

HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING COMMISSION
LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION ON INDIAN SERVICES
2024 ANNUAL REPORT



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Office of Executive Director
Higher Education Coordinating Commission
www.oregon.gov/highered

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Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Higher Education Coordinating Commission

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Patrick Flanagan, Executive Director
Legislative Commission on Indian Services
900 Court Street NE, Room 167
Salem, OR 97301
December, 2024

Dear Mr. Flanagan,

I am pleased to present the 2024 Legislative Commission on Indian Services Annual Report of the Higher Education Coordination Commission (HECC).

We honor the sovereignty of the nine federally-recognized Tribes in Oregon, and deeply value the opportunities we have had to work cooperatively with the educational representatives of the Tribes over the last year. This report summarizes the actions and initiatives the HECC has undertaken in 2024 to foster postsecondary education and training opportunities and pathways for tribal students and learners in Oregon. The HECC is actively serving and partnering with Tribes in Oregon in numerous ways to best address specific needs and promote opportunities for Oregon's tribal students. We are dedicated to building strong relationships with our tribal partners through consultation, communication, concrete actions, and the fulfillment of our commitments, and look forward to continuing and expanding our work together in the coming year.

We are at an exciting juncture for postsecondary education and workforce training in Oregon. This year, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) launched a new strategic plan to advance our vision for Oregon higher education and workforce training. The Commission's plan emphasizes its continuing commitment to equitably serving all Oregonians through postsecondary education, training, and workforce development. The plan speaks to a state and national context of increasing public skepticism about the value of higher education, including valid concerns about its costs and benefits. HECC's view of this is clear: while most forms of postsecondary education pay off, they need to do so better and more equitably. The plan tackles questions of value directly with strategies that bolster relevance, alignment, affordability, and inclusivity, with particular attention to communities that have been historically underserved and marginalized. I look forward to working closely with our Tribal partners on the activity that this plan will galvanize. The HECC continues in our efforts to foster an accessible, affordable, equitable, and coordinated network of college and career training programs, and we are pleased to report on more in this report.

Should you have questions or comments regarding this report, please direct them to Rudyane Rivera-Lindstrom, Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility and HECC Tribal Liaison, at (503) 689-4309.

Respectfully,

Ben Cannon
Executive Director, Higher Education Coordinating Commission

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ABOUT THE HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING COMMISSION

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Major Areas	<p>The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) mission (from HECC Strategic Plan 2024-2029) is as follows.</p> <p>Through strategic coordination, funding, outreach, services, reporting, and leadership for systems change, the HECC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drives equitable postsecondary access and success for all Oregonians; Anticipates and meets workforce and economic needs; and Strengthens Oregon’s collective future by fostering research, innovation, learning, civic engagement, and cultural contributions.
Agency Statement	<p>The HECC envisions a future where all people benefit from the economic, civic, and cultural impact of high-quality postsecondary education, training, and workforce development. (from HECC Strategic Plan 2024-2029).</p> <p>Established in 2011 and vested with its current authorities in 2013, the HECC is a 15-member volunteer commission appointed by the Oregon Governor and confirmed by the Oregon State Senate, with funding and policy responsibilities for higher education and the workforce statewide. The HECC supports postsecondary education by administering the statewide higher education and workforce budget of about \$2 billion per year; authorizing programs and degrees; administering statewide financial aid, workforce, and educational programs; and providing strategic guidance to state leaders. We also directly serve Oregonians by awarding grant and scholarship aid to students and connecting Oregonians with workforce and training resources. Our work is driven by the State of Oregon’s educational attainment goals for youth and adults, and by our Commission’s goals. To guide that work, we use the Equity Lens to help close system and opportunity gaps to achieve equitable outcomes for all.</p> <p>Oregon’s Strategic Plan for Postsecondary Education and Training was finalized in October 2024. The new plan focuses on lowering costs and increasing benefits of higher education and training for individuals, employers, communities, and the economy. The new plan establishes five action-focused strategic goals to advance systems change through intentional strategies: RELEVANCE, ALIGNMENT, AFFORDABLE ACCESS, BELONGING, AND LEADERSHIP.</p>

	<p>The Commission is supported by the state agency by the same name, comprised of <u>eight distinct offices</u> led by Executive Director Ben Cannon.</p>
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HECC INITIATIVES AND ACTIVITIES, 2024

The HECC coordinates activities with tribal partners, the Governor’s Office, the Oregon Department of Education, and numerous other education partners to foster postsecondary pathways and student success. The following are significant activities HECC has undertaken in 2024 that support postsecondary education pathways for, and honor our relationships with, the nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon.

HECC Strategic Plan: After a yearlong public process, we are pleased to announce our new [Strategic Plan for 2024–2029](#). The HECC strategic plan is used to guide development and implementation of higher education and workforce development funding and policy initiatives that impact Oregonians statewide. The new plan focuses on lowering costs and increasing benefits of higher education and training for individuals, employers, communities, and the economy. The two-page Strategic Plan was approved unanimously by the Commission at the October 10, 2024, public meeting, after a process of development and public input that started in fall 2023. It includes revised vision, mission, and values statements, and establishes five action-focused strategic goals to advance systems change through intentional strategies:

- **RELEVANCE:** Improve the responsiveness of Oregon’s education and training systems to the goals and needs of learners, employers, and communities.
- **ALIGNMENT:** Align Oregon’s education and training systems to create straightforward pathways for learners.
- **AFFORDABLE ACCESS:** Make postsecondary education and training affordable for all Oregonians.
- **BELONGING:** Elevate learner voices and support inclusivity and belonging in all postsecondary learning settings.
- **LEADERSHIP:** Infuse postsecondary education, workforce development, research, and innovation into Oregon’s economic development strategies.

