



Testimony on HB 2421
House Higher Education and Workforce Development
Committee

March 11, 2025

Chair Hudson, Vice Chairs Fragala and Harbick, and members of the Committee. My name is Kyle Thomas, and I am the Director of Legislative and Policy Affairs for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 2421. HECC has no position on the bill.

HECC, in collaboration with the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), community colleges, public universities, and school districts, has been working to remove barriers and streamline the transition from high school to postsecondary education for Oregon students.

Overview of Direct Admissions in Oregon

In recent years, Oregon has made significant strides in expanding postsecondary access and equity through direct admissions, an initiative designed to proactively admit high school seniors to college based on predetermined criteria, such as GPA, instead of navigating a complex application process. By automatically notifying eligible students of their college acceptance, the program seeks to reduce barriers, particularly for historically underrepresented students, first-generation students, and those who may not see themselves as college-bound.

This work has been guided by research and legislative action, including Senate Bill 1552 (2022), which emphasized the need for state-supported pathways into postsecondary education, particularly for low-income, BIPOC, and rural students. Since its inception, Oregon has looked toward successful programs in Idaho, Minnesota, and other states, demonstrating that proactive admissions can increase college-going rates and early FAFSA completion.

Key accomplishments and progress so far include:

- **Statewide Workgroup Formation:** HECC and ODE have convened a direct admissions workgroup consisting of representatives from K-12 schools, community colleges, public universities, and other education stakeholders. This group is actively shaping policies, data-sharing processes, and communication strategies.
- **Data and System Development:** HECC and ODE are creating a centralized state data system to securely integrate high school transcript data and support the direct admissions process.
- **Early pilots and discussions with early-adopter institutions and regions,** such as Eastern Oregon University and regional school districts, Southern Oregon University and Medford District, and Portland Community College and David Douglas School District.

Perspectives on Potential Impact

While Oregon's direct admissions program still in its early phases, national research and state pilots indicate:

- Increase college-going rates: States implementing direct admissions have seen a rise in immediate college enrollment particularly among low-income and first-generation students.
- Higher FAFSA completion: When students know they've already been admitted to college, they are more likely to complete FAFSA, increasing their access to financial aid.
- Reduced Equity Gaps: Direct admissions minimizes application barriers that disproportionately impact underrepresented students.

Future Goals and Challenges

HECC recognizes that implementing direct admissions statewide requires long-term collaboration, data coordination, and funding for outreach and infrastructure. Key challenges include:

- Ensuring districts, community colleges, and public universities have the resources to support implementation.
- Developing a sustainable funding model for long-term success.
- Refining communication strategies to ensure that students, families, and counselors understand and engage with direct admissions.

HECC remains committed to aligning policy, data, and outreach efforts as we continue work to build out the direct admissions initiative established in 2022.