

Oregon’s public universities and colleges want more from governor’s proposed budget

Oregon Public Broadcasting | By [Tiffany Camhi](#)

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Erik Neumann / JPR

The Rogue Community College campus in Medford on March 1, 2024. Statewide community college officials are calling on Gov. Tina Kotek to increase aid in her new budget proposal.

The state’s public universities and community colleges are calling for increased investment in higher education.



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keep up with increased costs institutions are facing.

The leaders argue the inadequate funding could make higher education more expensive for Oregonians and slow down the state’s workforce development efforts.

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[The governor's \\$138 billion budget](#), released earlier this week, is a guideline for state lawmakers ahead of next year's legislative session. In her proposal, Gov. Kotek doubled down on her top three funding priorities: confronting Oregon's homelessness and affordable housing emergency, K-12 education and addressing the state's behavioral health care crisis.

Higher education appears to be lower on the list of concerns.

"This is generally what we expected given the Governor's collaboration with agencies during the development of Agency Request Budgets, the state's revenue constraints and numerous pressing statewide priorities," said Higher Education Coordinating Commission Executive Director Ben Cannon in a statement. Back in August, HECC commissioners [sent a letter](#) to the governor, objecting to the budget-setting process which led up to this week's recommended budget.

In the 2025-2027 biennium, the governor recommends \$4.39 billion for the agency responsible for two main funding streams for colleges and universities: operating revenue to run the institutions and financial aid programs to help students afford the cost of college.

The proposal, a 6.4% overall increase from the last biennium, sets aside more than \$25 million to build up education pathways that lead to behavioral health care jobs and nearly \$29 million to expand select need-based grants, like the Oregon Opportunity Grant.

But those investments fall well short of what college leaders say are necessary, especially when it comes to financial aid for needy students.

Higher education leaders in both the community college and university realm want to see lawmakers increase funding for the Oregon Opportunity Grant, the state's largest student financial aid program. Both the Oregon Community College Association and the Oregon Council of Presidents are calling for an additional \$150 million investment in this program alone, more than five times what the governor's budget recommends.

Operating revenue for the schools is not where it needs to be either, argue college leaders and funding advocates. State support for Oregon's 17 community colleges saw

number is still \$50 million below what colleges need to maintain their current operations and services to students, according to the OCCA.

This budget gap could force colleges to make program cuts and pass the financial burden on to students and families in the form of rising tuition. That would ultimately threaten colleges' mission to serve students and communities, said Portland Community College President Adrien Bennings in an emailed statement.

"Fulfilling this mission requires adequate investment to sustain the programs and services that our students and employers depend on," said Bennings. "Without it, we risk undermining access to education and workforce training when it is needed most, especially in critical areas like housing construction, behavioral health and child care."

Leaders from the state's seven public universities share a similar sentiment.

Gov. Kotek's budget proposed nearly \$1.08 billion to support university operations and research. That's a slight increase from the last biennium, but with costs rising, the proposed funding level falls about \$14 million short of what universities need to sustain their current operations, according to OCOP.

"We're thankful to see the Governor hasn't proposed deeper cuts to higher education in Oregon, but we're acutely aware of the continued need for investment in Oregon's public universities and its students," said Portland State University's Vice President of Finance and Administration Andria Johnson in a statement.

Portland State, particularly, is relying on the state legislature for significant investment in public universities as it attempts to [close an \\$18 million budget deficit](#) this school year.

OCOP said it will advocate for an additional \$195 million in public university support from the state legislature next year.

It remains to be seen whether lawmakers will heed these calls. But it's sure to be an uphill battle for higher education advocates as they're set to compete with the state's more visible crises and face a state legislature that has [historically underfunded public colleges and universities](#).