



## Computer Science

Oregon State University, Cascades  
1500 SW Chandler St  
Bend, Oregon 97702

P 541-322-3100  
oregonstate.edu

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Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

I am writing to express my **strong support for Senate Bill 541**, which is essential for ensuring that all Oregon students have access to foundational computer science education. As an **Associate Professor of Practice at Oregon State University-Cascades**, I have seen firsthand the impact that computing education has on students' future opportunities and the critical need to broaden participation in this subject.

Computer science influences nearly every aspect of our lives—from the news and entertainment we consume to the ways we communicate and make financial decisions. Algorithms now play a role in determining who qualifies for home loans, gains admission to college, and even secures employment. This raises crucial questions: Who builds these technologies? Who are they designed for? How do they affect people, communities, and the world? Regardless of career path, every student should move beyond simply using technology to understanding how technology works and how to leverage it for personal and societal benefit. **Every 21st-century learner** should have the opportunity to create technology and critically examine its impact on their lives, communities, and the world.

Despite its growing importance, **computer science participation in Oregon remains alarmingly low**, especially among students historically underrepresented in STEM fields. According to **2021-2022 Oregon Department of Education data**:

- **Only 6%** of high school students are enrolled in foundational computer science courses.
- **Only 3%** of high school girls take these courses.
- **Only 112** American Indian/Alaska Native students, **83** Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students, and **211** Black students are enrolled.
- Out of **44,000 Hispanic or Latino/a high school students in Oregon**, **only 2,000** are enrolled.
- Access to computer science varies drastically by geography, with urban schools offering **twice as many** courses as rural schools.

**Senate Bill 541 is critical** in ensuring that underrepresented students are not left behind. In recent years, Oregon has taken important steps toward expanding computer science education. The Governor's Education Emergency Relief (GEER) Fund supported the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) in developing a **Statewide CS Implementation Plan**, aiming to provide every public school student with access to computer science by the 2027-2028 school year. However, without this bill, implementation will stall, wasting years of planning and once again **delaying opportunities for students who need them most**.

Oregon risks **falling behind the national momentum** for computer science education. Forty states have already passed legislation funding computer science, and just last year, 26 states made new investments in expanding access. Thirty states now require all high schools to offer computer science, and eight states mandate that all students take it as a graduation requirement.

The benefits of computer science education are clear. A Brookings study found that taking a high school computer science course **increases a student's likelihood of earning a bachelor's degree in the field by five percentage points**. High-quality CS courses in high school also **raise employment rates by 2.6 percentage points** and **increase annual earnings by 8%**—even for students who do not pursue a CS-related career.

I urge you to support **Senate Bill 541** and help create a future where all Oregon students have the opportunity to engage with and shape the technology that defines their world.

**Sincerely,**

*Jill Hubbard*

Jill Hubbard  
Associate Professor of Practice, Computer Science  
Oregon State University, Cascades