



**SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE
HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 25, 2023

Press Contact:

Tess Seger, Tess.Seger@oregonlegislature.gov

Hannah Kurowski, Hannah.Kurowski@oregonlegislature.gov

Legislature Makes Attending College Easier, More Affordable for Oregonians

Higher education opportunities give more Oregonians access to high-paying jobs, keep state economy competitive even as job market fluctuates

SALEM, Ore. - With many Oregon college and university students returning to school, Democrats today are reflecting on the 2023 legislative session's higher education investments. Democrats passed critical legislation that will make it easier for low-income and historically underserved Oregonians to pursue higher education through financial support, including tuition relief and grant opportunities. With these investments, legislators are working to ensure more Oregon students have greater career opportunities and high paying jobs out of college.

"Education — from early learning, to K-12, to higher education and vocational training — is the best way people can improve their lives and the lives of their families," said **Senate President Rob Wagner (D - Lake Oswego)**. "I am proud the Legislature is stepping up to meet our obligation as a state to see that our education system is accessible by all and prepares our students for their futures."

"This is how we make sure Oregon's economy stays competitive in the 21st century and help students gain the skills they need for good paying jobs without having to go

into crippling debt,” **said Representative Ricki Ruiz (D - Gresham)**, vice chair of the House Committee on Higher Education.

These efforts complement the Legislature's historic funding for K-12 classrooms and child care services for toddlers and infants [signed into law last week](#) by Governor Tina Kotek.

[Oregon’s Higher Education Opportunity Budget](#) invests more than [\\$3.7 billion](#) responding to the college affordability crisis. It includes:

- More than \$300 million for the Oregon Opportunity Grant;
- \$24.2 million to continue the successful Tribal Student Grant program;
- \$800 million for the Community College Support Fund; and
- \$1 billion for the Public University Support Fund.

Oregon Opportunity Grants: Putting Our Students Through College

The Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG) is Oregon's largest state-funded, need-based grant program that serves over 36,000 low-income college students every year. This session, Democrats invested [more than \\$300 million \(House Bill 5025\)](#) in the program that will mean a **25% increase** in tuition relief for the lowest income earners—bringing yearly assistance from \$5,000 to \$7,500 per student.

"All young people who want to pursue higher education should be able to do so, and we have a responsibility to uplift those students who face barriers to access through no fault of their own," **said Sen. Lew Frederick (D - Portland)**, co-chair of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education. "The Oregon Opportunity Grant program has supported our students for years and is a critical program for this state."

Grants are available to qualifying students attending Oregon colleges and universities, including community college and four-year institutions, for up to four years at full-time enrollment.

Maintaining and Strengthening the Tribal Student Grant Program

The Oregon Tribal Student Grant Fund established by the Legislature in 2023 through [House Bill 3565](#) will provide continuing support for students from Oregon's Nine Federally Recognized Tribes to offset the cost of attendance at Oregon colleges and universities.

The Legislature allocated \$24.2 million to the fund this year, on top of the \$19 million committed in 2022.

The program comes in response to the higher education affordability crisis that disproportionately impacts Native American students. According to data from Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), only 45% of Native American students who enroll in a public university complete a bachelor's degree within six years while 68% of all students statewide meet this same metric.

"For Oregon's Tribal communities, the fund has already proven to be a critical resource in its first year that helps our students not just afford college but continue on to graduation," **said Representative Tawna Sanchez (D-N & NE Portland)**, co-chair of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means. "This program is a testament to our commitment for racial justice and equity and will have impacts for generations to come."

The Legislature took an important step forward in 2022 when it established the Oregon Tribal Student Grant, breaking down barriers that keep tribal students from accessing higher education.

HB 3565 codifies the program within the HECC in order to continue providing robust support to tribal learners by ensuring **zero- or low-cost tuition**.

Since opening the program to applicants in May 2022, HECC has authorized 535 students to receive program funds and 365 students have enrolled in higher education programs.

Community College and Public University Support Funds: Investing in Every Unique Path

This session, through [House Bill 5025](#), Democrats invested \$800 million into the [Community College Support Fund](#), which assists institutions with a variety of educational activities, including associate degrees, transferable coursework, career and technical education, pre-college, adult basic education, literacy, and local workforce training.

Additionally, \$1 billion was allocated for the [Public University Support Fund](#), supporting university operational expenses with the goal of making sure students have what they need to get through school.

“We are committed to making Oregon's higher education system one that we can all be proud of,” **said Representative John Lively (D - Springfield)**, chair of the House Committee on Higher Education. “With these ongoing investments year over year, we’re making sure that our students have access to all types of programs that meet them where they are and prepare them for successful, rewarding careers.”

Empowering Essential On-Campus Part-Time Workers

House Bills [2611](#) and [2740](#) are improvements to the part-time faculty healthcare program established by Senate Bill 551 (2021). HB 2611 ensures that vision and dental benefits are included in healthcare plans for part-time faculty and HB 2740 alters the way classroom hours are calculated to better reflect the hours of preparation and after-class work put in by part-time faculty.

"Part-time faculty at our higher education institutions absolutely deserve to have dental and vision benefits included in their healthcare," **said Representative Susan McLain (D - Hillsboro, Forest Grove & Cornelius)**. “These faculty members are responsible for educating the next generation of Oregonians and deserve the peace of mind that comes with adequate healthcare."

"Our part-time and adjunct faculty put in hours of preparatory work and follow-up like grading and feedback," **said Representative Zach Hudson (D - East Multnomah County)**. “These services are key to a good classroom experience for the student, so it is essential we recognize faculty duties do not begin and end with the hours they spend in the classroom with students."

Supporting Campus Survivors

The Campus Survivors Bill ([House Bill 3456](#)) is a student-led initiative to make sure survivors of sexual assault at institutions of higher education have the resources and support they need, including free legal, medical and counseling services; confidential advice; and special protections for parties who report sexual assault who could be afraid of disciplinary action for drug and alcohol use.

This legislation will also ensure that Oregon collects consistent, accessible, statewide data on sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault from campus climate surveys. It will also require annual sexual assault response and prevention trainings for campus communities.

“Everyone deserves to feel safe on their campus and we need to collect more information on any barriers to safety that remain,” said **Representative Annessa Hartman (D - Gladstone, Oregon City & N Clackamas County)**. “Part of ensuring our kids feel safe on campus is making sure they’re equipped with the knowledge and resources they need for every situation they may encounter.”

Democrats in the Legislature are committed to ensuring Oregon’s higher education system is accessible, affordable, and inclusive so every Oregonian has access to the job training they need to be competitive in the 21st Century economy.

###