



**OCCA
DIGEST**

**UPDATES FOR
COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

Oregon Community College Association
www.occa17.com

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.



Happy
Holidays!

May the spirit of the holidays bring warmth to your heart and happiness to your home.

Wishing you a season of joy and a year of endless opportunity. We look forward to serving you in the new year!

Merriest wishes,
the OCCA staff

Don Casey Abby Kim Laura Katie


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Executive Director's Message



A message from OCCA Executive Director Dr. Abby Lee:

As we close out this remarkable year, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your dedication, vision, and leadership.

This year's OCCA Annual Conference was truly record-setting, which is a testament to the strength of our community and the dedication you bring to advancing our mission. Thank you for being present, engaged, and instrumental in making it such a success.

Looking ahead, we are preparing for a short but impactful legislative session. I know we will enter it with the same energy and determination that carried us through this year. With your guidance and collaboration, I am confident we will make meaningful progress and amplify the voices of our students and colleges.

May this holiday season bring you joy, rest, and inspiration. I look forward to starting the new year alongside you, ready to build on our momentum and continue making a difference.

With gratitude and excitement,
Abby

In the Spotlight

Legislative Days Recap & Revenue Forecast

Legislators had been anxiously anticipating the arrival of the state's quarterly economic and revenue forecast, which was released on November 19. The forecast shows an economy that slowed through early 2025 but is beginning to stabilize, with state economists still expecting a potentially significant rebound later this year, Oregon continues to lag behind national trends in job growth and unemployment, but income tax collections remain steady enough to signal that the state is not currently in recession.

For the 2025–27 biennium, the General Fund forecast was revised upward by \$309.5 million, driven mostly by higher-than-expected, mostly one-time corporate income tax revenues from prior tax years, along with a modest uptick in personal income tax revenues. Most other revenue sources declined slightly, leaving a projected June 2027 ending balance of negative \$63.1 million. Although the federal data blackout continues to

limit visibility, current indicators suggest moderate economic expansion with recession risks still present (at 25 percent) but slowly easing. However, with passage of the federal H.R. 1 (the One Big Beautiful Bill Act), Oregon still faces an estimated loss of \$15.1 billion in federal funding over the next three biennia, keeping significant strain on the state's fiscal outlook.

The economic forecast was presented during November Legislative Days where legislators receive updates on various topics and discuss potential legislation for the 2026 Legislative Session. During Legislative Days, the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education heard a report from Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) Executive Director Ben Cannon on budget cut scenarios the Governor has directed state agencies to prepare. Each state agency was required to prepare a cut list at 2.5 percent and one at 5 percent.

For community colleges, the HECC's 2.5 percent cut list includes:

- \$21 million cut to the Community College Support Fund
- *\$2 million cut to Career Pathways funding*

At 5 percent HECC's cut list includes:

- *\$41 million cut to the Community College Support Fund*
- *\$3 million cut to Career Pathways funding*
- *\$13 million cut Oregon Promise (no new students added)*
- *HECC childcare program closed*

Oregon Higher Education Coordination Act of 2026

Representative Pam Marsh is developing a major restructuring proposal for Oregon's higher education system as bill for 2026. 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. OCCA met with several legislators during Legislative Days to raise concerns about this piece of the proposal.

Governor releases 'Oregon's Prosperity Roadmap' to boost economic development, invites OCCA to participate in announcement



Governor Tina Kotek on Tuesday announced her strategy to focus on the state's economic development efforts with the "Prosperity Roadmap". The strategy lays out three broad goals: retain and grow Oregon businesses, catalyze job creation, and accelerate Oregon's economic growth. The Governor will work to advance

these goals through a series of administrative actions and legislation during the 2026 session.

Leading up to the announcement, which took place in Tualatin at semiconductor manufacturer Lam Research, the Governor invited key stakeholders to attend the press conference. OCCA was invited to participate, and Deputy Director John Wykoff attended (in photo, second from left in back row) along with Clackamas Community College President Dr. Tim Cook, Lane Community College President Dr. Stephanie Bulger, and Mt. Hood Community College President Dr. Lisa Skari.

While the "Prosperity Roadmap" doesn't specifically mention higher education as a partner in the efforts, OCCA looks forward to working with the Governor's Office, her new Chief Prosperity Officer, and the Oregon Prosperity Council to make sure community colleges are included moving forward in strategies to bolster workforce training.



OCCA Board to meet Friday

The OCCA Board of Directors will hold its quarterly meeting virtually on Friday. The meeting will feature a board development opportunity with Selena Grace, President of the Northwest Commission on Colleges & Universities (NWCCU), the accrediting body for Oregon's community colleges.



