

Submitter: Michelle Batchelor  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB604

Dear Senate Committee Members,

I am writing in strong support of SB 604, which would establish a Strong Start program for first-year students at Oregon's public universities. As a multi-generation Oregonian and a first-generation college student myself, I understand the challenges these students face in transitioning from high school to higher education. I benefited significantly from access to public higher education, and I believe Strong Start programs are crucial for supporting other first-generation students in making that critical leap.

These programs have a proven positive impact on student success. At Western Oregon University (WOU), where I serve as Dean of Library and Academic Innovation, our Strong Start program, Destination Western, demonstrates this impact clearly. Participants are retained at a rate 5-10% higher than their peers who do not participate. They also carry greater credit loads and achieve stronger GPA growth, leading to higher rates of on-time graduation.

WOU serves a significant population of first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented Oregonians, and nearly 20% of our students have benefited from Destination Western. SB 604 will allow WOU and other public universities to replicate this success, expanding access to support and upward mobility for students across the state. I urge you to support this important legislation.