The HECC contracted with Coraggio Group to facilitate the strategic development process, which included assessment of background data and needs; broad public and partner engagement (including a public survey with over 400 responses, numerous focus groups, interviews, and outreach sessions); as well as discussion and input over the course of a year of HECC public meetings.

During the development of our agency budget request for 2023-25, the HECC collected input from partners on potential actions and initiatives for realizing the Strategic Roadmap and invited input from Tribes and other partners.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY

Equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility continue to be guiding priorities for the HECC, and we are committed to fostering our connections and collaborations between HECC and the nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon. Our partners and the public can find former quarterly Government to Government updates as well as other information on work and initiatives in Coordination with Tribes on the HECC website at: www.oregon.gov/HigherEd. The HECC continues to apply our Equity Lens and utilizes its tools to evaluate funding decisions, policies, and proposals.

Participation in Government-to-Government Education Cluster and Convenings: The Executive Director has prioritized participation in the Government-to-Government (G2G) Education Cluster

and has committed that either he or his appointee will attend each quarterly gathering. Over the past year, Executive Director Ben Cannon and Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Rudyane Rivera-Lindstrom continue to attend Education Cluster meetings, to which the agency provides thorough written updates on recent activity.

Tribal Student Support Network Event: In October 2024 at the University of Oregon, HECC Office of Student Access and Completion, along with DEIA staff planned and convened the HECC's second Tribal Student Support Network. A daylong convening, this was the second summit organized by the HECC to build relationships and collaboration among tribal partners and institutions to better serve tribal students and their families. The Summit brought together numerous representatives from the federally-recognized Tribes of Oregon, students, community members, HECC agency staff, and educators from many of Oregon's public and private higher education institutions at the Many Nations Longhouse on University of Oregon's (UO) campus. This year, the event was led primarily by the HECC Office of Student Access and Completion and the agenda focused heavily on the Oregon Tribal Student Grant (OTSG), Oregon's state-funded financial aid program, first launched in 2022, that pays up to the full college costs for eligible tribal students.

Other Collaborations: HECC staff also continue their visits and collaborations around the state. This allows us to strengthen existing relationships and work directly with tribal partners on grant programs and awards, such as the Future Ready Workforce Readiness Grants, Oregon Tribal Student Grant and the Oregon Youth Corps (OYC). HECC staff hope to continue finding ways to collaborate and improve our processes. We are grateful for the new opportunities to connect. The HECC also continues serving on the Oregon Department of Education's American Indian/Alaskan Native State Plan Advisory Committee providing supports and post-secondary perspective as needed.

Equity Leadership: Since 2021, the HECC has had a strong DEIA team comprised of three employees who support the agency's equity works internally and externally. In addition to the HECC's first Director of DEIA, two Equity and Accessibility Specialists are supporting current efforts in addition to enhancing our engagement efforts with community partners and students. Rudyane Rivera-Lindstrom, Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility for the HECC along with her DEIA team, continues working with and collaborating with our partners and staff on the HECC's internal and external goals and initiatives related to racial justice and equity. For the first time, the Governor's office required every agency to submit a DEI Action Plan. Because of our system of operationalizing our equity commitment and established agency equity goals, the HECC was able to quickly submit the new plan and continue our path of accountability. Internally, agency leadership has adopted four overarching equity goals that align to our Strategic Plan. We continue in the consistency and accountability to the HECC's work and operationalizing of our Equity Lens. This has taken the form of new Equity Action Plans for each office, the creation of a new Equity Impact Protocol, and now the evaluation and establishing of a new metrics to evaluation agency progress.

In 2024, the HECC continued its intentional examination of its equity processes, levels of understanding of how to authentically engage in the work and identifying what was needed to strengthen the agency's long-standing commitment to equity and partnership with higher education institutions and other state agencies. In efforts to expand and deepen our engagement work, the DEIA team along with three of our offices and two external representatives from community-based organizations, were able to create an Engagement Assessment Toolkit to assess our agency's capacity and working understanding of what it means to authentically engage our partners. This year, we were able to evaluate the results of the assessment and found new ways to incorporate the outcomes into new working goals for the HECC offices. Externally, collaboration and network building continue

with consistent participation in virtual events and the creation of spaces that allow for new relationships to be formed and for our work to continue. The HECC not only collaborates with our postsecondary partners, but also supports and takes part in the equity and racial justice work along with other state agencies. The HECC also continues to reach out to the nine federally recognized Tribes individually in the effort to continue building relationships that move beyond the Education Cluster meetings.

REPORTING DATA AND ANALYSIS ON POSTSECONDARY TRENDS, DISAGGREGATED BY RACE/ETHNICITY

The HECC Office of Research and Data has numerous resources collect, analyzes, and reports research and data on postsecondary education and training to help inform decisions and guide progress toward state goals. Explore all our [Strategy, Research, and Data](#) work here.

2024 Key Performance Measures: We are pleased to share [a summary of our Key Performance Measures](#), a set of 17 metrics focused on Oregon's strategic progress toward state higher education and workforce goals, including indicators of college-going, affordability, and outcomes of postsecondary education and training. The HECC reports overall data for each measure plus disaggregated data by race/ethnicity to draw attention to equity progress. A few notable findings are featured here.

