



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

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Legislative Emergency Board Moves Forward Support for Stronger Schools, Early Learning and Student Mental Health

SALEM, Ore. - Last Friday, the Oregon Legislative Emergency Board moved forward agenda items to increase opportunities and support mental health services for students across the state.

The board's actions included approving \$19 million for the Oregon Tribal Student Grant Program and \$1 million for a pilot program to provide gap financing for affordable housing projects co-located with child care or early learning centers.

The board also approved a federal grant application worth \$5.4 million for Project AWARE. The grant would focus on strengthening mental health awareness, workforce, and infrastructure in Oregon schools, including creating mental health navigators in elementary schools, youth violence prevention and more.

"Oregon's path to stronger schools must include investments in mental health and well-being, now more than ever. Students, families, and our education workforce thrive when we give them the support and resources to be successful," said [Representative Courtney Neron](#) (D-Wilsonville), a former teacher and vice chair of the House Committee on Education. "From supporting our students in higher education to ensuring more mental health navigators in elementary schools and youth violence prevention programs, these federal grant dollars will help us take action locally across every corner of the state."

Oregon Tribal Student Grant Program | \$19 million investment

The [Oregon Tribal Student Grant Program](#) provides grants to Oregon tribal students to offset the [cost of attendance](#) for attending Oregon colleges and universities. These funds will implement the new grant program for the 2022-2023 academic year.

“This is a historic investment in the future of Oregon tribal communities,” said [Representative Tawna Sanchez](#) (D-N/NE Portland, Shoshone-Bannock, Ute and Carrizo) and the second Native American to serve in the Legislature. “This program is a step in the right direction to righting the wrongs of the past that have exacerbated present day barriers to receiving a college education.”

The majority of Oregon’s tribal communities are located in rural parts of the state and face significant barriers to financial resources and receiving a postsecondary education. According to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), 40% of tribal community members who apply for financial aid in Oregon still face cost barriers to accessing college.

The Oregon Tribal Student Grant is expected to pay for most or all public college-related expenses not covered by other grants for students pursuing their first Associate, Bachelor’s, or Graduate degree. Award amounts will vary depending on where the student attends school and the degree pursuing.

The \$19 million for the program was originally established in House Bill 5202 during the 2022 legislative session.

Affordable Housing & Early Care and Education (ECE) Projects | \$1 million investment

The board also approved \$1 million in funding established in House Bill 5011 from the 2021 legislative session for a pilot program to provide gap financing for affordable housing projects co-located with child care or early learning centers. Efforts to co-locate early care and education with affordable housing are rooted in evidence of what young children and their families need to thrive.

“These investments will help us respond to the severe child care shortages that our state is facing,” said [Representative Ricki Ruiz](#) (D-Gresham), a parent to a newborn, former school board member and member of the House Committee on Education. “This is also about boosting our economy, since we know child care is critical infrastructure that allows parents to participate in the labor force.”

According to the Oregon Housing and Community Services, this pilot program could ultimately help fill approximately 1,000 early learning slots in the state.

Project AWARE | \$5.4 million investment

Project AWARE supports the development, implementation, and evaluation of a sustainable infrastructure for school-based mental health, promotes healthy social and emotional development of school-aged youth, and prevents youth violence in school settings. The program focuses on strengthening mental health knowledge, workforce, and infrastructure in Oregon schools through professional learning and by creating mental health navigators in elementary schools.

“Federal funding from this program would help us create safer environments in our schools,” said [Representative Zach Hudson](#) (D-Troutdale), a public school teacher and member of the House Committee on Education. “By investing in our children’s mental health needs, we are giving students the tools they need to thrive, especially as we continue to recover from the pandemic.”

Project AWARE is a federal grant application program from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The funding will go towards the Oregon Department of Education’s (ODE) [Strengthening Mental Health in Education Initiative 2.0](#), a collaboration of ODE, the Oregon

Health Authority (OHA), state, ESD, district, Tribal, community-based organizations, and local partners to promote and support school-based mental health across Oregon.

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