

# Oregon schools need billions to close funding gap

By ALEX BAUMHARDT  
Oregon Capital Chronicle

SALEM — To meet state education goals, Oregon schools are going to need more money from the Legislature, a new analysis finds.

Every two years, the Education Quality Commission estimates the funding required to operate “a system of highly-effective schools” in the state and recommends a budget to the governor and the Legislature.

For the 2023-25 biennium, the commission found Oregon’s education budget needs nearly \$11.9 billion, or \$2.7 billion more than it receives.

“The state has made progress in recent years to narrow the investment gap between what it has historically budgeted for K-12 and what that system needs to achieve the state’s educational objectives,” the commissioners wrote. “Unfortunately, that progress has faced barriers.”

These include revenue shortfalls, the rising cost of goods and services and the

discovery that some of the corporate taxes constitutionally dedicated to the education budget, appear to be going into the state’s general fund instead. The committee said that “bears investigation and correction.”

The commission was created by the Legislature in 1999 to make education policy and budget recommendations. It’s made up of 11 people including Colt Gill, the director of the state’s Education Department, several school and education service district superintendents, the president of the state’s largest teacher’s union, Reed Scott-Schwalbach of the Oregon Education Association and two education consultants.

The recommendation to increase the budget is based on years of underfunding, according to the commission, and the addition of factors that would improve the quality of education in Oregon. These include paying for more school nurses, counselors and librarians to get schools up to nation-



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File  
**Pendleton High School senior Muriel Jones-Hoisington collects her diploma on Saturday, June 4, 2022, during commencement at the Pendleton Round-Up Arena. The Education Quality Commission estimates for the 2023-25 biennium, Oregon’s education budget needs nearly \$11.9 billion, or \$2.7 billion more than it receives.**

ally recommended ratios of these staff to students. It also recommended paying for more staff to work with English language learners.

The budget analysis includes an addition of \$450 for each classroom in the state for unreimbursed supplies. According to a

survey from the National Center for Education Statistics, 90% of K-12 teachers spend an average of \$459 out of pocket on classroom supplies each year.

## Smaller classes, more training

If the Legislature fully

funded the budget, it could pay for more teacher professional development days, teacher training and mentoring, new computers and computer education staff and allow schools to reduce class sizes.

The commission recommended the Legislature consider a budget that would pay for universal preschool.

In addition to sounding the alarm on some corporate tax dollars meant for education that were funneled to the state’s general fund, the commission criticized the Legislature for underfunding the education budget and then shifting pots of money to fill that hole. In 2021, the Legislature approved an education budget that was \$2 billion short of what the commission had recommended. The commission said lawmakers plugged that gap with Student Success Act dollars. Passed in 2019, the act is funded by a corporate tax and provides schools with \$2 billion every two years

to address student mental and behavioral health, class sizes and academic disparities among students.

Oregon’s school funding gaps go back to 1990, when voters capped the percentage of local property taxes dedicated to schools. This put the burden on the Legislature to make up the funding for districts; it has historically not fully funded the amount requested by the commission.

Oregon law directs the commission to identify at least two alternatives for achieving a greater level of educational quality if the budget request is not fully funded. The commission recommended that the Legislature “remain faithful to the intent of and targeted funding for the Student Success Act” and not use it to backfill the state’s education budget. Secondly, it said that if the Legislature cannot approve a budget that closes the funding gap in the next biennium, to focus on closing it gradually in the next two or three biennia.

## ‘Submarine ballots’ and ‘Betsy Brigades’ race to beat election deadlines

By GARY A. WARNER  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Nov. 8 general election is more than 12 weeks away, but Wednesday, Aug. 12, was the deadline to mail “submarine ballots” to some voters.

That’s the name of ballots that go to military and overseas voters who won’t be able to get a ballot, cast their votes and get it back to their county clerk in time to be counted. Like those on the USS Oregon attack submarine submerged somewhere in the seven seas.

The deadline, which is covered in Oregon Revised Statute 253.565, is just one of many coming and going as the election draws closer. One of the key dates next week will decide if a top candidate for governor goes on the Nov. 8 ballot.

