

Oregon college spending up, but behind national average

By SAM EDGE
The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregon has clawed its way out of the bottom of state rankings for higher education spending, but is still far from reaching national averages for per-student funding, according to a national report.

The latest State Higher Education Finance report, released in June, shows Oregon's state and local governments appropriated \$7,395 higher education dollars per student in fiscal year 2021, the state's highest per-student spending since 2001. That marks a 10% increase in per-student spending from 2020. Oregon is among a minority of states where spending has rebounded to pre-Great Recession levels.

But those numbers come with a big caveat, said Ben Cannon, director of the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission, during a Hunt Institute panel on July 26. Student enrollment is way down, Cannon said, which skews per-student funding and is undermining school budgets.



Sean Meagher/The Oregonian

Shadows fall June 24, 2022, on Johnson Hall on the campus of the University of Oregon in Eugene. The State Higher Education Finance report from June shows Oregon's state and local governments appropriated \$7,395 higher education dollars per student in fiscal year 2021, the state's highest per-student spending in 20 years.

Oregon also still lags far behind the national average of \$9,327 in per-student spending, spends less on financial aid per-student than the national average and relies on students to shoulder an above-average share of higher education revenue.

"This is the story of mild gain,

but a long way to go," Cannon told The Oregonian. "When we look at those increasing investments, we see enormous remaining need."

Less than a decade ago, Oregon ranked among the bottom of states for per-student spending in higher education, after some of the steepest

budget cuts in the country following the Great Recession.

The state has since made a 57% increase in higher education spending per-student, eclipsing pre-2008 recession funding levels, Cannon said. The latest report ranks Oregon 36th for per-student funding.

State legislators have been upping the funding to higher education over the past several budget cycles.

Despite increases in state funding, Oregon students still pay an outsized share of college revenue.

Across the country, student tuition makes up about 42% of higher education revenue, roughly double the contribution that tuition provided in 1980.

But Oregon is among 20 states where tuition dollars actually make up the majority of revenue. In 2021, tuition dollars made up 54% of revenue at Oregon's public colleges and universities. This is down from the nearly 64% that Oregon students shouldered in 2015, but far higher than the percentage of revenue that students contribute in neighboring states. Only 35% of Washington's higher education revenue and 20%

of California's revenue come from tuition.

Students studying at Oregon's public universities contribute to a greater share of school revenue than those at community college, which lean more heavily on state appropriations. Tuition revenue makes up about 23% of revenue at community colleges, and 69% at four-year schools.

Oregon also comes up short when it comes to providing state financial aid for students. Financial aid allocations in 2021 amounted to \$574 per full-time student, compared to the national average of \$921, according to the report. Washington allocated more than three times as much as Oregon in financial aid per full-time student, at over \$1,900 in 2021.

"Students in Oregon continue to pay higher than average price tags to access college and university, incurring greater than average debt loads," Cannon said. "We have a lot of work to do to expand the benefits of post-secondary education more broadly and equitably, and I think that should be a real call to action for Oregonians and Oregon policy makers."

Do we have enough water in Oregon? Depends who you ask

By MICHAEL KOHN
The Bulletin

BEND — Ask a few Oregonians if their state has enough water to meet its needs and you may get some varying answers. The differing views on the question may be tilted based on where people live, or even their gender.

Roughly half of all Oregonians (48%) agree there is enough water in Oregon to meet needs while 37% disagree and 15% are unsure, according to a survey conducted by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, a Portland-based nonprofit.

This number has shifted over the past 12 months — a year ago 56% of Oregonians said their state had enough water to meet current needs.

The survey also reveals a gender divide when it comes to who thinks there is enough water — 56% of female Oregonians believe we have enough water while 42% of their male counterparts agreed with them.



Malheur Enterprise/Contributed Photo, File

Lake Owyhee in southeastern Oregon is a major source of irrigation water for farms in Malheur County. A survey July 8-16, 2022, in Oregon shows 48% of Oregonians agree there is enough water in the state to meet needs while 37% disagree and 15% are unsure.

Younger people tended to agree with the statement more than older people — 54% of those 18 to 29 agreed Oregon has enough water for its needs, while just 39% of those in the 45-to 54-age category agreed.

There was also a split of opinion down party lines — 40% of Demo-

crats agree there is enough water to meet the needs of the state while 62% of Republicans agreed with the statement.

Attitudes were based on where people live, too — 54% of Willamette Valley residents agree there is sufficient water while the number

was 47% in the Portland area and 46% in the rest of the state.

The online survey consisted of 1,572 Oregon residents ages 18 or over. The independent and nonpartisan organization said this is a sufficient sample size to assess Oregonians' opinions, generally, and to review findings by multiple subgroups.

The survey was taken July 8-16. The survey's margin of error is plus or minus 2.5%.

Survey results show Oregonians are split between those who are willing to pay more in order to support drought-related infrastructure improvements and those who are not (49% to 40%).

About two-thirds of Democrats say they'd be willing to pay more (65%) compared to about one-third of Republicans (35%). Independents fell somewhere in between at 42%.

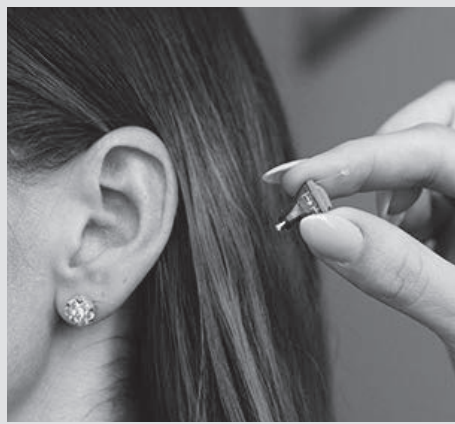
Across Oregon, there isn't a strong feeling that the agricultural community is doing enough to conserve

water. Just 37% of Oregonians agree that decisive action is being taken while 34% said they don't know.

When it comes to future needs, 36% of Oregonians think there is enough water while 46% disagree. A year ago, Oregonians were more evenly split on this question, with 42% saying Oregon has enough water for the future while 45% said there's not. This question also revealed a gender split — this year 45% of men said there is enough water to meet future needs while just 28% of women agreed with the statement.

The survey also revealed a political divide over whether or not the general public is doing enough to conserve water during droughts. The results showed that 41% of Republicans said the public is doing enough to conserve water while just 21% of Democrats agreed with the statement. In total (men and women), only 28% agree that the general public is doing enough while 56% disagreed.

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