Oregon Community College Association

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OCCA Board Representative Update

November 2026

2026 OCCA Conference

The 2026 OCCA Conference begins Wednesday, November 4, in Sunriver, bringing community college board members, presidents, employees, students and partners together around the theme "Community Colleges WORK for Oregon." Wednesday afternoon features a pre-conference session for board chairs and vice chairs, with a welcome dinner and Student Voice panel planned for Wednesday evening. Thursday's general sessions include a keynote from Kermit Kabela, Lumina Foundation's strategy director for credentials of value, and an afternoon workforce panel. Breakout sessions will address governance, Workforce Pell, student basic needs, Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) costs and financial planning. Thursday evening's Howard Cherry Awards Banquet will recognize outstanding contributions to Oregon's community colleges. Friday's closing sessions will focus on board responsibilities and legislative issues. "The Board's Role in Labor Negotiations" will address boards' responsibilities in collective bargaining. A legislative panel featuring state Reps. Lisa Fragala (D–Eugene) and Ricki Ruiz (D–Gresham) will offer perspectives as colleges prepare for the 2027 legislative session. View the conference schedule.

Action: Attendees are encouraged to share takeaways with their fellow board members at an upcoming meeting. Highlight lessons from the sessions and panels, share useful resources and identify an idea or practice for further board discussion.

Six leaders to be honored at Howard Cherry Awards Banquet

Six leaders will be honored for their contributions to Oregon's community colleges at the Howard Cherry Awards Banquet on Thursday, November 5, at the 2026 OCCA Conference. The Howard Cherry Awards will recognize Rep. Ricki Ruiz as Outstanding Community College Advocate for his work on college access and affordability; Blue Mountain Community College President Dr. Mark Browning as Outstanding Community College Administrator for his leadership in enrollment growth, financial stability and workforce education; and Treasure Valley Community College's Betty Carter as Outstanding Community College Board Member for her student-centered governance and community service. Klamath Community College board member Dave Jensen will receive the Chuck Clemans Award for his longstanding service to OCCA and statewide community college advocacy. The Oregon Presidents' Council will present the Cam Preus Award to Dr. Kristina Holton of Oregon Coast Community College and Amy Burbee, M.A., of Linn-Benton Community College for sustaining leadership development opportunities for women working at Oregon's community colleges. Read the full release and learn more about this year's honorees.

HECC November meetings to address policy priorities and HB 4124

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) will hold two fully remote meetings in November. Its regular monthly meeting on Thursday, November 5, will include a budget update, consideration of legislative concept recommendations to the Governor, an implementation update on the House Bill 4124 higher education system study and discussion of Oregon's postsecondary attainment goal. Commissioners will also review reporting requirements, staffing data and funding-related updates. A special informational meeting on Friday, November 13, will focus on a briefing and

discussion of the HB 4124 study and recommendations.

Action: Board members and college leaders are encouraged to read the next OCCA Digest, OCCA's monthly email newsletter, which will be released the week of November 9 to include updates on the election results, the OCCA conference and the HECC meeting, along with analysis of how the elections will shape the 2027 legislative session. Subscribe to the OCCA Digest.

Share your perspective on the future of Oregon higher education

Community college leaders and campus communities have an opportunity to inform the future of Oregon's public higher education system through the House Bill 4124 Study Public Survey, open through December 4. EY-Parthenon, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission's lead consultant for the study, is seeking input from students, faculty, staff, employers and community members about the system's challenges, opportunities and priorities. The short survey includes four substantive questions, along with a question about respondents' connection to higher education. Responses will inform the study alongside other research and public engagement as HECC develops recommendations for the Legislature, due April 1, 2027. Learn more about the study.

Action: Board members and college leaders are encouraged to complete the survey and invite their campus communities and networks to participate before December 4. Share the link with students, employees, community partners and employers so the study reflects the experiences and needs of the people Oregon's community colleges serve.

