

## OCCA Update for College Boards – March 2026

### **2026 Legislative Session Nearing End**

The 2026 Legislative Session is coming close to an end, with the constitutional sine die set for March 9. The short session has moved at warp speed, and OCCA has continued to track numerous bills throughout the past month. One of those bills – SB 1537 – appears to be moving forward and, if approved, will have implications on community college boards.

[SB 1537](#) is the revised community college governance bill (that originally came about in the 2025 Session and died), which would require boards to list a public email address on their college website, add a non-voting student member, and establish clearer procedures for board vacancies. The measure is a significantly scaled-back version of the broader governance proposal introduced in 2025. While OCCA continues to oppose unnecessary encroachment on locally elected board authority, the amended version of SB 1537 represents the most workable path forward. In late-February, the House Education Committee passed the bill out of committee with an additional [amendment](#) that excludes non-voting student members from attending executive sessions and removes the requirement for boards to adopt policies for student members in executive session. Statements on the record also make it clear that materials that are distributed to the board and must be provided to non-voting student members do not include executive session documents. The bill now moves to the House floor for passage. If passed, it will go back to the Senate for concurrence.

However, Senator Lew Frederick (the bill's sponsor) has indicated he will vote against concurrence, which would likely send the measure back to a conference committee to reconcile differences and negotiate a final version. With the compressed timelines of this short session, that process becomes increasingly challenging and unlikely every day, and the bill could ultimately run out of time. If that occurs, the immediate effect would be that the legislation would not move forward this year. However, Senator Frederick's office indicated he would bring the issue up in 2027 if it does not pass this session.

In addition to SB 1537, OCCA is closely monitoring [HB 4177](#), which would retain a “common sense understanding” of serial communications and provides clarity around terms used in the statute. News media opposes this bill as they feel they were excluded from the workgroup. If approved, the bill will ensure that governing boards conduct their business in a clear and transparent manner consistent with the requirements of Oregon Public Meetings Law. The bill passed out of the House Rules Committee and was referred to the Joint Ways and Means Committee where it awaits further action.

With the potential for both SB 1537 and HB 4177 to move forward in the Session, OCCA will develop an educational session for community college boards to help members learn more about the new requirements (if enacted), as both have emergency clauses that cause them to go into effect immediately upon passage (with some phase-in clauses). Stay tuned for more information about these board education opportunities.

**BOARD MEMBER ACTION:**

- **Be on the lookout for a board education opportunity and then register** to learn more about the new public meetings laws and community college governance law if approved in the 2026 Session.

**Coming Soon: 2026 End of (Legislative) Session & Implementation Report**

At the conclusion of each legislative session, OCCA publishes an End of Session Report that highlights the priority bills the association tracked, summarizes the work conducted on each measure, and explains how those bills progressed through the legislative process. The report also provides an overview of the session and outlines what the outcomes mean for community colleges in relation to OCCA's legislative priorities.

In addition, OCCA produces an Implementation Report to help colleges and governing boards understand new laws and prepare for any required changes. When impacts to colleges are identified, the implementation guidance outlines the steps institutions should take to prepare for implementation.

During short legislative sessions, OCCA combines these two resources into a single, streamlined End of Session & Implementation Report. This combined report is typically released shortly after the legislative session concludes.

**BOARD MEMBER ACTION:**

- **Read through the OCCA 2026 End of Session & Implementation Report** when it's released following the end of the 2026 Legislative Session.

**Coming Soon: OCCA Member Services Survey**

The OCCA Member Services Committee, in consultation with the DEI Committee, has developed a brief survey to better understand the education, training, and resource needs of locally elected community college board members. Your feedback will help shape future board education opportunities, professional development offerings, conference planning, and strategies to strengthen engagement among board members statewide.

The committee has set an ambitious goal of achieving an 80% response rate to ensure the results accurately reflect board member perspectives across Oregon. When you receive the survey, please take a few minutes to complete it – your input will directly inform OCCA's member services priorities and help ensure our programs align with the needs of board leadership.

Please keep an eye out for the survey in the coming weeks and thank you in advance for your participation.

**BOARD MEMBER ACTION:**

- **Be on the lookout in your email inbox** for the survey link and then **take the survey**.

**Public Meeting Minute – What is a Public Meeting?**

*Each month, OCCA Senior Policy Advisor & General Counsel Karen Smith will provide guidance for boards related to Oregon Public Meetings Law.*

Oregon Public Meetings Law defines a public meeting as “the convening of a governing body of a public body for which a quorum is required in order to make a decision or deliberate toward a decision on any matter.” Understanding how each part of this definition applies helps clarify when community college discussions must comply with the law.