- The college-going rate of Oregon high school graduates* rose for the first time since the pandemic, to 53 percent, and it rose for all race/ethnic groups. However, equity gaps in college-going rates between these groups widened during the pandemic and have not closed.
- We estimate slightly more students are facing unaffordable costs than a year ago. In 2022-23, 37 percent of resident students cannot meet expected costs of college or university even with public grant aid, most institutional aid, expected family contributions, and estimated student earnings. However, **affordability improved for students who identified as Native American/Alaska Native**, thanks to the State's investment in tribal students through the Oregon Tribal Student Grant.
- Completion and transfer rates at community colleges declined slightly just over one percentage point to 50.3 percent in the most recent year (measuring four-year rates for students who started in 2019), but equity gaps have narrowed.
- Graduation rates for first time full time freshman at public universities fell almost three percentage points to 67 percent in the most recent year (measuring six-year rates students who started in 2017). Equity gaps remain largely the same.
- Earnings five years after completion rose for both community college completers and bachelor degree graduates at the public universities, even after accounting for inflation

The Commission and agency use the findings to help guide our ongoing work and new strategies. The full report of HECC's annual metrics will be submitted to the Legislative Fiscal Office and the Department of Administrative Services and will be posted on our website with [past reports here](#).

Oregon Data Dashboards: In 2024, the HECC Office of Research and Data published interactive data dashboards with data on enrollment, affordability, completion, and earnings of postsecondary students in

Oregon. We present numerous measures on the dashboards and in other reports by race/ethnicity and other characteristics.

Oregon Educator Workforce Dashboard October 2024: A new interactive data dashboard published by the Oregon Longitudinal Data Collaborative (OLDC) provides insights on new teachers in Oregon public K-12 schools. The dashboard explores licensure recommendations, hiring, and retention for new teachers. This data can answer fundamental questions about teachers trained by Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) in Oregon, such as the following.

- How have EPP licensure recommendations changed over time since 2010?
- What percentage of licensed teachers become employed at public schools in Oregon?
- Does teacher retention vary by gender, race, or ethnicity?

OLDC matched data from the Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission to create this dashboard.

Continued Administration of the Oregon Longitudinal Data Collaborative (OLDC): The OLDC is an inter-agency program located in the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. It looks at the intersections of K-12, postsecondary education, workforce training, and employment to examine how these sectors influence and impact each other. This work focuses on the impact of education programs, policies, and investments to help individuals and communities in Oregon thrive.

Fall Enrollment is Up Overall: We recently shared a [summary of the fall 4th week enrollment data for the public institutions](#) on our website. Across all public institutions, enrollment rose 3 percent this fall, compared to 2023. This is the second year of increase since enrollment fell during the pandemic; however, enrollment has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. The number of learners at community college rose 4.3 percent, to 94,898 in 2024. Enrollment rose at 12 of the 17 colleges. The number of public university learners rose 1.7 percent, to 100,205. Enrollment rose at four of the seven universities.

Other HECC Reports and Data: In addition, our regular measures and reports feature data on enrollment, affordability, completion, participation in education and workforce programs, employment, and more.

- [HECC Strategy, Research, and Data– Home](#)
- [Featured Research and Data](#)
- [Statewide Higher Education Snapshots](#)
- [HECC Reports](#)
- [Equity Briefs](#)

FUNDING AND POLICY FOR EQUITY AND STUDENT/LEARNER SUCCESS

State Higher Education and Training Budget for 2023-25, Preparing for the 2025

Legislative Session: Our work to serve Oregonians in higher education and workforce training is driven by policy and investment decisions made by the State of Oregon Legislature and Governor. Every two years, the HECC informs these decisions by developing recommendations for the higher education and training system. The HECC presents to legislative committees and advises the Oregon Legislature and the Governor on topics of critical concern to Oregon postsecondary education and training. On our website [legislative resources page here](#), our partners can stay informed on HECC legislative presentations, testimony, and documents designed to inform decisions on legislative and budgetary decisions in the 2025 Legislative Session. Partners can also learn more about the [typical budget timeline here](#).

In December 2024, the Governor has released the [Governor's Recommended Budget \(GRB\)](#), and HECC will present on this budget to the Legislature. The GRB for HECC takes a Current Service Level (CSL) approach for most components of the HECC budget, including to the public university and community college support funds we administer, and adds strategic increases in some areas. Among other strategic investments, the GRB includes a recommendation to fund the Oregon Tribal Student Grant at \$28.5 million, which includes an increase of \$2.5 million above current service level. We look forward to working with the Governor and Legislature in the upcoming session to inform the policy decisions and investments made for 2025-2027.

Outcomes of 2024 Legislative Session: The Legislative Assembly during the 2024 short session made several strategic investments and policy changes in education and workforce programs and initiatives. The HECC summarized these in the [2024 Summary of Legislative Outcomes Related to Postsecondary Education and Training](#). Some featured changes that HECC is now implementing include the following.

- **Direct Admission:** Senate Bill 1552 required HECC to establish a mandatory direct admissions system to all Oregon public higher education institutions. Under this system, academically qualified high school seniors will be directly informed of their admission to certain institutions, and the process will become simpler for the student than the usual college application process. ODE and HECC are required to coordinate to make student data available to support the system.
- **Co-requisite Education:** Through SB 1552, HECC and public institutions were directed to examine improving developmental education delivery through co-requisite education. Unlike traditional developmental education, where students take developmental math and writing courses before taking college level courses, corequisite systems place students in the college course and provide additional academic support to students at the same time.
- **Rules Pertaining to Oregon Opportunity Grant Award Process:** Through SB 1552, HECC is required to develop rules specifying the way the student awards are determined for the Oregon Opportunity Grant.
- **Funding for Applied Baccalaureate Programs:** SB 1552 requires HECC to include in the Community College Support Fund distribution model payments for activity related to applied baccalaureate degrees and Nursing BS degrees, beginning in the 2025-2026 academic year.

RECENT EQUITY AND STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The HECC's commitment to equity informs policy decision making, funding recommendations, ongoing programs as well as special initiatives.

