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2022 Legislative Session ends with support for Career Pathways

SALEM, Ore. – The 2022 Legislative Session ended earlier today, and Oregon Community College Association (OCCA) ended its advocacy during the Session with positive news regarding Career Pathways funding and several policy-related issues.

SB 1545 – the Governor’s \$200 million Future Ready Oregon proposal – received overwhelming support in both the House and Senate and was sent to the Governor’s desk for signature on March 3. The bill puts \$95.5 million in existing funds and another nearly \$95 million from other sources to give Oregonians the education, training and resources needed to get into good-paying careers. Much of OCCA’s advocacy was centered around the investment for Career Pathways (\$14.9 million) for funding between now and the start of the next biennium (2023-25) and ensuring \$10 million of ongoing investment in that program into the 2023-25 biennium. Career Pathways was one of the only programs to receive ongoing funding. Each college is expected to receive a base of \$300,000, with the remainder going out to the colleges based on the funding formula through the Higher Education Coordinating Commission’s (HECC’s) Office of Community College and Workforce Development (CCWD). Career Pathways programs offer fast-track certificate programs for students and have shown great success in community colleges throughout the state. These programs support historically underserved communities through integrated education and training programs. The program boasts a statewide graduation rate of 89%.

In addition to the Career Pathways funding in SB 1545, community colleges are also eligible to apply for a competitive grant for Credit for Prior Learning, which received \$10 million in one-time funding. Oregon’s universities also are eligible for this funding.

“OCCA appreciates that legislators and the Governor recognize the critical value community colleges have in providing Oregonians with strong pathways to good careers with the passage of Future Ready Oregon (HB 1545),” said OCCA Board of Directors President Stephen Crow. “This was an important step forward in supporting successful community college programs that benefit Oregon’s recovering economy.”

In addition to Future Ready Oregon, OCCA also tracked and advocated for several other key bills during the 2022 Session.

Some key changes to the Oregon Promise program, which provides tuition waiver grants to students



who have recently graduated high school or obtained a GED, were made during the Session with the passage of the Education Omnibus Bill, SB 1522. This bill approved changing the minimum GPA requirement from 2.5 to 2.0, eliminating the \$50 copay for students, and doubling the minimum award for Pell-eligible students from \$1,000 to \$2,000. These changes will allow the Oregon Promise to serve the more low-income, under-represented students it was originally intended to support. The Oregon Promise has shown success so far, with 75% of recipients returning to community colleges for a second year of the program. Oregon Promise students thus far have tended to be women and Hispanic/Latinx.

SB 1522 also approved changes to the part-time faculty healthcare bill that passed in 2021. That bill originally required colleges to have a twice-annual verification process for insurance eligibility, which was a significant strain on college human resource offices and made access to the insurance benefits more difficult for part-time faculty. The updates in SB 1522 changed that verification process to just once annually, in line with other insurance eligibility verification. This was a win-win for both faculty and college HR offices.

Several community colleges also received funding for projects in HB 5202 – the Omnibus Spending Bill – as part of the \$100 million Rural Infrastructure Package brokered with rural legislators.

OCCA has some unfinished business including a budget request for cybersecurity investments to ensure that student and employee data at colleges is protected. OCCA will continue to work on this important issue during the interim and into the 2023 Legislative Session.

OCCA would like to extend its appreciation to all 17 colleges, their presidents, boards, staff, students and community advocates for their support and work during this Session to advance and promote community college priorities, as well as reach out to legislators.

“OCCA receives a tremendous amount of support from the colleges we serve throughout the Session,” said OCCA Executive Director Morgan Cowling. “Without their efforts, OCCA could not be as successful in its advocacy.”

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