



April 11, 2019

Good evening Co-chairs Smith Warner and Roblan, and members of the Joint Committee on Student Success.

My name is Kenneth Thrasher, and I chair the Oregon Business Council's Education Task Force. I serve on the boards of College Possible and the Children's Institute and have been involved in education policy for 30 years, and was previously Chair of the Quality Education Commission. I am passionate about the role education plays in transforming lives and applaud this committee's efforts to advance education outcomes for Oregonians.

This past year, I chaired a committee for the Oregon Business Plan Steering Committee to develop recommendations on how to invest all along the education continuum to get the best education outcomes for Oregon. Based on this work, my basic message for this summary is clear: please prioritize the funding pools to include investments in post-secondary education as a P-20 continuum to achieve Oregon's 40-40-20 goals and to integrate student post-secondary and career aspirations.

I know that this committee's charge is to improve outcomes for students in K-12 education. And as you looked at your charge, you recognized, quite appropriately, that to improve K-12 results, we need to invest in early learning.

The same is true for higher education. As I have commented previously we have to look at education funding as a continuum, as high-school graduates on average cost the State funding resources. Students need some post-secondary education to not use Oregon's resources.

Imagine you are a low-income student just starting high school, coming from a family where you lose both natural parents in divorces, and living with a step-mother with an eighth grade education and working in an industrial laundry. And you never had an expectation of going to college. I can imagine it clearly – that is my story. Without a workplace mentor like Bill Naito I would have never gone to college.

Young people need to see a path to a promising and rewarding life and career if they are to pursue better educational outcomes. And that path will likely not happen if they just graduate from high school. They need to see promising careers in many fields, especially in science, technology, engineering, and math, and the trades where opportunities are so plentiful. And they need to know they will be able to afford to pursue their dreams as they move beyond high school. Without this hope, high school alone will appear to be an empty promise.

To round out this plan, I recommend that two funding priorities be considered:

First, provide funding to support programs at community colleges and universities that lead to technical and engineering degrees that are in high demand and lead to high incomes. With 430,000 estimated new jobs with high skills and talents needed by 2027, we must align our K-12 and post-secondary systems to meet this demand. Please fund the community college CTE pathway and the ETIC sustaining pathway needs for universities. They need to be funded along with the necessary support for the STEM Hub Network and CTE programs.

Second, increase dual credits and career awareness, and to assure affordable access, add funding for the Oregon Opportunity Grants – with an aim to provide affordable access to any Oregonian graduating from high school into post-secondary education. In addition, ensure that the community college and university support funds are adequately funded to temper tuition increases, and create further access for economically disadvantaged and diverse students.

I greatly appreciate the deep thinking this committee has done addressing the needs of early learning and K-12 education. There is much to like about your work. I think many of us are still reviewing the specifics of this legislation and would like to reserve the opportunity for further reflection. We look forward to engaging as the Student Success Act is developed and would be more than happy to work with you to flesh out this framework and think through the many challenging questions around funding distribution, governance and accountability.

Thank you.