January 28, 2022

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OCCA to advocate for cybersecurity funding, Future Ready Oregon proposal during February Legislative Session

SALEM, Ore. – Oregon Community College Association (OCCA) is preparing for the start of the February short Legislative Session and its advocacy efforts on behalf of the state's 17 community colleges. OCCA's legislative agenda hones in on three key areas: one-time funding for cybersecurity protection measures for the colleges, support for the Governor's Future Ready Oregon 2022 proposal, and updates to the Oregon Promise program.

"OCCA looks forward to advocating on behalf of the colleges during the short Session," said OCCA Executive Director Morgan Cowling. "Future Ready Oregon could provide important programs to underrepresented students, and cybersecurity is a growing and critical threat to our institutions that must be addressed immediately to protect our colleges and student and employee data. We also believe important changes to the Oregon Promise's GPA requirement and minimum awards will better serve the students most in need of this financial support."

Cybersecurity – $5.1 million in one-time funds
OCCA's one-time $5.1 million cybersecurity request would fund training, security gap analysis and resolution, and upgrades to current systems to protect institutions from cybersecurity attacks. Colleges plan to hire a contractor to assist with advanced email protection and data recovery in the event of an attack. Each college would be allotted up to $300,000 to begin addressing this unprecedented challenge.

Funds would support:
- Training for college staff in vulnerability management, security awareness and phishing awareness;
- Artificial Intelligence tool to protect against fraudulent account creation;
- Outsourced email protection and data recovery;
- Additional staffing to support cybersecurity protection; and
- Data loss prevention.

Ransomware attacks and cyberthreats have become significant operations concerns for community colleges and universities around the country over the past several years and have become more pronounced with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. These threats and attacks aim to hold institutional, employee and student data hostage for ransom money or to take this personal data for monetary gain. This means cybersecurity is of the utmost importance for institutional operations. In addition, most colleges do not have the in-house capacity or expertise to manage cybersecurity, even though it's as much

a cost of doing business now as keeping the lights on.

As of January 2022, Microsoft reported that education is the most targeted sector for malware attacks. There has been a 300% increase in these attacks on institutions nationwide over the past year. Oregon has not been immune to these attacks as several institutions have been victims of malware attacks.

Future Ready Oregon 2022 (SB 1545)
Oregon Governor Kate Brown's Future Ready Oregon 2022 proposal seeks a $200 million investment in the state's workforce system to utilize existing infrastructure to expedite short-term solutions while addressing inequities in the workforce system. The proposal includes $92.5 million to expand existing programs. Of that amount, $17 million would be dedicated to community colleges for Career Pathways Programs, and colleges would also be eligible for $10 million in Credit for Prior Learning. These programs have shown to successfully provide career-connected learning opportunities for historically underserved communities.

In addition, Future Ready Oregon also allocates $95 million for Competitive Workforce Grants to provide individuals, organizations, and service providers resources and supports to remove barriers and improve access to the workforce system, and connecting key populations to job training, employment, and career advancement priorities. Community colleges would be eligible to apply for these grants.

Future Ready Oregon 2022 combines General Fund and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to facilitate immediate outcomes in the current biennium (2021-23) and maximize extended opportunities through ARPA-funded investments. Services through Future Ready Oregon 2022 are expected to be made available for initial implementation during the 2022-23 academic year.

Oregon Promise Updates
The Oregon Promise is a state grant that helps to cover tuition costs at any Oregon community college for recent high school graduates and GED® test graduates. It currently requires a minimum GPA of 2.5, and Pell Grant-eligible students receive a minimum of $1,000 annually. Currently, these requirements have made it difficult for low-income students – those the Oregon Promise was originally intended to support – to quality. A recent presentation from the Higher Education Coordinating Commission that showed how the Oregon Promise as it stands directly undermines statewide equity goals.

The proposed updates would decrease the GPA requirement to 2.0 and double the minimum award to Pell-eligible students to $2,000. Making these updates will ensure that low-income students and those with fewer resources will have access to an education at Oregon's community colleges.

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