 2590 \(2021\)](#). The task force is charged with visiting public institutions of higher education in order to meet with students who are historically underrepresented in higher education settings, including students who:

- are “underrepresented” and “diverse” as defined in statute;<sup>1</sup>
- are from rural communities;
- are from low-income families;
- experience disability;
- identify with a minority sexual orientation or gender identity;
- are undocumented; or
- have been in foster care.<sup>2</sup>

The task force began holding virtual meetings in November 2021. Each virtual meeting covered one of the topics listed in HB 2590 as priorities for addressing the needs of underrepresented students, including access, retention, graduation, and entry into the workforce.<sup>3</sup> Following the 2022 legislative session, the task force embarked on a series of multi-day site visits at public institutions of higher education around the state.

With the conclusion of the site visit phase in July 2022, the task force will now divide into work groups to reflect on what was learned at the visits and develop policy proposals to address the issues that emerged. The full task force will reconvene in November to consider the work groups’ findings and direct the drafting of a final report due in December. The task force will also request several placeholder legislative concepts (LCs) that it may use to file legislation for the 2023 session.

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<sup>1</sup> [ORS 342.120 \(2021\)](#) defines “underrepresented person” as a person who is Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, or Native American or Alaska Native. [ORS 342.433 \(2021\)](#) defines “diverse” as cultural or linguistic characteristics of a person who is Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Alaska Native, or whose first language is not English.

<sup>2</sup> [House Bill 2590 \(2021\)](#), (1)(3)(a)-(h).

<sup>3</sup> [House Bill 2590 \(2021\)](#), (1)(5)(a)(d).

## **CAMPUS SITE VISITS**

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Immediately following the 2022 legislative session, the task force began its main objective of visiting public institutions of higher education in order to meet with underrepresented students. Each visit consisted of two full-day visits at two campuses in the same region, with one day's events hosted at a public university and the other at a community college. The agenda for each day followed the following format:

1. a roundtable discussion with campus and community leaders, including institutional presidents, board members, K-12 education partners, community-based organizations, and business representatives;
2. a roundtable discussion with members of the campus community, including faculty and staff who work directly with underrepresented students, such as instructors, admissions counselors, mental health practitioners, and academic advisors;
3. small group listening sessions with underrepresented students where students shared their experiences with the task force members;
4. a tour of the campus, featuring facilities and services that serve underrepresented students; and
5. a formal public meeting during which the task force heard comments from students and the public.

### **Portland Metro Area**

The task force's first site visit was to the Portland metropolitan area, hosted by Portland State University on March 30, 2022, and Mt. Hood Community College in Gresham on March 31, 2022, respectively. The task force spent a full day at each campus.

Representatives from other public higher education institutions, including Oregon Health and Science University, Portland Community College, and Oregon Institute of Technology's Wilsonville campus also took part in the roundtable discussions, small group student listening sessions, and public comment periods.

### **Willamette Valley**

The task force spent the morning of April 25, 2022, at Lane Community College in Eugene, where it held back-to-back roundtable discussions, and moved to the University of Oregon for the remainder of the day, consisting of a student listening session, site tour, and public comment period. On the following day, April 26, 2022, the task force visited Western Oregon University in Monmouth, which also featured participants from Oregon State University, Chemeketa Community College, and Linn-Benton Community College.

### **Eastern Oregon**

On May 10, 2022, the task force spent the day at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande. The task force visited Treasure Valley Community College in Ontario the following day. Both meetings featured participants from Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton.

## Southern Oregon

The final site visit was to Southern Oregon University in Ashland on July 20, 2022, and Rogue Community College's Table Rock Campus in White City on July 21, 2022. On both days, the task force was able to meet with students and stakeholders despite the summer break.

## VIRTUAL MEETINGS

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### Central Oregon Virtual Site Visit

Due to the scheduling of Legislative Days in June, the task force was unable to travel to Central Oregon as originally planned. In lieu of a field trip, the task force held an all-day virtual meeting on May 31, 2022, to host representatives and students from Oregon Institute of Technology, Oregon State University-Cascades, Central Oregon Community College, and Klamath Community College. The format of the meeting mirrored that of the site visits, featuring two roundtable discussions, a private listening session with students, a set of presentations by the institutions instead of a site tour, and a virtual public comment period.

### Other Virtual Meetings

In addition to the site visits, the task force held monthly virtual meetings from November 2021 through July 2022. Each meeting consisted primarily of informational presentations that focused on a particular topic, such as the state's equity lens and adult education goals, the role of education in workforce development, financial aid and student debt, and the four topics named in the bill as priorities: access, retention, graduation, and entry into the workforce. Several of these meetings featured national experts as well as representatives from state agencies, institutions, and public comment from students. Below is a brief description of the topics covered at these meetings.