Sustaining the Equity Work:

In 2024, the HECC committed to supporting in a statewide Community Table comprised of community members throughout Oregon in collaboration with Parakata Consulting, CAPACES Leadership Institute, Oregon Community Foundation, the Lumina Foundation and others to help transform Oregon's postsecondary higher education institutions to better serve underserved students. Born from the 2022 Joint Task Force on Underrepresented Students in Higher Education, the Community Table will become the first statewide community advocacy organization on behalf of underrepresented students in Oregon's postsecondary education and workforce training landscape. By strategically coordinating and collaborating educative trainings, Community Table members will strengthen their knowledge and commitment towards advocacy efforts for identified legislative policies they will support for the 2025 legislative session and beyond. These efforts align strongly with

the HECC's new Strategic Plan. Although still recruiting members, many of HECC's current partners have committed to also serve on the Community Table to increase their opportunity help transform Oregon's higher education systems. This new group will be presenting for the first time to the House Committee for Higher Education in the 2025 Legislative session.

2024 Educator Equity Report Highlights Diversification Efforts: The Educator Advancement Council provided funding through HECC for a new round of Educator Equity Plan Implementation grants in the 2023-2025 budget. The Commission this year reviewed Educator Equity Plans for each public university educator preparation program in spring 2025. The universities are supported by a community of practice to refine their goals and plans to enhance university program quality and candidate experiences.

This year's Educator Equity Report was recently presented in September 2024. In preparation for the release of the 2024 report, the Oregon Longitudinal Data Collaborative (OLDC) is working on a statewide educator workforce report to detail teacher recruitment, preparation, and employment.

COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESS

The HECC continues working to protect and expand college affordability through our ongoing administration of financial aid and access programs as well as new initiatives. Go to OregonStudentAid.gov to learn more and apply for grants and scholarships.

Oregon Tribal Student Grant: The Oregon Tribal Student Grant (OTSG) program was continued and funded at \$24 million for the 2023-2025 biennium. The HECC will present to the Oregon Legislature in early 2025 on the Governor's recommendations for this program for the 2025-2027 biennium. The OTSG is expected to pay for most or all public undergraduate college-related expenses—including tuition, housing, books, and other costs not covered by other grants—for eligible students who are enrolled members of Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes. The OTSG, first launched in 2022 and codified in statute in 2023, bolsters the opportunity for tribal members to achieve their postsecondary education goals, whether they have just graduated from high school, or are adults wanting to start or return to college. The HECC proposed legislation that was passed in 2023 (HB 3565) that made the Oregon Tribal Student Grant (OTSG) a part of Oregon law. The HECC has seen growing participation in the OTSG in its first two years and we are very glad to see that the growth trend continues into 2024-25. For the 2024-25 school year, the HECC's Office of Student Access and Completion (OSAC) has already received 992 submitted applications and 746 of those applicants have been fully approved, others are pending due to one or more of the following: needing to submit a Tribal Enrollment Verification form, need to complete the 2024-25 FAFSA/ORSAA, or they might seek to enroll in a non-eligible school. For the 2023-24 school year the OSAC awarded 501 OTSG recipients, compared to 412 students for the 2022-2023 academic year (the pilot year). The OTSG to date has served students pursuing all levels of postsecondary education, including certificates, associate degrees, bachelors, masters, PhDs, MDs and JDs. The current 2024-2025 application will remain open until April 2025, as long as funds are available. To be eligible for the program students must be an enrolled member of one of the nine federally recognized tribes in Oregon. Students must also be enrolled or accepted for enrollment at an Oregon college or university and complete a valid FAFSA or ORSAA for the 2024-2025 academic year. Additional eligibility information can be found on the Oregon Tribal Student Grant web page.

Oregon Opportunity Grant: The HECC is continuing to implement an increase to the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG) for the 2023-2025 biennium. Oregon’s need-based financial aid program serving Oregonians with grants toward postsecondary expenses received a \$100 million increase for 2023-2025, bringing total funding to \$308 million in 2023-25. With the added funding, the HECC Office of Student Access and Completion (OSAC) is increasing awards for the lowest income Oregonians. These need-based grants follow the students. Students apply for the OOG by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the Oregon Student Aid Application (ORSAA). The HECC will present to the Oregon Legislature in 2025 on the Governor’s recommendations for this program for the 2025-2027 biennium.

OSAC Scholarship and Grant applications Open for 2025-26 School Year: OSAC has officially opened its OSAC Scholarship Application for the 2025-2026 academic year. Learn more at OregonStudentAid.gov or see our press release here. The State of Oregon has made accessing scholarships easy for Oregon students with its central site for more than 600 scholarships. Through the application, students can apply for many awards at one time. Those who submit their scholarship application by the early bird deadline of February 18, 2025, will have the chance to win a \$1,000 scholarship, and the final deadline is March 3, 2025. Also on the OregonStudentAid.gov site, students can learn about and apply for numerous state and federally funded grant programs such as the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG), Oregon Promise Grant, Oregon Tribal Student Grant, Oregon Student Child Care Grant, and more. Students should plan to complete any required applications and the key forms that determine eligibility for need-based aid: the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the Oregon Student Aid Application (ORSAA) (see below).

The 2025-26 FAFSA is now open and the ORSAA will open soon: To be eligible for most types of financial aid, students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the Oregon Student Aid Application (ORSAA). New and returning students should complete one of these two applications to be considered for federal and/or state financial aid such as the Federal Pell Grant, the OOG, and more. Resources on financial aid form completion can be found using the links below. Learn more and find deadlines and applications at OregonStudentAid.gov.

