

**EDUCATION**

# Oregon students could soon be directly admitted to state universities. But other higher ed efforts fell flat

Updated: Mar. 13, 2024, 1:47 p.m. | Published: Mar. 13, 2024, 8:42 a.m.



Portland Community College President Adrien Bennings and Beaverton schools Superintendent Gustavo Balderas shake hands at the signing of an agreement to directly admit Beaverton students to the community college starting in 2025. Courtesy Portland Community College



By [Sami Edge](#) | [The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

Portland Community College will grant students graduating from Beaverton High School and Beaverton's Early College High School automatic admission to the college beginning in 2025.

The pilot program, which the community college plans to expand to other Beaverton high schools and possibly other districts in the metro area, aims to boost college enrollment.

"Directly admitting seniors really saves time and reduces stress and anxieties that students have when it comes to how to apply," said Vicky López Sánchez, PCC's dean for community partnerships. "It really removes barriers."

That approach could soon be a reality statewide. [A bill](#) that passed the Legislature in its final hours last week directs the state's Higher Education Coordinating Commission to create a direct admissions pathway for Oregon's 24 community colleges and public universities.

Where the typical higher education recruitment process relies on students to submit an application, direct admission removes that step. In a [direct admissions](#) system, colleges and universities make proactive acceptance offers to students based on their academic performance in high school without a student having to apply.

Other attempts to amend higher education laws or boost funding for colleges and universities met mixed success in a short session laser-focused on housing, addiction and campaign finance reform. Bills to [increase the transparency](#) of school board meetings, including those by community college boards, and boost workforce training succeeded. But several other proposals, including student-supported requests for emergency needs funding and to require a review of Oregon's higher education governance structure, fell short.

In his final legislative session, Sen. Michael Dembrow, a Portland Democrat who chairs the Senate Education Committee, ushered through the [multi-part bill](#) that included the direct admissions approach. The bill also creates a new youth advisory group at the state Department of Education and creates a workgroup to study [corequisite courses](#) in higher education.

The push to more directly admit Oregon's graduating seniors into the state's colleges and universities isn't new. The Higher Education Coordinating Commission suggested that idea in 2023, but lawmakers didn't take up the proposal, said Veronica Dujon, director of academic policy for the commission. Over the last year, a group of admission directors from Oregon's seven public universities have continued to explore the idea, which is one strategy to boost college attendance.

At least 12 other states have created some kind of guaranteed admissions process for students, according to the Education Commission of the States. Of those, Dujon said, 10 rank higher than Oregon for the share of high school seniors who go straight from high school to college and six rank higher than the national average.

“We do see higher college-going rates,” Dujon said. “There is certainly a correlation.”

In the past decade, Oregon has seen a 10 percentage point decline in the rate of students who enroll directly in college within 16 months of finishing high school. Much of that steep drop-off was caused by the pandemic, but college-going had declined gradually even before COVID-19. Of students in the graduating class of 2021, just 56% enrolled in college.

Direct admissions programs, Dujon said, help enroll students who are academically capable of going to college but unlikely to proactively ask about it, either because they’re not confident in their skills or don’t know how the application or financial aid processes work.

One hurdle to establishing direct admissions has been allowing colleges and universities to access data about students’ high school course-taking and grades, Dujon said. Dembrow’s bill aims to help address this by requiring Oregon’s Department of Education to begin collecting student grade data and to collaborate with the commission to share it.

“Where direct admissions is really attractive is when it’s outreach to students who maybe are first-generation, that haven’t necessarily thought of themselves as college material,” Dembrow said in an interview before the legislative session.

Those students are a target of Portland Community College’s new efforts. López Sánchez said automatically admitting students could help more from underserved communities attend college, including low-income students, first-generation students, minority students and foster youth.

Because PCC has no grade point average requirements, López Sánchez said that most students who meet Beaverton’s graduation requirements would be automatically admitted. The students would still have to tell the college that they intend to enroll before they could register for classes.

López Sánchez hopes the effort can foster a college-going culture among students and also help them feel a sense of belonging in higher education.

“I think it makes every student feel wanted,” López Sánchez said. “It’s allowing them to have an institution say: ‘We want you.’ Then they can aspire to focus on their career and what would that look like to attend college?”



Harper Barre, a current senior in the Beaverton School District, wants to spend a year after high school working before deciding on whether to pursue higher education. If he does go to college, he said, he'll likely enroll at PCC.

Barre doesn't qualify for the direct admissions to the college, which will start only for a few schools in 2025. But if it had applied to him, Barre said, he likely would have decided to go to PCC right after graduation.

"It's just the ease of access," he said. "It's not like a thing I have to go out and do."

Barre doesn't qualify for the direct admissions to the college, which will start only for a few schools in 2025. But if it had applied to him, Barre said, he likely would have decided to go to PCC right after graduation.

