

Submitter: Cheryl Beaver, Mathematics Professor, WOU

Committee: Senate Committee on Education

Re: SB 604

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I write in strong support of SB604. As a mathematics professor who teaches in the Destination Western bridge program, funded by Strong Start, I can attest to the impact of the program on student success. I firmly believe this program provides a valuable foundation for navigating the challenges of college life. Our curriculum is carefully designed to acclimate students to the campus environment, familiarizing them with essential resources like Canvas, our on-campus tutoring services, and the unwritten rules of classroom engagement. We not only reinforce the critical mathematics and writing skills, but we also explicitly teach them soft skills like how to interact effectively with professors, turn in homework online, where to find buildings, how to collaborate successfully in groups, etc. The mathematics course culminates in a poster project presented to a large audience – a unique experience that most students don't encounter until later in their academic careers. I am confident that students completing the program not only feel more confident in the critical skills of writing and mathematics, but also see themselves as an academic who can be successful.

My belief in the program's effectiveness isn't just anecdotal; it's supported by compelling data. Strong Start's impact is evident in several key areas:

1. **Retention:** Destination Western/Strong Start students demonstrate a 5-10% higher retention rate compared to their non-participating peers.
2. **Academic Performance:** These students, on average, carry greater credit loads while simultaneously maintaining stronger GPA growth, setting them on a path toward more timely graduation.
3. **Reach:** Nearly 20% of WOU students have already benefited from the Destination Western/Strong Start program, underscoring its significant contribution to our student body.

I strongly encourage you to continue support of this valuable program.