

SECRETARY OF STATE

# **Higher Education Coordinating Commission:**

Oregon Must Improve Community College Performance,  
Student Support, and Sustainability Amid Persistent  
Enrollment Declines



## **House Committee on Higher Education**

January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023

# Overview

- Audit is of HECC with a focus on community colleges. Issued Dec. 19<sup>th</sup>.
- Audit examines three risk areas: student success, student support, and college sustainability.
- We found HECC can make critical improvements in all of these areas, with support from state leaders.
- Five recommendations are addressed to HECC. One is addressed to the Governor and legislators.

# Why community colleges matter

- Lower tuition, more locations, and open access admissions:
  - Critical for students who are low-income, from rural areas, older working students, first generation students, and students from underserved races and ethnicities.
- They are essential to meeting the state's education, economic, and workforce goals.
- Successful students see increased starting wages and median salaries five years after graduation.

# Important improvements made

- Students are obtaining certificates and associates degrees at higher rates.
- HECC and colleges have increased focus on equity and effective data use.
- Equity gaps have narrowed.

# Key Findings/Issues


- Student performance lags and accountability for results is low.
- The state and colleges lack data to guide strategic improvements.
- Crucial student support services are inadequately tracked and supported.
- Steep enrollment declines threaten college stability, despite increased state funding.
- HECC will not fully address these issues without legislative support.

# Student Success – Findings

- Student performance still lags versus other states.
- HECC and the colleges lack sufficient student and program data to guide strategic improvements.
- The system continues to lack transparency and accountability.
  - No public benchmarking of Oregon performance versus other states.
  - Individual college results incomplete and difficult to compare.
  - Oregon Student Success Center initiative results not public.
  - Accreditation reports kept confidential by most colleges.
  - Low level of strategic funds with performance reporting required.




# Student Success – Recommendations

- Substantially upgrade the community college system's transparency and use of data for improvement.
  - Publish complete student success metrics by college and statewide. Use them to identify successful programs and evaluate initiatives.
  - Analyze staffing needs at HECC and community colleges and request staff needed to support in-depth research, analysis, and public reporting.
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# Student Support – Findings

- Student support is critical for student success – particularly for low-income students and historically underserved populations.
  - Despite progress, substantial shortfalls remain, such as large advisor caseloads and limited support for effective programs.
  - Crucial student support services are inadequately monitored and supported, despite their importance to equity and student success.
  - Our findings tie in with the underrepresented students task force.
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# **Student Support – Recommendations**

- Evaluate the sufficiency and effectiveness of statewide and college-specific student support programs and academic advising.
  - Report results biennially to the Legislature.
  - Continue working to improve Oregon’s financial aid efforts, including addressing inequitable distribution and gaps for part-time and older students.
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# College Sustainability – Findings

- Despite increased state funding, Oregon's colleges face substantial threats to sustainability.
  - Persistent enrollment declines, before and after the pandemic, are greater than in most other states.
  - College funding per student FTE has increased, but colleges still need substantially more state funding to maintain the status quo.
  - HECC provides little strategic guidance or oversight in this area.
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# College Sustainability – Recommendations

