

Submitter: Shelby Worthing
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB604

I write with unwavering support for SB604 because I have seen firsthand the profound impact of the programs funded by the Strong Start Funds on Oregon's most at-risk students. This program isn't just about academics—it's about equity, empowerment, and ensuring every student has a real chance to succeed in college, no matter their background.

For many of our students, Strong Start is the bridge between uncertainty and confidence. It provides a critical foundation, not just for navigating coursework but for understanding how to thrive in a college environment. The curriculum goes beyond reinforcing essential math and writing skills; it teaches students how to navigate campus, engage with professors, submit assignments online, and collaborate effectively with their peers. These are the skills that can make or break a student's college experience.

The data speaks for itself:

- Higher Retention: Students in the program are 5-10% more likely to stay in school compared to their peers.
- Stronger Academic Performance: They take on higher credit loads while maintaining stronger GPA growth, putting them on track for timely graduation.
- Wide-Reaching Impact: Nearly 20% of WOU students have already benefited from this program, a testament to its importance in our community.

But beyond the numbers, the human impact is undeniable. I have seen students walk into this program feeling lost and unsure, only to leave with a sense of belonging, capability, and hope for their future. These programs level the playing field, ensuring that higher education is truly accessible to everyone—not just those who already know how to navigate it.

I urge you to continue supporting this invaluable program. The future of countless students depends on it.