



## **2026 Legislative Session OCCA Priorities and Current Issues to Monitor**

### **Top Priorities**

1. Protecting the Community College Support Fund (CCSF) from a 5% Budget Reduction
2. Preserving Access to the Oregon Promise Program
3. Protecting Career Pathways Programs from Elimination

#### **1. Protecting the Community College Support Fund (CCSF) from a 5% Budget Reduction**

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) has proposed a 5% mid-biennium reduction to the Community College Support Fund, totaling more than \$53 million statewide. This proposal comes at a time of rising enrollment, especially in high-demand CTE programs, and growing workforce needs across Oregon.

Because community colleges dedicate most of their budgets to instruction and student services, cuts of this magnitude would directly impact classrooms, labs, advising, tutoring, rural centers, CTE capacity, and frontline student supports. Likely consequences include fewer course sections, restricted access to required classes, delayed equipment upgrades, and increased strain during a period of acute workforce shortages.

Community colleges serve as Oregon's "economic shock absorber," providing rapid upskilling and retraining in response to economic shifts. A 5% CCSF cut would severely limit the sector's ability to meet Oregon's workforce and economic needs at a critical time.

#### **2. Preserving Access to the Oregon Promise Program**

HECC's proposed budget reductions include a freeze on new Oregon Promise enrollments while continuing to serve current recipients. HECC leadership has indicated that such a freeze could lead to the program's permanent phase-out, ending roughly \$40 million in annual tuition support for community college students.

Oregon Promise is a vital affordability pathway for thousands of low-income and first-generation students. Ending new enrollments would reduce access to community colleges, weaken high school-to-college momentum, and limit post-secondary opportunities across urban, suburban, and rural regions. OCCA will advocate to preserve this critical investment in Oregon's future workforce.

#### **3. Protecting Career Pathways Programs from Elimination**

HECC has also recommended eliminating funding for Career Pathways programs—representing a nearly \$3 million cut. These programs provide career-connected, high-quality education aligned with industry needs, allowing individuals to advance through multiple, successive entry and exit points.

Career Pathways and the advising for these programs are especially vital during economic downturns, when displaced workers seek short-term training to re-enter the workforce. Cutting this funding would remove critical access for working adults and reduce Oregon's capacity to respond to shifting labor market demands.

## **Issues to Monitor and Evaluate**

### **I. Oregon Higher Education Coordination Act of 2026 (OHECA 2026)**

Representative Pam Marsh is developing a major restructuring proposal for Oregon's higher education system. Key components include:

- A four-tier institutional structure (community colleges in Tier I)
- A statewide affordability benchmark tied to tuition caps and HECC reporting
- A Higher Education Cost Adjustment (HECA) to guide university funding
- A new tier-based funding model incorporating mission, demographics, and performance

One area of concern is language that may limit community colleges to associate degrees only, potentially blocking the development of additional Bachelor of Applied Science programs in fields like teacher education, healthcare, and advanced technical careers.

### **II. ASUO Proposal on Student Fee Autonomy**

The Associated Students of the University of Oregon (ASUO) is pursuing legislation to expand student government authority over incidental fees. While the issue originates in the university context, the proposal would apply to community colleges and could pre-empt the authority of locally elected boards. No bill language has been released to date.

### **III. Public Meetings Laws and OGEC Rule on Meals**

OCCA is monitoring developments related to Oregon's public meetings laws and a recent advisory opinion from the Oregon Government Ethics Commission (OGEC) regarding public bodies providing meals to their employees and elected officials during meetings, team building events, etc... OGEC has asserted that meals provided to public officials during meetings could violate Oregon Ethics Law as a prohibited use of office unless meals are included as a part of the public official's "official compensation" in a policy adopted by the public body.

However, current statutory language found in Chapter 341 prohibits compensation for community college board members—including meals—making OGEC's guidance inapplicable for resolving the concerns specific to community colleges. This creates a compliance challenge for colleges seeking to provide modest hospitality to board members during public meetings or convenings.

OCCA is actively participating in a legislative work group focused on clarifying and improving guidance related to meals and public meetings practices. OCCA will continue to track any legislative or regulatory changes that may affect how public meetings are conducted and how meals are managed under Oregon's Ethics Law and expects the Legislature to consider a bill to fix this and several other Public Meetings Law clarifications in the February 2026 session.

### **IV. Short-Term Workforce Pell: 2026 Implementation Update**

Federal approval of Short-Term Workforce Pell is a significant national win, thanks in part to strong advocacy from Oregon's community colleges. With implementation set for July 1, 2026, this new funding stream creates a major opportunity to expand access to short-term, career-connected training programs across the state.

This is not a legislative proposal, but a collaborative opportunity to work with the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) on program alignment and policy clarity. OCCA and the Oregon

Presidents' Council (OPC) have requested to join HECC's implementation work group, and representatives from financial aid, academic programs, and student services are being invited to participate.

HECC is coordinating closely with the Governor's Office to ensure Oregon's approach reflects statewide workforce priorities and equity goals. Together, we aim to ensure Oregon's community colleges are ready to deliver high-impact programs that strengthen economic mobility and meet regional labor market needs.

#### **V. Bachelor of Applied Science in Education: HECC Approval Process**

Oregon's community colleges are pursuing the ability to offer a Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) in Education to help address regional teacher shortages and expand access to educator pathways. While this is not a legislative proposal, it remains a high-priority opportunity for collaboration with the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). OCCA will continue to support this work to ensure community colleges are positioned to deliver high-quality, regionally responsive educator preparation programs.