- Each biennium, analyze and report to the public and Legislature on community college sustainability systemwide and by college.
  - Include the status of shared services and other sustainability steps colleges are taking.
  - As in the K-12 system, identify best practices in the community college system and the funding needed to reach state goals.
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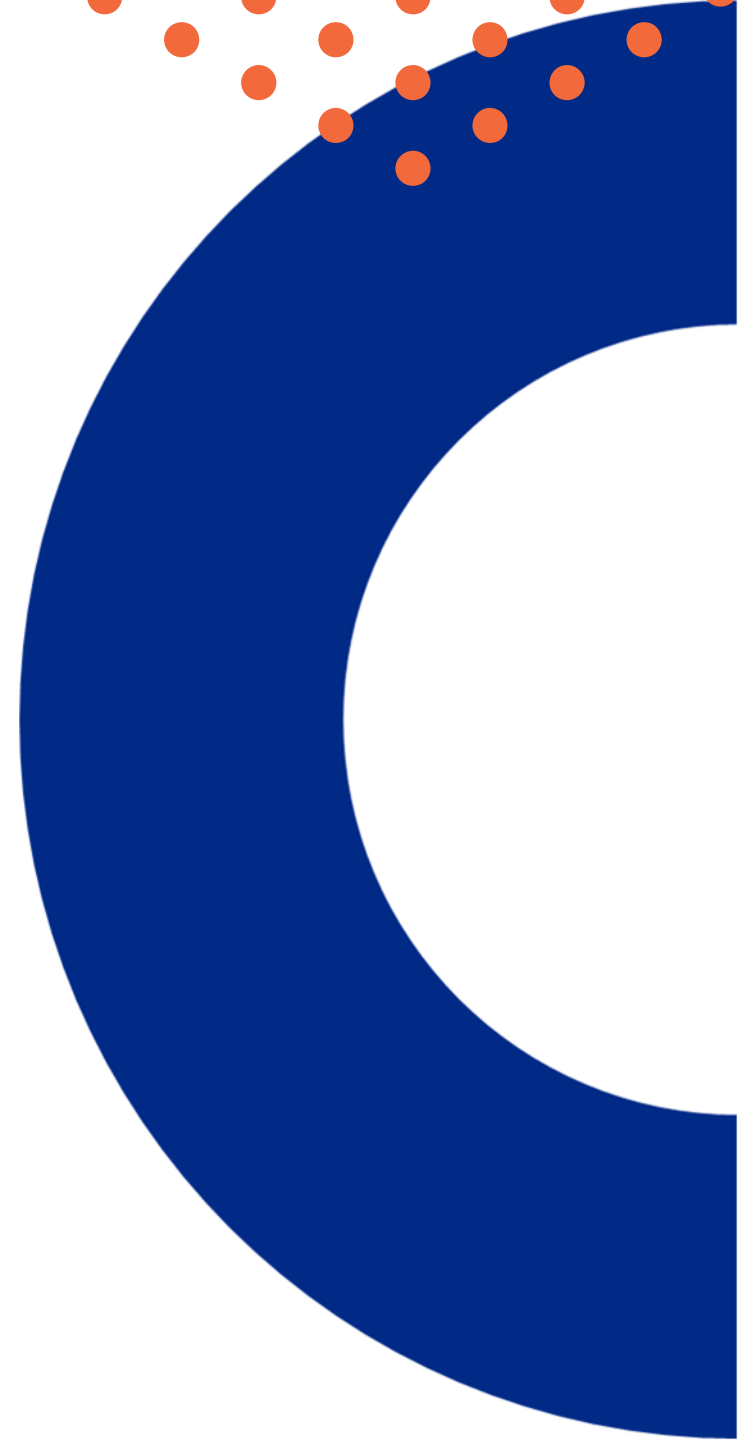
## **HECC struggles to help drive timely improvements**



- HECC's mission is ambitious but its role is limited by statute.
  - Its role includes monitoring the system's performance, reporting quality information on how the system is doing, and working with state leaders and stakeholders to address problems that arise.
  - To be more effective, HECC needs more staff in targeted areas and clear directives from state leaders to improve oversight of performance, student support, and college sustainability.
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# Recommendation to Governor's Office and Legislature:

- Increase the system's focus on student success and accountability, student support once students are at colleges (in addition to access), and college sustainability.
  - Help HECC and the colleges make the improvements requested in recommendations made to HECC.
  - Provide clear support, statutory language when needed, and necessary staff and funding at HECC and the colleges to help drive system improvement.
  - Steps to clarify HECC's authority are particularly important in student support and college sustainability.

**QUESTIONS?**





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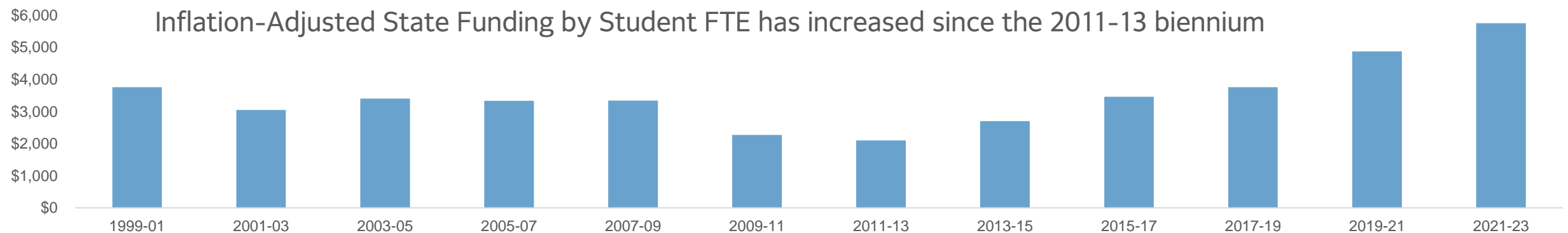
# Despite increased state funding, Oregon's colleges face substantial threats to sustainability