November 18 revenue forecast to inform Oregon's next budget

Oregon's next Economic and Revenue Forecast will be released November 18, providing an updated picture of state resources as the Governor and Legislature prepare the 2027–29 budget. The forecast will be the last before the Governor's proposed budget is released. Although the August forecast improved projected General Fund and lottery resources, uncertainty about federal funding and competing demands on the state budget continues to complicate planning. For community colleges, the November forecast will help frame funding discussions ahead of the 2027 legislative session, including investment in the Community College Support Fund. An improved revenue outlook does not automatically translate into additional college funding, making it important for college leaders to explain how state investment supports student access, program availability and workforce preparation.

Oregon receives $4.1 million to expand student basic needs support

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) has received a $4.1 million federal grant to strengthen basic needs support and workforce pathways across Oregon's 17 community colleges. The four-year project, running through 2030, will help students access public benefits and services that address barriers such as food and housing insecurity. HECC's Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development will administer the grant, with Portland Community College coordinating the statewide effort among colleges and partners. The funding will expand benefits screening, strengthen referrals and campus services, and connect basic needs support with pathways to workforce credentials. It builds on existing efforts, including benefit navigators, Career Pathways and the SNAP Training and Employment Program (STEP). In 2025–26, benefit navigators at Oregon's public colleges and universities provided direct support to 30,180 students. The project aims to help more students stay enrolled, complete their credentials and move into employment. Read HECC's press release.

Action: Board members and college leaders are encouraged to learn about the basic needs services available at their college, including benefit navigation and community referrals. Consider requesting a briefing on how students find and access support, which needs remain unmet and how the college assesses whether services are helping students persist and complete.

November 19 Lunch & Learn to explore bonds and capital financing

OCCA's next Lunch & Learn webinar, "Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Bonds… and More!", is scheduled for November 19, earlier than usual because of the Thanksgiving holiday. Presented by Piper Sandler, the session will cover general obligation bonds, Oregon's property tax system, debt and disclosure requirements, and financing alternatives for major capital investments. Whether you are new to bonds or want a refresher, this webinar will help board members and college leaders understand options for supporting facilities, workforce programs and long-term financial sustainability. Registration is free for board members and college employees as part of their college's OCCA membership dues. A recording will also be available on the OCCA website following the session, alongside recordings of past Lunch & Learn webinars.

Action: Register for the November 19 OCCA Lunch & Learn and encourage interested colleagues to attend. If you cannot attend, plan to watch the recording on the OCCA website.

Public Meeting Minute

OCCA continues to work with other local government partners to advocate for common-sense application of Oregon Public Meetings Law by the Oregon Government Ethics Commission (OGEC). OCCA staff are participating in a legislative work group led by Rep. Nathan Sosa (D-Greater Hillsboro) to develop legislation for the 2027 session. In addition, OCCA President Pat Fahey and Executive Director Abby Lee are engaged in direct conversations with OGEC Commissioners sharing the reality of volunteer board service and the need for clear rules and consistent guidance on the requirements of Public Meetings Law. Areas of focus for these parallel efforts include clarifying the definition of serial communications to require active participation by a quorum in discussion and deliberations of matters before the board, creating a more collaborative process in addressing complaints and OGEC investigations, and ensuring that board members receive mandatory Public Meetings Law training early in their terms. We will continue to provide updates as legislation is developed.

Action: Do you have a question about Oregon Public Meetings Law that you would like us to address in a future update? Let OCCA Senior Policy Advisor & General Counsel Karen Smith know at ksmith@occa17.com.

Coming in December: OCCA Board Meeting

The OCCA Board of Directors will hold its next meeting virtually on December 4. The tentative agenda includes an update from the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) on the progress of the House Bill 4124 work group, a report on discussions with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission legislative work group regarding public meetings and serial communications, and approval of OCCA's 2027 legislative priorities. These priorities will guide OCCA's advocacy during the 2027 legislative session.

Action: Following the December meeting, OCCA will share a template resolution, similar to those provided in past years, for local boards to consider adopting. Board members are encouraged to bring the resolution forward for consideration to demonstrate unified statewide support for community college legislative priorities during the 2027 session.