



Senator Michael E. Dembrow Senator Betsy Johnson
Senate District 23 Senate District 16

November 11, 2020

Dear HECC Commissioners and Director Cannon:

We are writing because we feel strongly that revisions to the Student Success and Completion Model (SSCM) should not be finalized at this time.

We understand and support your commitment to evaluate the formula every five years. This regular review is critical to assuring accountability for public investment in higher education. We agree that we must tie investments to the right outcomes, and we must align investments with our state's vision and goals for higher education.

We appreciate how much time and thought has gone into the proposal before you today. We understand that it is driven by the pursuit of fairness and equity. We agree that the current formula is complicated and needs to be streamlined and updated.

However, we are not confident that the current proposal will achieve those goals at this time. The proposed changes represent a shift in policy that may have unintended consequences given the continued uncertainty of our state economy and the global public health crisis impacting our state, universities, and communities.

Given these unpredictable variables to our economic landscape, and with an upcoming legislative session that will require a number of difficult budgetary decisions, we ask the HECC to tread very carefully before making changes to the formula distribution. Legislators will need to feel fully confident that the dollars we eventually allocate will be distributed in a way that will fully achieve the desired outcomes. They will need to feel that you have thoroughly reviewed the consequences of the changes you are considering in both their short-term context as well as under various plausible long-term scenarios.

To that end, we request that you brief the Senate Education Committee on the current draft proposal at its next meeting on December 7. It's important that you do so before taking any final steps to adopt this new policy.

This will give legislators the opportunity to understand the goals and details of the proposal and to get answers to any questions they may have. We know that they will want to hear how these changes will create better pathways to opportunity for all students, including BIPOC students and others seeking to overcome barriers to access in nontraditional fields. We also know that they will want to hear about potential negative impacts on institutions and students and how those can be addressed as the new model is finalized and eventually adopted.

As legislators committed to the growth and success of higher education, we want to partner with the HECC and universities to make improvements to access, affordability, and attainment for all Oregon students. If there are some universities that need additional assistance this next year because of natural disasters or challenges that have compounded over time, we should work together to address those short-term gaps on behalf of Oregon's students. Looking longer term, we believe strongly that much more work must occur to determine a strategic path for higher education in Oregon, including funding sources for higher education.

Commissioners, we do not make this request lightly, but it is important that we do so. Please do not cause unnecessary disruption at a time of such uncertainty and vulnerability for our students. Please work with us on stabilizing access and affordability and developing a smart, strategic path forward for higher education and the students we serve - and need to be serving - in our public universities.

Senator Betsy Johnson, Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair, Senate Education Committee