For community colleges, the governing body is the locally elected Board of Education. Because the board has authority over policy and administration, it is a decision-making body subject to Public Meetings Law. Advisory bodies that are authorized to make recommendations to the board are also considered governing bodies under the law, as are certain board committees and subcommittees.

Some groups are not subject to Public Meetings Law. Fact-gathering bodies that only collect and provide factual information, without authority to make decisions or recommendations, are exempt. In addition, bodies appointed by an individual public official, such as a college president, are exempt when they make recommendations only to that official and the official is not required to forward those recommendations unchanged to a governing body.

A “quorum” is the minimum number of members required to legally conduct business. Community college boards have seven members, so a quorum is a majority of the board, or four members. The quorum requirement does not change if a board position is vacant.

The law broadly defines “convening.” A meeting may occur through an in-person gathering, real-time electronic or telephonic communication, serial written communications, or the use of an intermediary to relay communications among members. Oregon Government Ethics Commission (OGEC) rules specify that serial written communication includes a series of electronic exchanges such as emails, text messages, or social media messages. These communications can occur during or outside a formal meeting.

OGEC rules also clarify which gatherings are covered. Regular, special, and emergency meetings, executive sessions, and work sessions or workshops where information is received or preliminary deliberations occur are all subject to Public Meetings Law. Activities such as on-site inspections, purely social gatherings, or attendance at national, regional, or state association meetings are exempt, provided board members do not deliberate or make decisions on matters reasonably expected to come before the board.

Next month, we will review legal requirements related to meeting notices and minutes. OCCA is also organizing a training session for board members on executive session requirements, with details to be shared soon.

### **Save-the-Date: All-Oregon Academic Team Luncheon**

The 2026 All-Oregon Academic Team (AOAT) Luncheon will take place on **Friday, April 17, 2026**, at Chemeketa Community College's Eola Center in Salem. Registration for this exciting and inspiring event will open very soon! The luncheon honors students from all 17 colleges who have made remarkable achievements in and out of the classroom, often overcoming challenging obstacles. The event's keynote speaker and featured student speakers will be announced in the spring.

### **BOARD MEMBER ACTION:**

- **Register & plan to attend the AOAT Luncheon** when the registration link becomes available and is emailed to you soon!

### **OCCA Lunch & Learn Webinar: February Recap**

On February 26, OCCA hosted a Lunch & Learn titled *From Authority to Implementation: Applied Baccalaureates in Action*, providing board members and college leaders with an update on progress since Oregon community colleges were granted authority to offer Applied Baccalaureate degrees.

The session began with an overview of the current statewide applied baccalaureate landscape, followed by a focused discussion of the two consortium models currently in development – the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) and the Bachelor of Applied Science in Education (BASE). Presenters shared insights into program structure, cross-college collaboration, and where each consortium stands in the implementation process. The discussion highlighted how these programs are expanding access to bachelor's degrees while helping meet critical workforce and community needs across Oregon.

Presenters included John Wykoff (OCCA), Holly Nelson (Chemeketa Community College), Julie Downing (Central Oregon Community College), Karla Hale (Chemeketa Community College), and Kanoe Bunney (Linn-Benton Community College).

Board members who were unable to attend – or who would like to revisit the discussion – can view the recording by [clicking here](#).

### **BOARD MEMBER ACTION:**

- **Watch** the February Lunch & Learn.

Registration for the March Lunch & Learn presented by The Ford Family Foundation coming soon!



260 13<sup>th</sup> Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301  
503.399.9912  
<https://www.occa17.com>

### **OCCA Digest e-newsletter**

The *OCCA Digest* is a monthly e-newsletter that highlights updates during the Legislative Session, important events, news, and announcements. It is a great way to stay connected with information important to community colleges in Oregon and learn how you can take action to support colleges and students. The newsletter is published the first Thursday of each month, *except during a legislative session, at which time it becomes a weekly publication that comes out on Thursdays.*

To sign up to receive this free e-newsletter, visit <https://occa17.com/resources/newsletter/> and click the “Sign Up” button. The OCCA Digest will come from OCCA Communications Director Casey White-Zollman at [casey@occa17.com](mailto:casey@occa17.com), so be sure to add her email to your contacts to ensure the email arrives in your inbox and not your spam folder.

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*The Oregon Community College Association was founded in 1962 with the purpose of providing support to the colleges before policymakers and partners whose actions affect the wellbeing of community colleges across the state. OCCA represents the 17 publicly chartered community colleges and their locally elected board members. Leading with racial equity, we advocate, communicate, and collaborate to strengthen community colleges for the benefit of Oregonians, particularly those historically underserved or systemically marginalized in higher education. Have questions about OCCA and our work to support Oregon’s community colleges? Contact [occa@occa17.com](mailto:occa@occa17.com).*