

House Bill 4124

Sponsored by Representative MARSH, Senators WAGNER, PATTERSON, Representatives EVANS, FRAGALA, MCDONALD, Senators BROADMAN, GOLDEN; Representatives BOWMAN, HARBICK, LEVY B, OWENS, WALLAN, WISE, Senators FREDERICK, MANNING JR, NASH, SOLLMAN, WEBER (Presession filed.)

SUMMARY

The following summary is not prepared by the sponsors of the measure and is not a part of the body thereof subject to consideration by the Legislative Assembly. It is an editor's brief statement of the essential features of the measure **as introduced**. The statement includes a measure digest written in compliance with applicable readability standards.

Digest: Tells the HECC to study the system of higher education in Oregon. Tells the HECC to submit a report. Declares an emergency and becomes law when the Governor signs it. (Flesch Readability Score: 64.1).

Directs the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to conduct a study of the condition of Oregon's post-secondary education system and to develop detailed recommendations for the design, implementation and operation of a viable and superior institutional framework. Directs the commission to submit a report to the interim committees of the Legislative Assembly related to higher education on or before December 1, 2026.

Declares an emergency, effective on passage.

A BILL FOR AN ACT

Relating to the state post-secondary education system; and declaring an emergency.

Whereas about a decade ago Oregon established a statewide system of independent universities and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission; and

Whereas Oregon's post-secondary education institutions have unique missions and should serve distinct populations; and

Whereas Oregon's system of independent boards at public universities and community colleges provides essential oversight and direction to the mission and operation of these institutions of higher education; and

Whereas market competition among Oregon's post-secondary education institutions has eroded cross-institutional collaboration, impaired focus on regional and state needs and undermined public confidence in the system as a vital source of economic development and employment opportunities; and

Whereas after about a decade of operations, Oregon must reevaluate the accessibility, financial resiliency, efficiency, effectiveness and coordination of its post-secondary education system to ensure the system meets the diverse needs of Oregon's students, economy and workforce; and

Whereas recent, current and projected demographic, enrollment and market conditions and trends coupled with the competitive landscape for post-secondary education institutions, including the effects of online and out-of-state programs, require Oregon institutions to strategically assess financial and enrollment sustainability; and

Whereas Oregon's public universities and community colleges are cornerstones of our communities and engines of economic growth and should be aligned to meet regional and state economic needs; now, therefore,

Be It Enacted by the People of the State of Oregon:

SECTION 1. (1) **The Higher Education Coordinating Commission shall conduct a study**

NOTE: Matter in **boldfaced** type in an amended section is new; matter *[italic and bracketed]* is existing law to be omitted. New sections are in **boldfaced** type.

1 of the condition of Oregon's post-secondary education system and develop detailed recom-
2 mendations for the design, implementation and operation of a viable and superior institu-
3 tional framework that:

4 (a) Supports access to post-secondary education institutions for students across ge-
5 ographic location, including rural communities and other underserved populations;

6 (b) Fuels regional and statewide economic development and employment opportunities;
7 and

8 (c) Improves the financial viability of each post-secondary education institution in
9 Oregon and the post-secondary education system as a whole, including by addressing
10 projected enrollment, increased personnel costs, changes in federal law or priorities, sector-
11 specific inflationary costs or other related factors.

12 (2) The study must evaluate and make recommendations on each of the following sub-
13 jects:

14 (a) The distinct objectives and missions of each category of post-secondary education
15 institution, including community college, public university, regional university and research
16 university, in consideration of key variables such as research, public services, instruction,
17 academic programming, educational model and the student population served; and

18 (b) Opportunities for collaboration, restructuring or integration in the post-secondary
19 education system.

20 (3) The study may evaluate and make recommendations on each of the following subjects:

21 (a) Development of academic programs and specialties to support current and emerging
22 regional and state economic development and workforce needs;

23 (b) Instances of unnecessary program duplication across post-secondary education insti-
24 tutions and unmet program needs statewide;

25 (c) Structures and supports to connect students and graduates to employers and em-
26 ployment opportunities;

27 (d) Funding strategies, including strategies to foster collaboration, restructuring or in-
28 tegration in the post-secondary education system; and

29 (e) Metrics of affordability for students and financial health for post-secondary education
30 institutions.

31 (4) In developing recommendations under this section, the commission shall consult
32 public institutions of higher education, including faculty, staff and students, and any other
33 interested stakeholders identified by the commission.

34 (5) The commission shall present the results of the study, along with any recommended
35 legislative changes, in a report to the interim committees of the Legislative Assembly related
36 to higher education in the manner provided under ORS 192.245 on or before December 1, 2026.

37 (6) The commission may utilize third-party contractors to carry out all or part of this
38 section.

39 **SECTION 2.** This 2026 Act being necessary for the immediate preservation of the public
40 peace, health and safety, an emergency is declared to exist, and this 2026 Act takes effect
41 on its passage.
42