- [OSAC: Introducing FAFSA/ORSAA](#)
 - [OSAC: FAFSA and ORSAA Information](#)
 - [OSAC: Updates on Recent FAFSA and ORSAA Changes](#)
- [Federal Student Aid FAFSA page](#)

Oregon Narrowed the Gap in FAFSA/ORSAA Completion: With the late roll-out and challenges introduced by the new federal form in 2024, there was serious concern in Oregon and nationally about FAFSA completion being far behind previous years. We are pleased to report that our latest Oregon data on financial aid form completion showed considerable progress. In November 2024, Oregon high school senior completion rates were only 1.2 percent behind where they were at last year at this time in completion of the FAFSA or ORSAA. We congratulate all students who have completed the form, and thank all who support them, including our own HECC Office of Student Access and Completion (OSAC) team, the Oregon Department of Education, school districts, high school educators, counselors, college access and community-based organizations, tribes, and many others. To support FAFSA/ORSAA completion efforts, OSAC organized 45 FAFSA completion events and travelled across the state to help students. Our ASPIRE program also assisted schools in hosting another 500 financial aid events serving students statewide. OSAC also hosted numerous training events, webinars, and videos facilitating professional development opportunities for schools and communities.

OSAC Continues Outreach and Presentations Across the State: Go to OregonStudentAid.gov to request support from OSAC at an upcoming event, in a classroom, or providing training to your students/communities. You can also sign up to receive our e-newsletters here.

- **Webinars:** OSAC hosts a variety of webinars throughout the year for students, parents, and career/college practitioners. Our webinars are to provide up-to-date information about programs we serve.
- **Free Publications and Posters:** Order or download free posters and brochures. English and Spanish versions available.

Tribal Access to Oregon Foster Youth Tuition and Fee Waiver: HECC-OSAC continues to be available to ensure eligible tribal foster youth and youth experiencing houselessness have access to the Oregon Tuition and Fee Waiver program, which waives tuition and fees for the equivalent of four years of undergraduate studies after other public grants and any school aid are applied for eligible students under age 25. Learn more about eligibility at www.oregonstudentaid.gov. OSAC representatives would be pleased to help any tribal staff. Please contact Anne.Shearer@state.or.us.

Tribal Partners Continue to be Invited to Join the FAFSA Plus+ program: FAFSA Plus+ is a year-round program that includes FAFSA completion activities, events, and support, financial literacy information, scholarship resources, award letter help, and other college access information. OSAC continues to share student-level FAFSA data and best practices with sites, allowing site staff to provide targeted assistance to their students who need to complete and submit a FAFSA, make corrections, and notify students who have been selected for verification. Since the expansion, HECC has entered into data-sharing agreements with the NAYA Early College Academy, the Southern Oregon Indian Education Program (SOIEP), and The Klamath Tribes.

Partnering with High Schools and Partners Statewide on Pre-college Mentoring and Outreach: OSAC works to prepare students of all backgrounds for success in college and career, through Oregon ASPIRE, community outreach presentations and more.

EXPANDING DIVERSE LEARNER AND WORKER PATHWAYS

We continue our work to expand and streamline learner pathways to better serve the needs of diverse students today, including collaborative campus efforts to streamline the community college to university transfer pathway, working to improve affordability and time to degree for students—including low-income, first-generation, and underserved learner groups—and to support employment and workforce success.

Transfer Council Focused on Streamlining Transfer Pathways: Through faculty-led collaboration, the HECC, community colleges and public universities are working to create numerous statewide transfer policies and agreements. This work, which is guided by legislative mandates and HECC priorities, is intended to save students time and money, reduce barriers to completion, and improve equitable pathways. The faculty collaboration, public processes, and consensus-building work needed to develop statewide transfer articulation policies is currently performed by the Transfer Council, a 15-member committee that advises the HECC on establishing transfer agreements. The Transfer Council has made considerable progress on work to streamline the credit transfer process from two to four-year institution. Since convening in October 2021, the Council and its subcommittees have focused on developing a common course numbering system, advancing the

work on Major Transfer Maps and other credit transfer-related issues. [Partners can learn about this policy work and the legislation driving it here.](#) Students can find [transfer tools to support their pathways here.](#)

Benefit Navigators: Initially launched by 2021 legislation, Oregon helps fund Benefit Navigators. Employees at Oregon colleges and universities who help students apply for federal, state and local benefits programs that can support their progress in college. These resources are critical in addressing students' basic needs, including food and housing insecurity, and help close equity gaps for students. Benefit Navigators served more than 15,000 students in 2023-24. The HECC distributes funds to the 17 community colleges and seven public universities for this purpose and supports partnership and policy development.

Continued Administration of First Generation Student Success Grants: Thanks to continued funding approved by the Oregon Legislature, HECC continues to administer the First Generation Student Success grants funds supporting nine Oregon public community colleges and projects, programs, and strategies that will increase the number of students who are underrepresented by race/ethnicity as defined in ORS 342.120, including low income, college-bound, and/or first-generation and who enroll in community colleges statewide and make progress toward a certificate or degree. Grant projects are serving Latinx, Native American, and African American students.

