

2023-25 Budget Ask

Summary:

The COVID-19 pandemic caused profound disruptions for community college students, the colleges, and their employees. Since the pandemic, Oregon's community colleges have continued to adapt and innovate to meet the rapidly changing needs and circumstances of their students and their communities.

Key Points:

Colleges Served Students Through the Challenges of the Pandemic

Community colleges serve students at all education and skill levels, educating students with the greatest barriers to attaining post-secondary education and training, and this population seems to have faced some of the most significant disruptions from the pandemic.

Nationwide, community colleges saw historic declines in enrollment during the pandemic as students struggled with access to online learning and took on additional family responsibilities such as childcare and at-home education. In Oregon 11 of 17 colleges lost more than 20 percent of enrollment since 2019.

As enrollment dropped, demand increased dramatically for student services including advising, coaching, basic needs support (food, housing, etc.), mental health and counseling. Students had to choose between meeting basic needs or completing an education.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, colleges made a rapid shift to online learning and have invested in high-flex classrooms that allow students to attend in-person or online.

Oregon's community colleges never stopped meeting the needs of their students, ensuring that essential CTE programs critical to Oregon's workforce continued and students had access to supports noted above to continue their educations.

Colleges Are Adapting to Changing Educational and Economic Needs

The pandemic-related declines in enrollment appear to have subsided and colleges that went fully online during the pandemic are seeing big increases in in-person enrollment, but students want more flexibility in how, when and where they learn.

While colleges are seeing decreases in students transferring directly from high school or university, they are seeing more demand from adults seeking career and technical education (CTE) programs and for non-credit workforce-related certificates that lead directly to a job.



TALKING POINTS

This creates a fiscal challenge for colleges because CTE and workforce-related programs tend to be more expensive to offer while lower division transfer programs are usually much less expensive. *(Talk about CTE and non-credit certificate programs you may be adding or are seeing growth).*

Demographically the number of high school students is decreasing statewide. Adults with some college but no certificate or degree are the largest group when looking at Oregonians by education levels. Community colleges are best positioned to serve these learners.

Typically, community college enrollment runs counter-cyclical to unemployment. When unemployment is high, enrollment surges and low unemployment leads to an enrollment decline at colleges. If unemployment increases colleges will need program capacity to help workers retrain and get back into the workforce.

Colleges Are Asking for State to Partner in Confronting Fiscal Challenges

Pandemic shutdowns created significant declines in enrollment revenue to colleges. Federal relief dollars helped make up for this gap, but those dollars are now gone, and colleges are facing a fiscal cliff.

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) has recommended the state invest an additional \$155 million in state funding (an increase of 20 percent for the biennium) to cover the increased costs for community colleges.

The HECC is recommending an additional \$50 million in one-time spending for the colleges to transition to a lower statewide enrollment base while trying to meet changing student needs. For example, if a college cuts a program, they first try to “teach out” the existing students in the program which means they will need some transition funding to support that effort.

Colleges are asking the legislature in the 2023 Session to support the HECC request of \$155 million in ongoing funding and at least \$50 million in one-time funding for the 2023-25 biennium.

To fully maintain all current capacity, colleges would actually require an ongoing biennial increase in state support of 44 percent (roughly \$305 million for the biennium).

