



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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Senate Democrats support access to higher education for ‘Post-Graduate Scholars’

SB 1537 allows high school students to enroll in community college programs

SALEM – Oregon Senate Democrats today voted to establish criteria by which school districts can establish “Post-Graduate Scholar” programs to help certain students get a running start at college.

Senate Bill 1537 passed the Senate floor by a 28-0 vote, allowing school districts to receive and spend some State School Fund dollars to support Post-Graduate Scholar programs. These programs allow certain students who have already satisfied the requirements for a high school diploma to earn community college credits while staying connected to important support systems and resources within their school district.

“When the Senate Education Committee took testimony on the Post-Graduate Scholar bill, a Eugene student named Devin pleaded, ‘Please! Let me have my chance!’” said the bill’s sponsor, Sen. Sara Gelsler (D-Corvallis). “With its vote today, the Oregon State Senate told alternative education students like Devin that we are committed to his future. The Post-Graduate Scholar Program has already succeeded in boosting high school graduation rates by double digits for at risk kids in places like Corvallis. I’m so grateful that districts will be able to continue this truly transformational work that puts struggling kids on track for successful and independent lives.”

Oregon statutes currently allow districts to operate “fifth-year” programs, wherein students delay graduation and remain enrolled in their school districts while attending community

college, with the district covering some or all of their tuition, fees and book costs. Senate Bill 1537 addresses concerns around the costs associated with those fifth-year programs by defining specific programs as “Post-Graduate Scholar” programs and establishing new, narrowed parameters for operating them.

Districts wishing to facilitate a Post-Graduate Scholars program must dedicate staff to help support students; must demonstrate other specific efforts to promote a college-going culture; and must have clear policies and strategies in place to improve high school graduation rates. To be eligible for a qualifying program, students must first apply for the Oregon Promise tuition assistance program and complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

State School Fund dollars received by school districts with Post-Graduate Scholar programs will be reduced over the next few years, and both the Oregon Department of Education and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission are required to report on the participation rates and associated costs of Post-Graduate Scholar programs. The bill comes with a commitment to return during the 2019 Legislative session, in order to assess alternative funding recommendations and other programmatic considerations for the continued operation of these programs.

SB 1537 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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