HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING COMMISSION
November 5, 2026
Docket Item #: 6.0

Docket Item: 6.0 – Oregon Postsecondary Education System Study (HB 4124) Implementation Update

Summary

HB 4124 (2026) directs the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to study the condition of Oregon's postsecondary education system and develop recommendations for a viable and improved institutional framework for public higher education in Oregon. The recommendations must support student access across geography and populations; fuel statewide economic development; and improve the financial viability of institutions and the system as a whole. The legislation requires HECC to engage faculty, staff, students, and other partners and to submit a preliminary report by October 1, 2026, and a final report by April 1, 2027.

This docket item presents an update on progress towards fulfilling HB 4124's requirements. Prior updates were included within the materials for the Commission's regular May, June, August, September, and October meetings. In addition, in August, September, and October the Commission has held special meetings dedicated to discussing the project.

HECC staff provides regular updates on this work at https://www.oregon.gov/highered/strategy-research/Pages/hb-4124.aspx.

Project Status Update

1. *Submission of the Preliminary Report*

On September 30, HECC staff submitted the HB 4124 Preliminary Report to the Legislature.

2. *Advisory Group Update*

In June, HECC established an Advisory Group to help guide the project and to advise HECC staff on the report and recommendations that are brought to the Commission. The 10-member group includes representatives of institutional administration, faculty, staff, unions, philanthropy, workforce, K–12, and underrepresented communities. HECC Chair Greg Hamann is a member.

The Advisory Group has met monthly since June. At its last meeting, held October 12 at Klamath Community College, the Advisory Group meeting focused on advancing discussion of two major areas of the study: institutional differentiation within Oregon's

higher education system and strategies for addressing long-term financial challenges. Participants heard opening remarks from the Presidents of Klamath Community College and Oregon Institute of Technology, who highlighted the importance of regional partnerships, workforce alignment, student pathways, and community responsiveness. The consulting team, EY-Parthenon, presented research suggesting that Oregon may need clearer institutional roles, particularly among public universities, guided by a stronger state-level vision tied to workforce and regional needs. Advisory Group members discussed tensions between institutional autonomy and state coordination, the need for more seamless transfer, dual-credit, and direct-admission pathways, and questions about who bears responsibility for implementing and financing differentiation strategies. The group also examined cost pressures facing institutions, including expenditures per FTE, legacy PERS obligations, healthcare costs, shared services, and possible structural consolidations or partnerships. Members emphasized that cost containment alone is insufficient without a broader vision for revenue generation, workforce development, and student success.

The Advisory Group also heard from a regional panel of education, employer, and workforce leaders. They emphasized the strength of cross-sector partnerships among K-12 schools, higher education institutions, healthcare providers, workforce organizations, and economic development leaders in the Klamath Basin. Panelists highlighted challenges including high poverty rates, geographic barriers, healthcare workforce shortages, and the need to better support first-generation students, adult learners, and workers affected by automation. They stressed the importance of stackable credentials, career and technical education, stronger career awareness, and expanded healthcare training pathways. Looking ahead, regional leaders pointed to significant opportunities in clean energy, aerospace, agriculture, healthcare, and technology, while urging state policymakers to support collaborative regional models and avoid disrupting successful local partnerships.

HECC Commissioner Gayle Yamasaki and State Representative Emily McIntire attended the panel discussion and a subsequent dinner sponsored by the Oregon Community Foundation.

The Advisory Group will meet next on November 9 in Medford. Additional meetings are planned for December (Monmouth), January (Portland), and February (Newport). Each of these meetings will also include regional panels and other local participation.

3. *Faculty, Staff, Student, Board, and Public Engagement*

Over the last month, the EY-Parthenon consulting team has convened separate focus groups with public university faculty, public university classified staff, community college faculty, and community college classified staff. These focus groups allowed

employees to inform the consultants' understanding of baseline data that was included within the Preliminary Report, as well as to provide feedback on emerging hypotheses and directions for the project. EY-Parthenon will schedule additional opportunities for focus group invitees to weigh in on the project as it proceeds.

