

SB 1551 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Education

Action Date: 02/13/24

Action: Do pass with amendments. Refer to Ways and Means by prior reference. (Printed A-Eng).

Vote: 5-0-0-0

Yeas: 5 - Anderson, Dembrow, Frederick, Gelser Blouin, Weber

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: No revenue impact

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Meeting Dates: 2/8, 2/13

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure allows students who graduated from Oregon high schools between March 1, 2020, and February 28, 2022, who enrolled in college or university for one term or less, and who are otherwise eligible, to receive the Oregon Promise grant for the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 academic years. It declares an emergency, effective on passage.

Detailed Summary:

Requires the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to waive the following requirements for students who graduated from high school or passed a high school equivalency test such as the GED between March 1, 2020, and February 28, 2022, and who enrolled in college or university for up to one term:

- The Oregon Promise eligibility requirement that students must enroll in community college within six months of graduating high school or passing the GED. Applies to students who never applied for or never received the Oregon Promise.
- The Oregon Promise eligibility requirements for continuing eligibility, including making satisfactory academic progress toward a curriculum, degree or program, and enrolling at least half time for at least three consecutive terms in an academic year. Applies to students who received the Oregon Promise and dropped out within one term.

Requires HECC to apply waivers to applications submitted for the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 academic years.

Requires applications to be awarded in accordance with all other current statutes, rules, and policies. Declares an emergency, effective on passage.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Low uptake of the Oregon Promise in 2020 and 2021
- Unknown number of students who might apply for a waiver under the measure
- Cost of the measure
- Challenges of online instruction

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

The amendment replaces Section 1 of the measure. It requires the HECC to offer a one-time waiver to students who received the Oregon Promise and dropped out within one term, in addition to students who never applied for or never received the Oregon Promise. It limits eligibility for both waivers to students who were enrolled in college or university for one term or less.

BACKGROUND:

The Oregon Promise program was created by [Senate Bill 81 \(2015\)](#) and is the state's second-largest, state-funded financial aid program. Oregon Promise grants are available to Oregon high school graduates or students who pass

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a high school equivalency exam such as the General Educational Development (GED) test, subject to certain eligibility requirements, and provides financial assistance for tuition and fees at Oregon community colleges. The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) administers the program and issues a [biennial report](#) that analyzes the program's progress and impact. [ORS 341.522](#), which governs the Oregon Promise program, requires students to enroll in community college courses within six months of graduating high school or passing an equivalency test. It also requires a student to remain continuously enrolled in community college or lose their eligibility for the Oregon Promise.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, colleges and universities saw a dramatic decline in enrollment nationwide. According to data from the [National Student Clearinghouse](#), the decline was greatest among community colleges, which saw a 8.7 percent decrease in enrollment in fall 2020 and a further 6.9 percent decrease in fall 2021. In Oregon, the total number of students attending Oregon community colleges declined from 115,104 in 2019 to 88,247 in 2020, and continued to decline in 2021 and 2022, according to [student data from HECC](#). A HECC report on [2023 enrollment trends](#) showed that while enrollment at Oregon community colleges is rising, with a 7.3 percent increase in total enrollment and a 5.8 percent increase in full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment in fall 2023, enrollment numbers remain below pre-pandemic levels.