

Submitter: Tandy Tillinghast
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB604
Updated Letter:

Dear Oregon Legislator,

My name is Tandy Tillinghast and I am an Assistant Professor, NTT at Western Oregon University. I am writing today to request that you support the continuation of STRONG START funding for Oregon Universities with Senate Bill 604.

Over the last four+ years working as a Writing Instructor for Start Start and Destination Western at Western Oregon University I have seen the power of the program in shaping the success of students. These students, often first generation, develop relationships with faculty and staff, understand and learn the supports available on our campus and in turn aid other peers.

Even in students who I don't see until three to six terms later, in a first term writing course, strengths in their writing remain identifiable based on this short intensive program.

Most importantly, these students have self advocacy skills from participating in Strong Start that affect their success throughout university and beyond. The relationships, supports and leadership of students forged during Strong Start flourish during their university progress.

Students, especially rural, low-income, BIPOC, and otherwise underrepresented students need greater support than ever to start their college education, as the disruption of learning that occurred during the pandemic continues to impact college readiness. Students and their families need help investing in themselves by accessing higher education, and you can make sure that happens by supporting the funding to higher education and supporting their successful transition to college by creating a stable funding structure for Strong Start.

Using a gradual release of responsibility framework and scaffolding techniques, Destination Western helps students transition into higher education with additional support and resources. By participating in a summer orientation program that offers students intentional activities and resources, they are able to create meaningful friendships, build a lasting community and create a foundation for their academic journeys.

Furthermore, as we emerge from the pandemic, it is crucial to recognize the unique

challenges that students have faced over the past few years. Many students experienced learning disruptions during remote learning, dealt with mental health issues related to isolation, and experienced disruptions in their personal and family lives that often led to financial distress.

Therefore, we urge you to consider increasing funding for programs that provide mental health support and other resources to help students recover from the pandemic's effects.

I urge you to support the stable funding of Strong Start. It was a great way for students to get acclimated back into in person learning post pandemic and continues to be an integral program to serve underrepresented students in their transition to college. These programs show results, and with stable funding we hope to show you increased graduation rates in addition to the early data.

For all these reasons, I SUPPORT STRONG START FUNDING with Senate Bill 604.

I am happy to discuss this issue further and answer any questions you might have.

Thank you again for your support of Oregon students and institutions.

Much gratitude and be well,

Tandy

Tillinghast