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Ways & Means approves \$703M for community colleges

SALEM, Ore. – The Oregon Legislature’s Joint Committee on Ways & Means today approved Senate Bill 5528, the agency budget for the state’s Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) for the 2021-2023 biennium, which includes \$703 million for the Community College Support Fund (CCSF). This amount exceeds the colleges’ current service level by \$1 million, and is the largest amount ever allocated to the CCSF by legislators. It’s also \$62 million over what was in the Governor’s Recommended Budget announced in December 2020 for the CCSF.

“Oregon’s community colleges are appreciative of the legislative plan to fully fund our current service level at \$703 million,” said Cam Preus, Executive Director of the Oregon Community College Association (OCCA), which represents the 17 publicly-funded community colleges at the state level. “It is just a bit higher than what we proposed to the Governor and Legislature. With this level of funding, colleges can continue to serve their communities in providing affordable and high-quality education, as well as hold tuition at an affordable level. Funding at current service level and the planned boost in funding for Oregon’s need-based financial aid program – the Oregon Opportunity Grant – to \$200 million, is welcome news indeed.”

The Oregon Opportunity Grant, which supports thousands of students with need-based financial aid, received an increase of more than \$28 million over the current biennium to fund the program at \$200 million for the next biennium. This will keep tuition more affordable for Oregonians, many of whom are some of the state’s most underrepresented and underserved populations.

OCCA and state’s community colleges advocated for at least \$702 million for the CCSF, telling legislators throughout the 2021 Legislative Session that the increase is imperative to keep community colleges as the affordable option for access to higher education in Oregon, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic caused financial hardship for many Oregonians. In addition, community colleges are serving as Oregon’s economic recovery first responders, offering shorter-term programs directed at getting unemployed Oregonians retrained and back to work as quickly as possible.

OCCA worked with the 17 colleges since the start of the session to get these messages to legislators through a variety of ways, including the value and importance of Career Technical Education (CTE) during National CTE Month in February, student voices during National Community College Month in April, and the critical importance of partnerships with local business and industries in May.

SB 5528 now heads to the House and Senate floors for approval.

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