



January 13, 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OCCA to advocate for funding, BSN, student aid in 2023 Legislative Session

SALEM, Ore. – Oregon Community College Association (OCCA) is preparing for the start of the 82nd Oregon Legislative Assembly and its advocacy efforts on behalf of the state’s 17 community colleges. OCCA’s legislative agenda focuses on three key areas: an increase to the Community College Support Fund, allowing community colleges to offer Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degrees, and an increase to the Oregon Opportunity Grant.

“OCCA looks forward to advocating on behalf of the colleges during the 2023 Legislative Session,” said OCCA Executive Director Morgan Cowling. “Our priorities for the Session are intended to support colleges and students as we transition out of the pandemic and meet the increasing needs of our students, such as college affordability.”

Community College Support Fund

OCCA supports the Higher Education Coordinating Commission’s (HECC’s) recommendation of 20.1 percent above the current Community College Support Fund (CCSF) increasing the ongoing funding for the CCSF from \$699 million to \$855 million.

The HECC recognized the severe effect the COVID-19 pandemic had on community college students and their ability to enroll in post-secondary education and training resulting in dramatic losses in tuition revenue. While colleges would need a roughly 44 percent increase to fully maintain current services and capacity, the HECC recommendation provides a funding base from which colleges can continue to meet their students’ and communities’ changing needs. However, at the HECC-recommended funding level, many colleges will still be making program reductions that are reflective of reduced enrollment and tuition revenue as well higher-than-usual inflationary cost increases.

“Colleges have been responding to dramatic changes in the needs of their students and communities while also dealing with operational challenges still lingering from the pandemic,” Cowling said. “Now we are seeing enrollment stabilize or grow at many of the colleges, and the HECC’s recommendation will help maintain services and course offerings for the students that are coming back.”

OCCA also supports the \$50 million in additional one-time funding in the HECC budget recommendation because it will help colleges transition to changing enrollment as well as changing program and service needs.

(MORE)



“The transition funds recommended by the HECC will help colleges adjust to changes in program demand without pulling the rug from under students,” Cowling said. “It will also help colleges.”

Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN)

HECC needs additional statutory language to clarify that the HECC may approve a Bachelor of Science in Nursing at a community college. The colleges would otherwise have to title the degree as an Applied Bachelor of Science in Nursing. Because the nursing industry does not recognize that degree title, students with such degrees would be at a significant disadvantage making the degree much less valuable. *OCCA will pursue legislation to allow the HECC to approve BSN degrees if a college has met all the necessary requirements to do so.*

Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG)

The OCCA Board prioritized an increase in funding for the Oregon Opportunity Grant – Oregon’s primary source of state need-based financial aid for college students. Oregon’s two financial aid programs, the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG) and Oregon Promise, delivered \$657 per full-time student in 2020, which is below the U.S. average of \$830, and less than half of the \$1,489 provided in Washington state.

OCCA supports a minimum 100% increase of the Oregon Opportunity Grant, from the current funding level of \$200 million per biennium to \$400 million per biennium to increase the number of students receiving the grant and to help ensure year-round funding for the grant and with emphasis on serving both pipeline and returning adult students.

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