Future Ready Oregon Implementation: HECC is continuing our implementation of Future Ready Oregon, an investment package passed in 2022 that supports the education and training Oregonians need for good-paying jobs and meaningful careers. Future Ready Oregon investments support grants and strategies that center the needs of historically underserved and underrepresented Oregonians, identify and address barriers to education and employment, and expand partnerships between communities, educators, and employers to advance innovation in talent development. [Learn more here.](#)

Future Ready Oregon Industry Consortia: The HECC has convened three statewide Industry Consortia representing the healthcare, manufacturing, and technology industry sectors. Each consortium is comprised of representatives from industry, education, labor, and community-based organizations. Consortia are advisory to the HECC and the Workforce and Talent Development Board. Most recently, the consortia informed priorities for a sector-specific Workforce Ready Grants funding opportunity (see below). Additionally, in 2024, the consortia engaged a consultant to conduct focus groups with employers across the state to better understand their workforce and talent development needs. [Learn more here.](#)

Workforce Ready Grants Expand Career Pathways in Healthcare, Manufacturing, and Technology: In a recent press release, the HECC announced the latest round of Future Ready Oregon Workforce Ready Grant awards to support 62 innovative workforce and talent development projects. A combined total of approximately \$42 million has been preliminarily awarded, making this the largest round of Future Ready Oregon grant funding to date. These sector-focused Workforce Ready Grants in Healthcare, Manufacturing, and Technology support collaborative programs that center the needs of Oregon's underserved communities and connect individuals to resources for pursuing good-paying jobs and meaningful careers in key sectors of Oregon's economy. Projects specifically serving members of Oregon's Tribes include:

- The Fostering Oregon's Workforce in Advanced and Restorative Healthcare Program at Portland State University (FORWARD PSU) aims to prepare a cohort of 30 American Indian/Alaska Native undergraduates to pursue a terminal degree in a health professions program—Master of Public Health (MPH), Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD), Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD), or Doctor of Medicine (MD) .

- Sheridan School District (SSD) will complete next steps in developing the manufacturing pathway at the Barbara Roberts Career Technical Education Center (BRCTEC).
- Oregon Institute of Technology’s “Applied Computing Training for Upskilling and Reskilling Professionals” project aims to equip professionals from underserved communities with essential concepts and tools in applied computing, covering topics from system architecture to data science methodologies.
- PSU’s collaborative and innovative training program will upskill and reskill tribal members in cybersecurity jobs. This partnership between Hatfield Cybersecurity and Cyber Defense Policy Center, CISCO, Institute of Tribal Government, and Umpqua Technologies of the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Indians will build awareness and lower barriers to pursue careers in cybersecurity with an industry-recognized certification.
- Warm Spring Community Action Team will expand its Grow with Google certificate program to enable Warm Springs community members to complete training and find long-term career opportunities in the technology sector.

Workforce Benefits Navigators: Oregon’s nine local workforce development boards have launched their Future Ready Oregon Workforce Benefits Navigators (WBN) projects to increase access to benefits and services that help marginalized and underserved communities access workforce education and training opportunities, career coaching, and wraparound supports. The boards are piloting a variety of strategies. For example, Southwestern Oregon Workforce Investment Board is setting up tech resources, including mobile apps, in collaboration with libraries, tribal organizations, and local agencies. This effort is geared towards enhancing accessibility, fostering family-sustaining employment, and contributing to a thriving regional economy.

Continued Administration of Workforce Programs as well as Administration of Adult Basic Skills: We work with partners statewide to train returning students, adults, dislocated workers, and all Oregonians with the skills they need for gainful employment. The HECC is the administrative entity for several federally funded workforce and education programs, including those authorized by Title I and Title II of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). In 2024 the HECC and other workforce system partners collaborated to revise the WIOA Plan and align it with other statewide work and strategies, including the Career and Technical Education (CTE) State Plan to support adults in the transition between adult basic skills and credit CTE programs.

Supporting Dislocated Workers: The HECC Office of Workforce Investments (OWI) continues its extensive work to mitigate challenges for workers and employers. The OWI works with the Oregon Employment Department, partner agencies, and community-based organizations to coordinate Rapid Response services supporting affected workers and businesses during reported layoffs. The OWI continues to support businesses and Oregon’s nine Local Workforce Development Boards in their service.

Oregon Youth Works – Investments with Tribal Communities: Oregon Youth Works (OYW) is an initiative charged with empowering Oregon’s youth by supporting workforce and positive youth development programs that cultivate practical skills, foster community engagement, and drive sustainable growth. This is achieved through a variety of programs and service models to meet participant and community needs. Currently OYW is directly or indirectly partnering with eight of Oregon’s nine federally recognized sovereign tribal nations. In 2024 Oregon Youth Works increased engagement visits with tribal members. These visits helped staff better connect, learn, and engage with each tribe about their tribal specific plans to better support young people in education and workforce, learn about potential barriers, and considerations that led to new opportunities for improvement and access.

- **Federal Initiatives:** Statewide Tribal Youth grant was awarded to HECC for investing in tribal youth employment, in conjunction with Bureau of Land Management (BLM) projects in the Lakeview and Burns BLM Districts.
- **State Agency Collaboration:** Collaboration with Youth Development Oregon to coordinate Tribal Youth Workforce partnerships and funded agreements to improve alignment, implementation, and coordinate reporting.

Oregon Youth Works consists of five programs described below. All OYW programs apply the HECC Equity Lens in awarding grants by identifying and supporting populations with greater vulnerability including communities of color, indigenous communities, communities with members who have limited proficiency in English and communities with lower-income members.

Oregon Conservation Corps (OCC): The HECC has awarded nearly \$11 million in grant funding for the 2023-2025 biennium. OCC is serving youth from the following Oregon federally recognized sovereign tribal nations: Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Confederated Tribes of the Siletz, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Indians, Klamath Tribes, Fort Bidwell Indian Community, and Pit River Tribe. OCC partnerships focus on reaching youth from diverse cultural backgrounds, identities, and abilities and plan to serve upwards of 500 young adults in the 23-25 grant cycle. OCC partners operate through a crew-based model to reduce the risk wildfire poses to communities and critical infrastructure, help to create fire-adapted communities, and engage youth and young adults in workforce training. Tribal youth not only administer fuels mitigation, but they also participate in the delivery and care of their tribal elders through delivering wood and hardening homes from wildfire risk simultaneously learning cultural history and essential employability skills.