- Little strategic guidance or state oversight
- Public funding, spending, and state financial aid ranks relatively strong, nationally, due in part to local tax appropriations

## Oregon enrollment decreases outpace the nation

	2011 to 2019 Change	Pandemic Change
Oregon	20%	-21%
National	10%	8%


Inflation-Adjusted State Funding by Student FTE has increased since the 2011-13 biennium





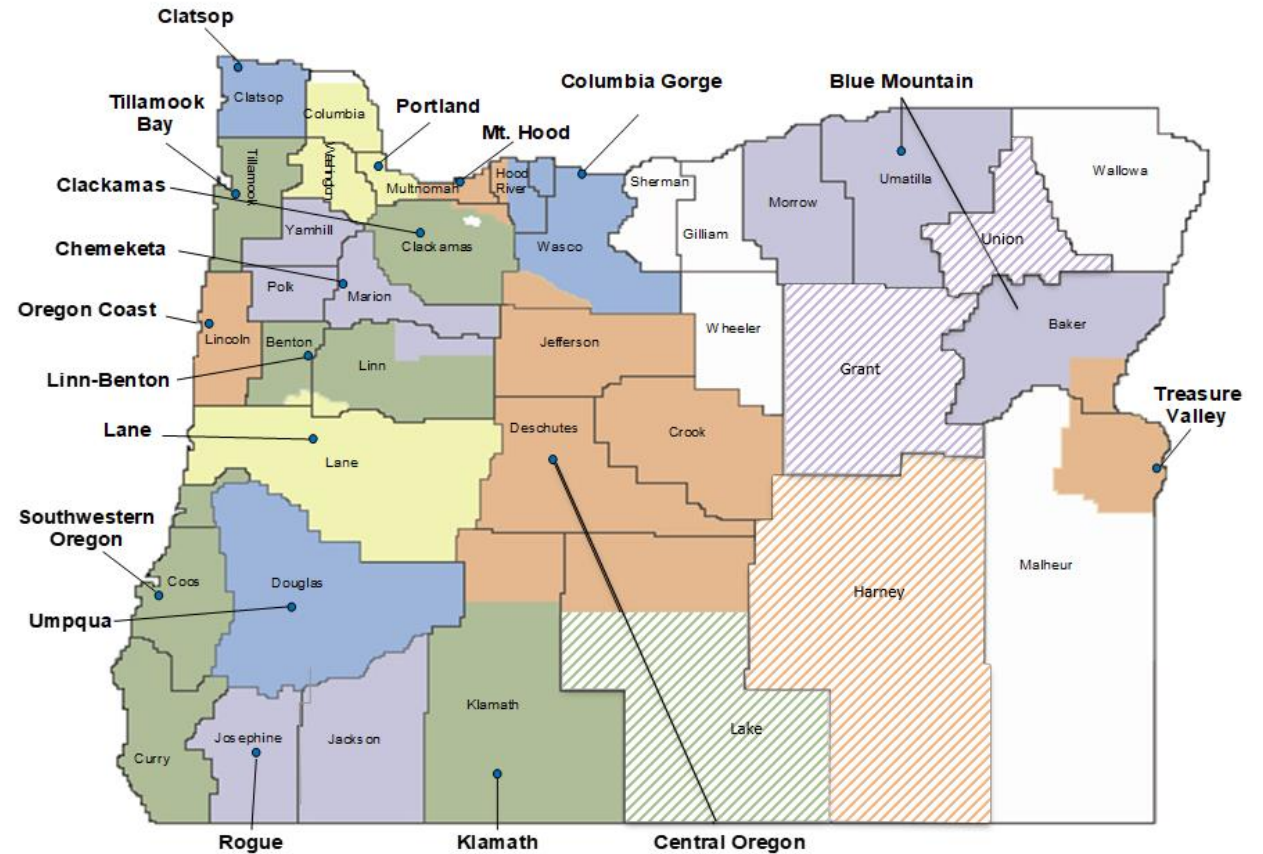


## **The system lacks clear transparency and accountability, and strategic investment remains limited**

- State and college use of data has improved since 2015
  - State and colleges still struggle to track and analyze student success – challenges collecting and using data, no agreed on definition of student success, and current state measures don't align with national best practices
  - Lack of transparency and sufficient analysis affects state and college ability to make strategic improvements or implement measures of accountability
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# Context

- Community colleges enroll many historically underserved students
- More than half of all students report food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness
- Colleges and the state are shifting from access to student success and equity gaps – but this remains a work in progress