### Deadline looms for ‘Run, Betsy, Run’

Secretary of State Shemia Fagan’s office has said it needs to have petitions seeking to put former Sen. Betsy Johnson on the Nov. 8 ballot submitted no later than Aug. 16. That will give officials two weeks to make sure the petitions add up.

Johnson, a longtime Democratic state senator from Columbia County, resigned from the Senate and left the Democratic party last year to mount a bid for governor as an unaffiliated candidate.

To do so, state law requires she submit petitions with enough valid signatures to equal 1% of the total vote in the last presidential election.

Based on the 2020 election, Johnson needs 23,743 valid signatures.

Signatures are checked against voter records to invalidate anyone who doesn’t qualify as an Oregon voter.

The longtime rule-of-thumb is to turn in 50% more signatures than needed. That’s a comfortable buffer to ensure the number thrown out doesn’t push the effort under the minimum needed to qualify.

Johnson campaign spokesperson Jennifer Sitton said late last week that the campaign was well on track to far surpass the number needed. Volunteer “Betsy Brigades” are out in force with petitions as part of the “Run, Betsy, Run” campaign.

Johnson supporters were collecting signatures at the Deschutes County Fair, while other campaigns for governor, congress and the Legislature also had booths.

Former Happy Valley Mayor Lori Chavez-DeRemer drove a golf cart decked out in campaign signs to shuttle fair-

goers from the parking lot to the entrance.

The Johnson campaign confirmed Thursday that it is on pace and will announce plans for events around the petition submission in the near future.

### Election day is Nov. 8; vote counting ends Nov. 15

The general election date is Nov. 8. That’s when voting stops. But counting votes will go on until Nov. 15.

Under a state law that went into effect this year, mailed ballots postmarked on or before election day will be counted if they arrive at county clerks’ offices within one week after Nov. 8.

The new balloting rules were used in the May 17 primary, which was marred by smeared bar codes on ballots in Clackamas County that further delayed final results on key races. One of the most watched was the 5th Congressional District upset win by Democratic challenger Jamie McLeod-Skinner of Terrebonne over incumbent U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Canby. Schrader won Clackamas County, but it wasn’t enough to flip the overall outcome.

Adding a wrinkle into the math for the general election is that the week after Nov. 8 will include two days with no regular mail service. Not only is Nov. 13 the usual Sunday with no mail pick-up and delivery, but so is Veterans Day, on Friday, Nov. 11.

The cut-off date will remain seven calendar days after election day, with properly postmarked ballots having to arrive by Nov. 15, according to Ben Morris, communications director for the secretary of state.

No ballot with a postmark after Nov. 8 will be counted during the one week period. No ballot, regardless of postmark, will be counted after Nov. 15.

During a briefing in the spring, Fagan said the state works with the U.S. Post Office to aggressively sweep all mailboxes for ballots in the days after a statewide election.

The majority of ballots are mailed in the county where they are to be counted and arrive within the first couple of days after the election.

The most common ballots with a qualifying election day or earlier postmark that arrive later, or sometimes are delayed beyond the one-week deadline, are those mailed outside of the county where the voter lives — or sometimes, the state. These ballots have to go through sorting hubs that can delay delivery.

## State higher ed commission seeks huge increase in student financial aid

By SAM EDGE  
The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregon’s Higher Education Coordinating Commission unanimously approved a budget request Thursday, Aug. 11, that includes a fourfold increase in funding for financial aid grants for Oregon students.

The request for higher education funding in 2023-25 includes a nearly \$780 million increase to the Oregon Opportunity Grant and Oregon Promise, the state’s premier financial aid awards. The budget also recommends continued funding for the Oregon Tribal Student Grant, which covers not only tuition but also housing and other college costs for enrolled members of Oregon tribes.

“It is a big investment, but it’s an investment we need. It’s an investment students have been advocating for for years,” said Maggie Gates, legislative director for the Oregon Student Association. “It’s just really exciting to see this sort of bold vision finally coming about.”

In total, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission is asking for an almost \$2 billion increase in funding, up to \$5.3 billion. The request also includes a proposed 10% increase in funds for public universities and a nearly 30% increase for community colleges, though part of that increase is one-time money.