Oregon Youth Corps (OYC): Oregon Youth Corps (OYC) opens stewardship focused opportunities for young people to develop employability skills, connect with their community, learn about themselves, and grow interest in what comes next in life. OYC delivers funding and resources to youth workforce training providers through a variety of mechanisms, including intergovernmental agreements and grants awards.

- **Intergovernmental Agreements:** OYC now provides opportunities to invest funding into Co-developed Youth Workforce Partnerships with all of Oregon's Federally Recognized Tribal Sovereign Nations, utilizing Intergovernmental Agreements (IGA). Starting in July 2024, partnerships with five Tribes have successfully launched executed IGA's. For the upcoming 2025 biennium, OYC has identified \$540,000 (\$60,000 per Tribe) as the initial funding investment to initiate each four-year Youth Workforce Partnership IGA.
- **Grant opportunities:** OYC provides program grants in 2024 with a goal to provide youth workforce and development experiences to local organizations within each of Oregon's 36 counties. Grants emphasize the teaching and practicing of workforce skill development and are modeled through stewardship focused work-based learning experiences for youth and young adults. HECC has released over \$3.2 million in funding thus far to help support over 1,300 workforce opportunities for young people throughout Oregon.

Oregon Youth Employment Program: In 2023-2025 biennium, the HECC received \$9 million to continue to enhance opportunities for Oregon's youth by supporting both the Oregon Youth Corps and the Oregon Youth Employment Program (OYEP). The OYEP program is designed to deliver equitable and inclusive access to meaningful experiences for youth aged 14-24. By prioritizing skills training, work experience, career development, and youth development, it not only empowers young people but also strengthens the collaborative impact within communities.

To ensure the program effectively serves those most in need, at least 75% of participants come from historically underrepresented groups, including communities of color, rural areas, and those affected by generational poverty.

Additionally, a minimum of 20% of program funds is dedicated to organizations with proven experience serving communities of color, ensuring targeted and impactful delivery of services. So far this biennium, OYEP has served over 1,000 youth, providing over 1,000 paid work experiences.

Department of Human Services (DHS) Youth Employment Program: The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Youth Employment Program (YEP) operates year-round to provide meaningful employment opportunities for youth participating in the JOBS Program. By focusing on TANF-eligible youth aged 16-24—including teen parents, non-parenting teens, young parents, and youth connected to the Child Welfare Independent Living Program and Vocational Rehabilitation Program—YEP empowers participants to build critical skills, gain work experience, and achieve greater self-sufficiency.

This targeted approach not only helps vulnerable youth overcome barriers to employment but also fosters pathways to long-term economic stability, equipping them with the tools to support themselves and their families while contributing to their communities.

Oregon WIOA Youth Programs: The Oregon WIOA Youth Programs play a vital role in preparing young people aged 14-24 for successful careers by providing transformative workforce development opportunities through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). These programs serve both in-school and out-of-school youth, offering access to hands-on job experiences such as summer and year-round employment, pre-apprenticeships, internships, job shadowing, and on-the-job training.

Beyond employment opportunities, the programs equip youth with skills for lifelong success through concurrent education and workforce preparation, leadership development, and personal supportive services. Participants also gain critical insights through labor market information and are guided toward postsecondary education and advanced training pathways.

By bridging education, employment, and career development, WIOA Youth Programs empower young people to overcome barriers, build brighter futures, and contribute to the strength and resilience of their communities. During the 2023-24 fiscal year WIOA Youth programs served over 2,000 youth.

Oregon CTE State Plan: In April 2024, the State Board of Education approved the 2024-27 Oregon CTE State Plan. This strategic plan for CTE in Oregon is developed and implemented jointly by the Oregon Department of Education and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission in collaboration with regional CTE partners and Oregonians. The development of this plan included significant community outreach and engagement to vet the proposed outcomes and strategies and the plan meets the US Department of Education's requirements for federal funding through the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V, 2018).

The current low unemployment rate and contraction in Oregon's population make CTE an essential component of Oregon's education system and a means to improve equitable workforce development and support business and industry vitality. The CTE State Plan identifies opportunities for focused support to school districts, colleges, community partners, and regions to improve the quality and consistency of CTE in the state. It also continues the important work of integrating career connected learning into our education and workforce development system to expand access and opportunities to high-wage, in-demand occupations.

Advance CTE Equity Project: A year ago, a team from Oregon’s Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD) was chosen to take part in a project with six other states, offered by Advance CTE, a national advocacy and professional development organization. The project asked states to identify an equity gap or area of concentration and develop a project that helps address that gap. The project the team developed involves Tribal high school students who are taking career and technical education (CTE) courses at the high school level and helps facilitate their transition into a community college CTE program to continue their education. To that end, the team members have focused on using Perkins data to see how many Native American high school students who are taking CTE courses in their high schools continue with their CTE program at an Oregon community college CTE program, and of those, how many go on to earn a degree or certificate. Ideally, we could learn how many of those students are hired into a job in their field or choose to go on to a university in a related field.

The project with Advance CTE will end on January 31, 2025, but the team plans to continue their efforts to make college CTE more accessible and attractive to tribal students. Looking ahead, here are the project elements we plan to continue:

1. **Promotional materials for high school students, their families, and staff at their high schools**
 - Community College CTE resource book
 - The benefits of CTE, for Tribal students and families
2. **Outreach and engagement**
 - Identify and attend conferences and events that involve educators, students and communities to share materials and present at sessions
3. **Professional development opportunities**
 - Training for counselors, advisors, and CCL System Navigators using the foundational documents *A Toolkit for Tribal Consultation 2.0* and *Essential Understandings of Native Americans in Oregon* (created by Office of Indian Education, ODE)
4. **Using data to understand CTE transitions**
 - Examine K-12 CTE data incorporating new ODE/OIE data points for Tribal affiliation
 - Examine community college CTE data

Link data sets for analysis and evaluate transition success from K-12 CTE students to community college CTE programs or degree-seeking pathways.