"It's just the ease of access," he said. "It's not like a thing I have to go out and do."



Carissa O'Donnell, right, president of the Associated Students of Oregon State University, and Chloe Webster, president of the Associated Students of the University of Oregon, testified at the Capitol in February about the need for extra funding for students in financial distress. That \$6 million request died in committee. Sami Edge

## Workforce initiatives find success

Workforce initiatives were among the higher education winners in the short session. Lawmakers approved millions for behavioral health training programs at Oregon's technical and regional universities and put money aside for the [semiconductor workforce](#).

Several universities also received funding for specific initiatives. Oregon State University got \$10 million for student scholarships, Willamette University got \$3 million for artificial turf in its baseball stadium, Southern Oregon University got \$6 million to improve its Central Hall and Portland State got \$500,000 for a Center for Women's Leadership.

But a bill to [reinstate free community college](#) to Oregon high schoolers who graduated during the COVID-19 pandemic by revamping their eligibility for the Oregon Promise scholarship fell short.

And two bills with vocal support from Oregon students also stalled. A bill requiring a review of Oregon's Higher Education system and the effectiveness of university governing boards [died in committee](#). And a [student aid package](#) that would have provided \$6 million for free textbooks, student housing and food also stalled.

"I'm just really, really disappointed that they couldn't get together a measly \$6 million to invest in students that are going hungry and are going houseless ... but somehow found it in them to invest in college athletics and turf fields and baseball teams," Nick Keough, legislative director for the Oregon Student Association said. "We're celebrating the wins that we do have around workforce, but this is a really hard loss."

*Sami Edge covers higher education and politics for The Oregonian. You can reach her at [sedge@oregonian.com](mailto:sedge@oregonian.com) or (503) 260-3430.*

If you purchase a product or register for an account through a link on our site, we may receive compensation.

By using this site, you consent to our [User Agreement](#) and agree that your clicks, interactions, and personal information may be collected, recorded, and/or stored by us and social media and other third-party partners in accordance with our [Privacy Policy](#).



### ▼ About Us

[Our Journalists](#)

[About OregonLive.com](#)

[Contact The Newsroom](#)

[Technical Support](#)

[Search Our Archives](#)

[Advertise With Us](#)

[Subscribe to The Oregonian](#)

[Subscriber Services](#)

[Digital Subscription FAQ](#)

[Delivery Opportunities](#)

[Accessibility Statement](#)

---

## ▼ Subscriptions

[The Oregonian](#)

[eNewspaper](#)

[Email Newsletters](#)

---

## ▼ Already a Subscriber

[Manage your Subscription](#)

[Place a Vacation Hold](#)

[Make a Payment](#)

[Delivery Feedback](#)

---

## ▼ Read More Top News

[Today's Top News](#)

[Politics](#)

[Crime](#)

[Business](#)

[Commuting](#)

[Weather](#)

[Education](#)

[Homes & Gardens](#)

[Letters to the Editor](#)

[Video](#)

[Environment](#)

[Tom Hallman](#)

[Special Sections](#)

[Here is Oregon](#)

[Sports](#)

[High School Sports](#)

[Ducks](#)

[Beavers](#)

[Trail Blazers](#)

[Timbers](#)

[Thorns](#)

[Recruiting News](#)

[Entertainment](#)

[Travel](#)

[TV & Movies](#)

[Eat, Drink, Cook](#)

[Comics](#)

[Archives](#)

---

## ▼ Your Regional News Pages

[Portland](#)

[Washington County](#)

[Clackamas County](#)

[Clark County](#)

[Pacific Northwest](#)

---

## ▼ Follow Us

[Email Newsletters](#)

[News on Alexa or Google Home](#)

[YouTube](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[RSS](#)

---

## ▼ Mobile

[iPhone, Android apps](#)

[Tablet apps](#)

---

## ▼ More on OregonLive.com

[Autos](#)

[Rentals](#)

[Jobs](#)

[Real Estate](#)

[Business Shopping](#)

[Post a Classified Ad](#)

[Sponsor Content](#)

[Sell Your Car](#)

[Sell/Rent Your Home](#)

[Post a Job](#)

---

# ADVANCELOCAL

Use of and/or registration on any portion of this site constitutes acceptance of our [User Agreement](#) (updated 4/4/2023), [Privacy Policy and Cookie Statement](#), and [Your Privacy Choices and Rights](#) (updated 12/31/2023).



**Cookies Settings**



© 2024 Advance Local Media LLC. All rights reserved ([About Us](#)).

The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of Advance Local.

[Community Rules](#) apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.

**YouTube's privacy policy** is available [here](#) and **YouTube's terms of service** is available [here](#).



[Ad Choices iconAd Choices](#)