

Submitter: Kennedy Schade
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB604

As someone who has seen first hand the immense benefits of programs like Strong Start, I write today in support of SB 604. My name is Kennedy Schade and I currently serve as the Assistant Director of Academic Support in the office of Student Success and Advising at Western Oregon University. When I joined WOU in 2022, they had a program called "Destination Western" which was supported by Strong Start funding. Fresh into my position and new to the culture at WOU, I helped serve as a professional staff member for our Destination Western program. I am proud to say I have served as a professional staff member to assist with Destination Western every year since I started at WOU and have loved every minute of it. I work with a lot of groups and departments at WOU and have the pleasure of interacting with so many students -- when I say that what happens through Destination Western has immeasurable positive impacts on our community and student body, I am not exaggerating. From a numbers standpoint, students who participate in Destination Western are retained at a rate 5-10% higher than the general student population. Destination Western participants also on average carry higher credit loads and maintain stronger GPA growth than their peers, which gets them closer to the end goal of graduation.

The numbers speak for themselves which is more than enough justification for why Strong Start should be supported but what cannot be boiled into numbers is the depth of belonging that comes from participating in Destination Western. I work with many students through Destination Western; many with varying degrees of readiness for the collegiate experience. Some bond with others and get the ropes right away but many are apprehensive or nervous and need connection with community and resources. Destination Western provides this in a way I have never seen at a collegiate level. The New Student and Family Programs team at WOU has created a program that does so much incredible work (deeply emotional and meaningful work) in such a short period of time. They help get students off on the right foot and through programs like Destination Western, put creation of community at the forefront of WOU's mission. I am greatly in support of any bills that would make programs like this possible because without them, our university would lack the strong community presence it currently has -- a quality that makes me very grateful to be part of this team.

I hope that SB 604 is supported -- I have tried in these brief words above to show what programs like this mean to our community but a small testimony truly cannot do it justice. Thank you for the consideration -- it is because of efforts like Strong Start

that not only first-generation and under-represented students benefit, but that our entire university community can continue to grow and thrive. Thank you for your time.