**November 18, 2021.** The task force held its initial organizational meeting to adopt rules and elect a chair. The task force then heard a review of its charge as outlined in HB 2590, followed by the first of two presentations from the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) on principles of equity in policymaking and the current indicators of outcomes for underrepresented students in the state's higher education system.

**December 16, 2021.** The task force heard the second part of the presentation from HECC on principles of equity in policymaking and the current indicators of outcomes for underrepresented students in the state's higher education system. The House Majority Office also presented a proposed communications and outreach strategy to the task force.

**January 10, 2022.** The task force heard an update on the planning work group that met earlier that month. Additionally, staff from the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis presented on the state's workforce needs for the future and current disparities in educational attainment across Oregon's demographic groups. There were also presentations from HECC staff and representatives of Oregon's public higher education institutions.

**April 21, 2022.** The theme for this meeting was underrepresented students' access to higher education. HECC Executive Director, Ben Cannon, presented on college-going rates across the state, the influence of high school advisors, co-requisite models, financial aid applications, and developmental education. Presenters from public universities and community colleges gave their perspectives on admissions criteria and barriers to access.

**May 19, 2022.** The theme for this meeting was affordability, including financial aid and student debt. Dr. Louise Seamster of the University of Iowa presented the challenges students face regarding debt and the cost of pursuing higher education. HECC Executive Director, Ben Cannon, spoke to the task force on the state's current financial aid grant programs. Presenters from public universities and community colleges gave their perspectives on financial aid and the cost of attendance.

**June 16, 2022.** The theme for this meeting was student retention. Dr. Frank Harris III of San Diego State University presented an equitable framework for developing policies that help underrepresented populations. This was followed by presentations from HECC Executive Director, Ben Cannon, and representatives of public higher education institutions on student retention and drop-out rates. The task force also heard an informational presentation on Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) that highlighted which higher education institutions in Oregon are considered MSIs.

**July 14, 2022.** The theme for this meeting was workforce preparation. The task force heard presentations from HECC staff and institutional representatives on graduation rates, the earning potential associated with completing a degree or certificate, and career counseling. This meeting also featured a private virtual listening session with students incarcerated at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville and Snake River Correctional Institution in Malheur County.

## **WORK GROUPS**

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Now that the site visits have concluded, the task force will pause its regular meeting schedule and divide into three work groups. Each work group is co-chaired by two task force members and staffed by the Legislative Policy and Research Office. The purpose of these work groups is to reflect on the themes that emerged during the site visits and deliberate on policy solutions that address the causes of inequitable outcomes for underrepresented students.

A survey was sent out to recruit participants from the pool of individuals who had participated in the planning work group, attended the site visits, or otherwise expressed interest in the work of the task force. Nearly 100 individuals responded to the survey. At the direction of Chair Alonso Leon, membership in each work group was further divided into participants and observers. The work groups will meet from September 2022 through late October 2022 and report findings and policy proposals to the task force at its next full meeting in November.

## **Financial Aid and Affordability**

The work group on financial aid and affordability is co-chaired by Senator Dembrow and Representative Zika. This work group will discuss students' affordability challenges, including financial aid, the cost of attendance, and meeting the cost of basic needs beyond the cost of attendance.

## **Student Support and Wraparound Services**

The work group on student support and wraparound services is co-chaired by Representatives Owens and Ruiz. This work group will discuss programmatic best practices for supporting underrepresented students on campuses, including academic advising, mentoring programs, cultural responsiveness, and mental health supports.

## **Systemic Accountability and Continuous Improvement**

The work group on systemic accountability and continuous improvement is co-chaired by Representative Alonso Leon and Senator Wagner. This work group will discuss the nonprogrammatic elements of improving higher education, including broader issues of culture and climate, integration of the K-12 and higher education systems, and the state's equity and adult education goals.

## **NEXT STEPS**

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Work group meetings will continue throughout September and October 2022. The task force is empowered to pre-session file legislation for the 2023 session.<sup>4</sup> Because the task force will not have final policy recommendations in time for the deadline to request legislative concepts from Legislative Council (September 23, 2022) several placeholder drafts will be requested and submitted.

The next full task force meeting is scheduled for November 17, 2022. At this meeting, the task force will consider the policy proposals submitted by the three work groups. After this meeting, LPRO staff will draft a final report summarizing the process, activities, and recommendations of the task force. In December 2022, the task force will meet one final time to approve the final report and vote to introduce legislative concepts for presession filing.

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<sup>4</sup> [House Bill 2590 \(2021\)](#), (1)(12)(b).