

Submitter: Kella Helyer
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB604

Hello, as the Director of Financial Aid at Western Oregon University, I can unequivocally state that the Strong Start Program at WOU has changed student lives for the better. The program started just after the COVID pandemic and was a much needed lifeline for students to re-engage academically after the tumultuous COVID years. However, what we found in addition to these students showing great progress in their courses and that they were better retained, it also engaged them with their peers, connected them to the university, and academically jump started them for the year and years to come. The students in this program are much more engaged than regularly admitted students who go through a Welcome Week program. They feel like they are apart of the university and have bought into their success. A little bit of early connection has made all the difference for the students in this program and I know that if we can continue to support and grow this program, we will see even better results. Western Oregon University has made great progress utilizing the funds for this program and is exactly what our population of students need and greatly benefit from.