The proposed budget is preliminary. The request goes next to the governor’s office, and after that is subject to votes by the 2023 Legislature. Commission



Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission/Contributed Photo  
**College graduates are seen in this 2017 photo from the state Higher Education Coordinating Commission. The panel on Thursday, Aug. 11, 2022, asked for a fourfold increase in financial aid grants.**

staffers don’t assume ultimate funding levels will match their requests.

“We do not expect to get everything we’re asking for,” Ramona Rodamaker, the commission’s deputy executive director, said. “In many ways what we’re laying out here is a menu of things we would like (state legislators) to invest in and support.”

The Oregon Tribal Student Grant was funded for the first time this year, as an effort to help address longstanding inequities that indigenous students face in higher education. The Legislature funded it for only one year, but the commission’s proposed budget would make that funding ongoing. The commission expected up to 700 tribal members to take advantage of the grant

in its first year, but commission staffers said Thursday that only around 400 people have submitted complete applications so far.

The commission is asking for a more than eightfold increase in funding for the Oregon Opportunity Grant, the state’s largest need-based aid award for low-income students. Commissioners want to see an increase from \$200 million in 2021-23 to \$945 million in 2023-25.

Commissioners also voted to ask for \$41 million more for the Oregon Promise grant, which pays community college tuition for Oregon high school graduates and GED earners who meet GPA requirements and enroll in a community college shortly after high school.

Oregon currently lags behind the national average state student aid award of \$921 per full-time student. The state only gave \$574 in financial aid per full-time student in 2021, according to a new national report. Cannon said that fully funding the budget would help Oregon become one of the top financial aid states in the country, approaching the funding levels of neighboring Washington which spent \$1,900 per-student in 2021.

Oregon’s community colleges asked the higher education commission for a 44% spending bump this year to help cover the cost of inflation, loss of federal pandemic aid and budget shortages caused by a steep downturn in enrollment during the pandemic.

## OREGON BRIEFING

### 100,000-pound drilling rig tips over in Portland

PORTLAND — The operator of a 100,000-pound drilling rig was seriously injured after the machine tipped over outside Oregon Health & Science University on Friday morning, Aug. 12, pinning the worker inside.

The operator, who has not been publicly identified, was extricated from the machine’s cab by Portland Fire & Rescue and taken to a trauma center, department spokesperson Lt. Laurent Picard said.

No one else was injured, Picard said.

The injured worker is an employee of Vancouver-based construction company Pacific Foundation and was working at the site of a hospital expansion project, according to Tim Johnson, general manager of Skanska, the construction and development company behind the project.

Skanska is investigating what caused the rig to tip over, Johnson said in a statement Friday afternoon.

Johnson said Skanska does not have permission to release the name of the worker, who is being treated at the

Oregon Health & Science University Hospital.

Portland Fire & Rescue received reports of the rig tipping over just before 10:45 a.m., Picard said.

Construction crew members positioned a jack to lift the rig up and off the worker before fire crews arrived. Fire officials then broke the glass of the cab and extricated the worker, Portland Fire & Rescue said in a statement Friday afternoon.

The extrication took 14 minutes, officials said.

### Oregon catalytic converter crime ring busted

BEAVERTON — A months-long investigation by the Beaverton Police Department may have completely dismantled a local organized crime ring responsible for a large portion of catalytic converter thefts up and down the West Coast, police said Thursday, Aug. 11.

Two alleged ringleaders and at least 12 of their suspected accomplices were indicted July 29 by a Washington County grand jury on dozens of aggravated theft, racketeering and

money laundering charges.

The investigation began in late 2021 when detectives said Tanner Lee Hellbusch, 32, of Beaverton, was running an illegal fencing operation by posing as a legitimate business buying and selling catalytic converters. In March, police said they pulled over Hellbusch with more than 100 stolen catalytic converters, worth about \$80,000 on the black market.

Hellbusch’s arrest led detectives to the person they believe is the top of the crime enterprise: Brennan Patrick Doyle, 32, of Lake Oswego.

The investigation came to a head in late July when police searched eight locations, including a rented lakefront house in Lake Oswego, where they arrested Doyle and said they found 3,000 catalytic converters, hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash, a high-end car and jewelry.

Doyle, Hellbusch and the 12 other not-yet-publicly-named defendants are accused of trafficking more than 44,000 stolen catalytic converters with an estimated street value of more than \$22 million since January.

— The Oregonian