Lunch & Learns provide quick professional development opportunities

In October, OCCA hosted a Lunch and Learn session featuring Carol Samuels and Brendan Watkins of Piper Sandler & Co. The discussion focused on what

In addition, the board will hear a federal issues update from Dustin Buehler, Special Counsel for the Oregon Office of the Attorney General. The Board is also expected to take action on proposed revisions to the OCCA Bylaws and Board Policies, as well as the association's 2026 Legislative Priorities.

Please [click here](#) for the board meeting agenda.

board members need to know about Oregon's Public Employees Retirement System. The session highlighted upcoming rate changes for the 2025–27 biennium and the implications of side account adjustments for community college budgets.

The November Lunch and Learn provided an overview of Oregon's 2026 budget landscape. Presenters included Kim To from the Legislative Services Office, Kyle Thomas from HECC, and John Wykoff. They outlined key fiscal pressures and the legislative budget outlook.

Due to the holidays, there will be no December Lunch & Learn webinar. However, [registration will open soon](#) for the January 22 Lunch & Learn on Legislative Advocacy for the 2026 Legislative Session.

All Lunch and Learn sessions are recorded and available online at [OCCA's website](#).

OCCA Conference brings opportunity & connection



The 2025 OCCA Annual Conference was an inspiring gathering of board members, presidents, and administrators from across Oregon on Nov. 5-7 in Hood River. Over three days, we celebrated accomplishments, looked ahead to the legislative session, and shared ideas to strengthen our colleges. The energy was high, and the conversations left participants motivated and engaged. Thank you to the

Member Services and Executive committees for their efforts to provide support and vision.

[Click here for more conference highlights.](#)

For a gallery of photos of the conference, please [click here](#).

Thank you to Conference Diamond Sponsor PACE!



SAFETY • SERVICE • STABILITY

A Trust Built for Students

OCCA would like to extend a huge THANK YOU to OCCA Conference Diamond sponsor **PACE!** The Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA) and Special Districts Association of Oregon formed PACE in 2006 to serve the unique needs of Oregon's community colleges, public school districts, Education Service

Districts (ESDs) and charter schools. PACE's unequaled coverage options, its size and steady financial base allow them to address member needs quickly. Unlike an insurance company whose profits are distributed to shareholders, PACE's only business objectives are to provide reasonable rates and comprehensive coverage to participating entities.

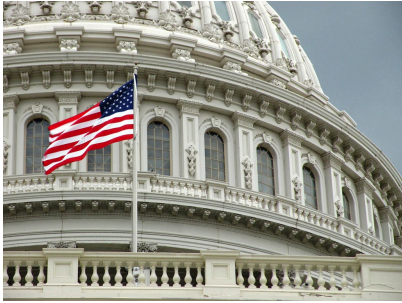
PACE is always looking for ways to help members protect what matters most — students. PACE says it's wonderful to partner with OCCA in keeping students, faculty and colleges safe!

Conference Gold Sponsor



Home care jobs through the state offer unprecedented flexibility, allowing students to work around their class schedule in a job that makes a difference. No previous experience required, and all training is free or paid. Skills obtained are highly transferable. Jobs are open in every Oregon county. Visit OregonHomeCareJobs.com.

Federal Issues Update: Government shutdown ends



After 43 days, the longest shutdown of the federal government in U.S. history ended with the passage of a continuing resolution to fund most functions of the government until January 30, 2026. The bill that passed did include funding through September 30, 2026, for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which many community college students and their families rely on to stay enrolled in college. Congressional appropriators continue to work on the remaining FY 26 appropriations bills, including the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education funding bill, which funds education grants and programs, in hopes of reaching agreement before the January 30 expiration of the continuing resolution.

On November 18, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) announced that as part of the winddown of the department's operations, several intergovernmental agreements were signed with the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Interior, and State to move a number of programs and grants operations to these agencies. The agreements are similar to the one ED signed this summer with the Department of Labor to transfer Career and Technical Education (CTE) program grants.

[Click here for the list of all department operations changes.](#)

2025 brought many changes to the federal higher education and workforce training landscape and this trend will continue in 2026. Policy changes at the federal level continue to impact students and institutions. Throughout the course of the year, OCCA monitored new developments (sometimes occurring daily) and engaged in advocacy on behalf of Oregon's community colleges with our national partners. This included advocating for the passage of Workforce Pell and continued funding for grants that serve our state's diverse communities, tracking the government shutdown and impact on student basic needs, the termination of Title III and other grants at several of the colleges, and the increase in federal immigration enforcement activities across the state. We appreciate your efforts in contacting the Oregon Congressional delegation to advocate in support of the community college mission and students you serve in your communities. OCCA remains committed to voicing statewide priorities and advocating for community colleges at the federal level.