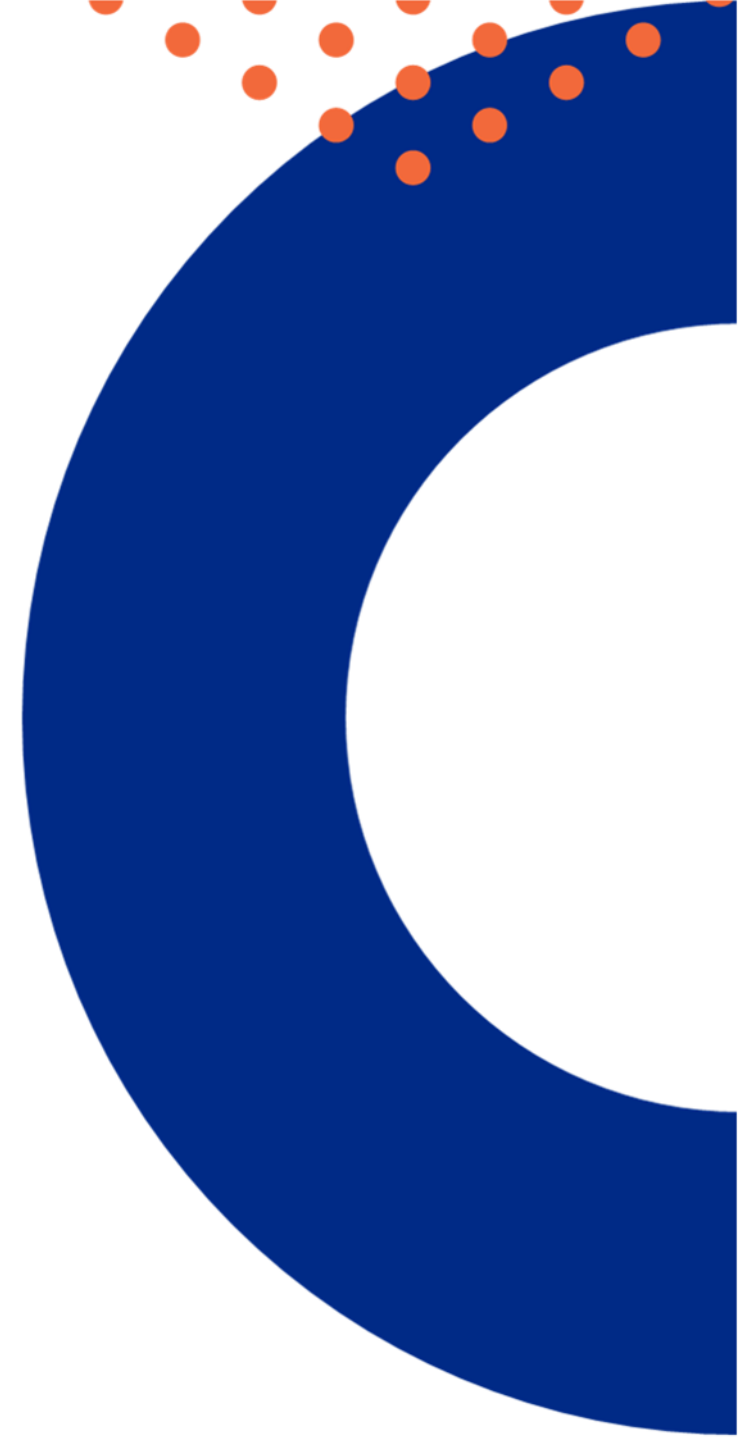


## **HECC's Mission**

Dramatically and equitably improve postsecondary attainment levels

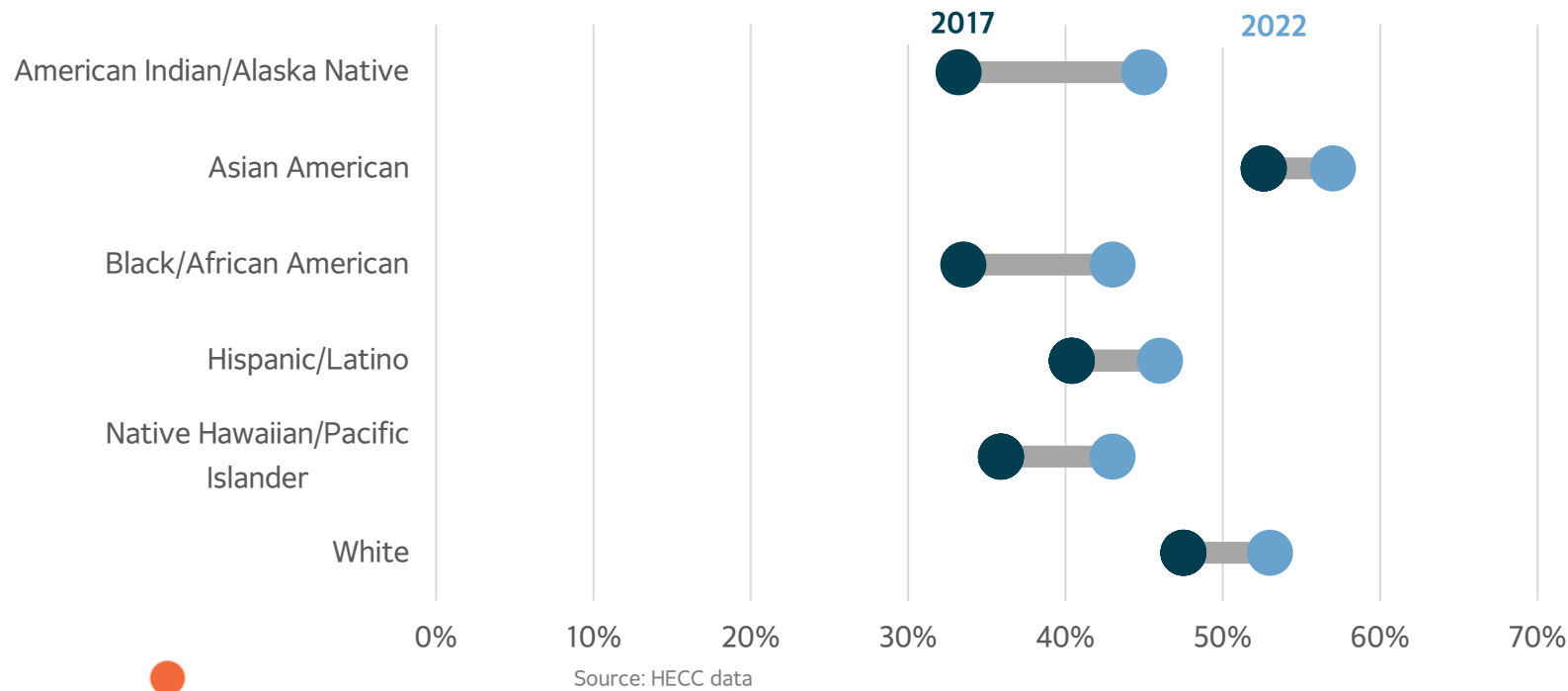
Improve Oregon's economic competitiveness and quality of life

Ensure that Oregon students have affordable access to colleges and universities



# Oregon continues to lag in national performance rankings, and equity gaps remain

Four-year completion and transfer rates for Oregon credential-seeking students improved but gaps remain



## Oregon ranked 40th in student completions in 2021