College Credit while in High School – Accelerated Learning: Educational experiences that allow high school students to earn college credit while in high school are known in Oregon as “accelerated learning” programs. The HECC works with educators across the state to ensure that students may access quality accelerated learning programs while in high school. Students participating in accelerated learning usually start on a pathway to a college degree or certificate. These programs aim to provide bridges that support and encourage college and career preparation. They can smooth the transition into a college or university by enabling high school students to successfully earn college credit and participate in programming to orient and motivate them for postsecondary degrees and certificates. The HECC coordinates closely with the Oregon Department of Education, community colleges, and public universities to implement the state’s equity lens through the state standards for college credit in high school.

Adult Basic Skills Annual Conference: This year’s Oregon Adult Basic Skills (ABS) Conference – held on November 4-5, 2024, in Salem, Oregon – was a great success. The theme, "Point of View," emphasized the

importance of recognizing and valuing diverse perspectives of adult learners and those pursuing high school equivalency. The diverse perspectives of adult learners span a wide range of experiences, including those of immigrants, first-generation students, individuals with dyslexia, those impacted by trauma, gifted students, individuals affected by incarceration, individuals experiencing poverty, people from both rural and urban environments, and more. This year's conference brought together educators from across the state to discuss topics such as creating inclusive learning environments through Universal Design for Learning, supporting language and literacy skills building for learners with diverse needs, implementing effective GED® programs that retain and transition students through college and career, data in Oregon's adult education programs, and more. The Oregon Adult Basic Skills Conference is an annual event that brings together professionals committed to advancing Adult Basic Skills and high school equivalency education. From engaging plenary sessions to thought-provoking workshops, participants had the opportunity to collaborate, learn, and exchange ideas.

Statewide Administration of Oregon's High School Equivalency Program: Oregon's High School Equivalency Program, administered by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), plays a critical role in preparing students for college and career readiness, aligning with the state's adult attainment goals. This comprehensive program encompasses GED® test preparation, instruction, testing services, processing, and hosting a national conference for educators to share best practices and innovations in adult education.

In 2023, HECC continued to leverage state funding allocated by the Legislature to address the financial and systemic barriers many GED® test candidates face. These investments support the cost of GED® testing and the provision of vital wraparound services designed to ensure equitable access to educational success.

Through these efforts, HECC empowers adult learners to achieve their GED® credentials and equips them with the skills and resources needed to transition seamlessly into college and career pathways. By addressing barriers holistically, Oregon is making significant strides in fostering a more educated and skilled workforce, contributing to the state's long-term economic growth and social equity goals.

OregonServes and AmeriCorps in Oregon: Since 1994, OregonServes has served as Oregon's federally designated state service commission, promoting lifelong service and supporting personal, educational, and career growth. The state commission is guided by Governor-appointed members who develop a three-year State Service Plan, prioritizing equity, reducing barriers to service, and ensuring that programs reflect the diverse needs of Oregon's communities. As the central hub for national service, OregonServes administers approx. \$3.7 million annually in AmeriCorps State grants, funding programs that address education, environmental stewardship, economic opportunity, emergency response, public health, veteran, and youth services. We prioritize recruitment in local communities, ensuring those closest to challenges are part of developing solutions. Recent investments include a \$75,000 planning grant to Salvation Army Grants Pass to create a program addressing homelessness and housing instability in Southern Oregon.

AmeriCorps provides individuals aged 17 and older opportunities to serve their communities while gaining valuable experience, earning certifications, training, and a living stipend, along with benefits like health insurance, childcare assistance, and an education award for further education or student loan repayment. For tribal communities, AmeriCorps offers dual opportunities: individuals can serve as AmeriCorps members, while tribes can establish their own programs through OregonServes-administered grants or federal Tribal Grant funding. These efforts help build community capacity, expand access to resources, and support diverse community needs.

OregonServes is committed to advancing equity and dismantling systemic barriers. Through partnerships with organizations like the Coalition for Racial and Economic Justice, College Possible Oregon, Metropolitan Family Service, and the RARE AmeriCorps Program, we've addressed education inequities, increased college enrollment rates, increased economic opportunity in rural communities, reduced barriers to access loans and rebates for electric vehicles for low-income communities, and supported second chance programs for formerly incarcerated individuals. Looking ahead, OregonServes is in process to launch a new Youth Mental Health Corps, is a leader in the multi-organizational implementation of a state Climate Corps in Oregon, through the establishment of the Oregon Climate Alliance, and continues to prioritize tribal outreach, in its mission to strengthen workforce pathways, address pressing community challenges, and ensure all Oregonians have the opportunity to thrive through service.

Continued Approval of New Academic Programs at the community colleges and public universities.

HECC Commission Leaders Visited Colleges and Universities Statewide to Inform Our Work:

Since February 2024, Higher Education Coordinating Commission leaders have been travelling across the state to visit all of Oregon's 24 public colleges and universities, and to foster conversations on how the HECC can more effectively coordinate and support them. HECC Chair Sandy Rowe and Vice Chair Greg Hamann proposed the campus visits in January of this year. Thanks to the welcoming responses of institution partners, either the chair or vice chair have already visited 17 of the 24 colleges and universities and with additional visits scheduled, they aim to conclude their tour by spring 2025. The purpose of this statewide tour is for Commission leaders to deepen their understanding of each institution's work, culture, and opportunities, and to promote a shared understanding of respective roles at the institution and state levels.

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