Worth the Read

Articles & reports worth a quick read

- [Dual enrollment's impact on completion](#) - CC Daily, 12/4/2025
- [A statewide approach to improving transfer pathways](#) - Inside Higher Ed, 12/4/2025
- [No college degree, no problem? Not so fast](#) - The Hechinger Report, 12/2/2025
- [Urging more vets to try the trades](#) - CC Daily, 12/2/2025

- [The growing diversity of community college trustees](#) - Inside Higher Ed, 12/1/2025
- [Breaking away from the pack](#) - CC Daily, 11/30/2025
- [A new law could change the way low-income students access college](#) - The Chronicle of Higher Education, 11/26/2025
- [Oregon community college numbers on the rise, but still below pre-pandemic levels](#) - Elkhorn Media Group, 11/26/2025
- [Hiring leaders equitably and effectively](#) - Inside Higher Ed, 11/26/2025
- [Leadership as a landscape](#) - CC Daily, 11/23/2025
- [Enrollment is up at Oregon's public colleges and universities](#) - 11/21/2025
- [Oregon's budget picture brightens - slightly](#) - OPB, 11/19/2025
- [Succession strategies for tomorrow's leaders](#) - CC Daily, 11/19/2025
- [Community colleges face new challenges as Trump battles with higher education](#) - PBS News Hour, 11/18/2025
- [Examining why students leave college](#) - CC Daily, 11/18/2025
- [Innovations to reduce college costs](#) - CC Daily, 11/18/2025
- [The growth of community college baccalaureates](#) - CC Daily, 11/17/2025
- [Why community colleges can't sit this one out](#) - CC Daily, 11/13/2025
- [Reawakening the civic mission of community](#) - CC Daily, 11/12/2025
- [Developing a 'strategic compass' for community colleges](#) - CC Daily, 11/12/2025
- [Enrollment growth continues, bolstered by short-term credentials](#) - Inside Higher Ed, 11/11/2025
- [The future of Career-Technical Education: Building on success while responding to new challenges](#) - New America, 11/5/2025

Kudos Corner: Colleges receive honors



SWOCC TRIO director earns prestigious recognition

Congratulations to Michelle Benoit, Director of TRIO Student Support Services at **Southwestern Oregon Community College**, who was recently honored with the Dr. Arnold Mitchem Leadership & Advocacy Award by the Northwest Association of Educational Opportunity Programs (NAEOP). Since 2013, Benoit has led the TRIO SSS program at Southwestern, where she has been a tireless advocate for students on her campus and throughout Oregon, the Northwest region, and nationally. Her leadership was particularly vital

during her tenure as Oregon TRIO Association (OTA) president in 2020, when TRIO programs nationwide faced unprecedented challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Click here for more details.](#)



PCC earns sustainability recognition

Congratulations to Portland Community College, which the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) recently named a top performer in its [2025 Campus Sustainability Index for Associate and Short-Cycle](#)

[Institutions](#), adding another major milestone in the college's long-standing commitment to environmental responsibility. This recognition follows PCC's Gold rating from STARS (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System) in March from the most widely recognized framework for publicly reporting sustainability performance in higher education. PCC's sustainability efforts span nearly 20 years. The college's Board of Directors adopted a Sustainability Policy in 2006 and soon after signed the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment, setting a course toward climate neutrality. [Click here to learn more.](#)

OCCA and our colleges do incredible things throughout the year that make an impact on students and our communities. Kudos Corner will highlight these commendation-worthy actions each week. Want to recommend a Kudos-worthy highlight? Email casey@occa17.com.

Mark Your Calendar

[Download the 2024-25 OCCA Calendar](#)

All times are PST.



December 2025

- 5 - OCCA Board Meeting, 9:00 a.m. (virtual)
- 8 - OCCA [Member Services Meeting](#), 3:00 p.m. (virtual)
- 9 - OCCA [Legislative Committee Meeting](#), 10:00 a.m. (virtual)
- 10 - HECC Funding & Achievement Committee Meeting, 1:00 p.m. (virtual)
- 11 - HECC Full Commission Meeting, 9:00 a.m., Salem (hybrid)
- 11 - OCCA Board Policy & Procedure Program Workshop (*subscribers only; contact [Karen Smith](#) for details*)
- 17 - OCCA [Executive Committee Meeting](#), 9:00 a.m. (virtual)

24-25 - OCCA Office Closed, Christmas Holiday
31 - OCCA Office Closed, New Year's Eve Holiday

January 2026

8 - Oregon Presidents' Council (OPC) Meeting, 9:00 a.m. (virtual)
13-15 - Legislative Days, Oregon State Capital, Salem
29 - [OCCA Lunch & Learn Webinar](#): 2026 Legislative Advocacy, 12:00 p.m. (virtual)



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