Relatedly, HECC leadership is coordinating with faculty and staff unions to schedule at least two project briefings and feedback sessions, likely to be held in November-December, and likely with EY-Parthenon participation.

Also in October, Oregon Consensus convened and facilitated the first meeting of the HB 4124 Study Student Voices Group, made up of approximately 20 current community college and public university students, who provided perspectives, insights, feedback, and recommendations to the consultants. At least two additional meetings of this group are planned.

Since the summer, Executive Director Cannon has discussed HB 4124 with the governing boards of Mt. Hood Community College, Oregon State University, Oregon Tech, Portland State University, and Western Oregon University. Additional presentations are scheduled to Clatsop Community College and Rogue Community College, and a HB 4124-dedicated meeting for institutional board representatives from across the state is being planned for December.

Other interested parties, including members of the public, have the opportunity to provide input through public testimony (written and/or oral) at regular HECC Commission meetings scheduled monthly through the duration of the project. In addition, EY-Parthenon is working with HECC staff to establish an online survey that will provide a more structured avenue for widespread participation in the project.

4. *Online Survey*

On October 22, EY-Parthenon launched the HB 4124 Study Public Survey. The survey seeks input from students, faculty, staff, employers, legislators, community members, and other interested parties. It asks respondents four questions related to the study and allows them to list their connection/affiliation with the higher education system. Survey feedback will help identify challenges, opportunities, and priorities for Oregon's public postsecondary education system and will be considered alongside other research and engagement methods. The survey will remain open through December 4.

5. *Technical Workgroups*

The EY-Parthenon consulting team has established five Technical Work Groups, comprised primarily of institutional administrators, that have considered and provided

feedback on the operational implications of various potential recommendations. The groups are considering approaches to expanding enrollment, improving system outcomes, institutional differentiation, and addressing financial challenges, as well as the system levers that may be required. These groups have each met at least once, and are expected to reconvene.

6. *Legislative Briefings*

Legislative briefings, coordinated by HECC staff and HECC Commissioner Michael Dembrow, were held twice this summer, and attracted a robust group of legislators and legislative staff. The next legislative briefing is planned for November 20.

7. *Other Next Steps*

The HECC will hold its next special Commission meeting – designed to give commissioners the option of engaging in deeper conversation about the project – on November 13 at 1:00pm.

8. *Decision-Making Structure : Roles and Authorities*

The HB 4124 project is organized around a collaborative governance model designed to ensure broad participation from interested parties while maintaining clear accountability for final decisions. The process attempts to establish areas of high alignment between interested parties, but also reflects that HECC will be responsible for final decisions.

The **HECC Commission** retains final responsibility for findings and recommendations submitted to the Legislature.

HECC staff sets project expectations, oversees contracts, and ensures the work remains aligned with the statutory charge of HB 4124. It prepares final recommendations for the Commission's consideration.

Oregon Consensus plays a central role in designing and facilitating the collaborative process. OC supports meeting facilitation, operating protocols, outreach design, and coordination across project partners.

The **Advisory Group** functions as the project's key deliberative body. It meets monthly to guide the work, inform the research contractor's analysis, and advise HECC on findings and recommendations. The group should serve as a collaborative leadership forum, providing critical advice to HECC staff on the development of the final report.

EY-Parthenon serves as an independent, evidence-based technical advisor, providing rigorous analysis, comparative evidence, and modeling to support decision-making. Their role is advisory rather than directive; analysis produced by EY-Parthenon is reviewed and shaped through Advisory Group deliberations and ultimately evaluated by HECC.

As described earlier in this docket, other mechanisms have also been established to provide students, faculty, staff, legislators, employers, regional representatives, and other interested parties with the opportunity to contribute to the project. These structures broaden representation and offer critical input but do not exercise formal decision-making authority.

Staff Recommendation
This item is for informational purposes.