

Submitter: Maren Anderson
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB604

Dear Members of the Oregon State Legislature,

I am writing to express my strong support for the Strong Start Grant program, specifically its funding of the Destination Western initiative at Western Oregon University. This vital program has demonstrated remarkable success in supporting student achievement and retention, making it a worthy investment in Oregon's educational future.

I have taught for Destination Western for two years and seen its effectiveness firsthand. Destination Western is an all-expenses paid ten-day residential program designed to help students build the skills needed to succeed in college-level writing and math as well as get them connected to others socially. I am frequently lucky enough to have these students in my classes during the regular school year, and they always feel better prepared than others in class.

In addition, the data clearly demonstrates the program's effectiveness. Students participating in Destination Western are retained at rates 5-10% higher than their non-participating peers. This significant improvement in retention not only represents individual student success but also reflects a more efficient use of educational resources and state funding.

Also, the program's impact on academic performance is noteworthy. Destination Western participants consistently maintain higher grade point averages while taking larger credit loads compared to their peers. This combination of stronger academic performance and increased course loads is directly contributing to higher on-time graduation rates, helping students enter the workforce in Oregon or pursue advanced degrees more quickly and with less debt.

The program's reach is substantial, with nearly 20% of Western Oregon University's student population benefiting from these initiatives. This broad impact demonstrates both the scalability of the program and its importance to the university's overall educational mission.

The Strong Start Grant program represents exactly the kind of evidence-based investment that can transform educational outcomes in Oregon. By supporting students during their crucial early college experience, we are building a stronger foundation for their academic success and future careers. The program's demonstrated success in improving retention rates, academic performance, and

graduation timelines makes it a model for effective student support.

I urge you to continue supporting and expanding the Strong Start Grant program. The data shows this is not just an investment in Western Oregon University, but an investment in Oregon's future workforce and economic vitality.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Maren Anderson

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