

My name is Michael Gwynn, and I am an Officer of Administration at the University of Oregon and have been working alongside the Strong Start funded Summer Bridge Program. I am writing in support of SB 604: The Strong Start Program at Oregon's Public Universities, which will give underrepresented students the support they need to find success as they start their journey in higher education by giving them an early start and providing additional resources to get them off on the right track.

The first year of college is often one of the most challenging periods for students, particularly for those who are the first in their families to attend college, come from underrepresented backgrounds, or face financial hardships. The Strong Start Program provides essential resources such as academic advising, peer mentorship, and access to critical academic support services. These components help students adjust to university life and lay the foundation for academic and career success.

By investing in SB 604, Oregon is committing to equitable access to education, ensuring that students from all backgrounds can thrive and flourish. Research at the University of Oregon consistently shows that students participating in these structured support programs during their first year are more likely to persist in their studies and complete their degrees. Strong Start funding has helped increase the retention of first-generation, Pell-eligible, and BIPOC students. Beyond retention, those same students had higher GPA and credit accumulation rates compared non-participants. The programs funded by Strong Start have had direct impacts on narrowing long-standing equity gaps for these students in their first year in college.

We also survey our participants to assess their perspective on the benefit of participating in the Strong Start funded Summer Bridge programs. Over the last two cohorts:

- 84% felt an increase in confidence leading up to the first week of classes.
- 83% were more connected to university faculty and staff.
- 92% understood and were more confident about accessing campus resources.
- 92% saw an increase in their preparedness for college-level courses.
- 100% reported an increase in knowledge of campus resources.

Strong Start has a direct impact on students, positively changing their social capital and empowering them to navigate the landscape of higher education at the University of Oregon. Please continue funding and expanding the Strong Start Program so that more students can benefit from its impactful services. Your leadership and commitment to education will help ensure that Oregon's public universities remain places of opportunity, inclusion, and achievement. Thank you for your time, and I hope I can count on your support of SB 604, the Strong Start Program!

Sincerely,



Michael Gwynn
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