

## **An Oregon Future for All Oregon Students!**

Dear Representative or Senator,

Governor Kotek's agenda is to reduce homelessness, but only by educating our future citizens and taxpayers, will Oregon decrease homelessness. Education is upstream of poverty and education is poverty prevention.

Oregon legislators need to educate and sufficiently fund all graduating high school seniors in Oregon through the **Oregon Promise community college grant/scholarship**. This is especially true given the concerns over future federal education changes and funding.

Nearly 2/3rd of McNary High School (Keizer, Oregon) seniors in the Class of 2024 applied for the Oregon Promise community college scholarship and completed the required FAFSA or ORSAA (to receive the community college Promise grant/scholarship).

The Oregon Promise grant/scholarship is the primary post high school education plan for middle income Oregon families and students, and increasingly all our families.

Many of our '24 Celt seniors/families lost the ability to access the Oregon Promise community college scholarship in July of 2024, just 2 months before those newly graduated HS seniors intended to show up at Oregon community colleges. They were told by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) that their family incomes were too high to receive the Oregon Promise. Who lost the scholarship? What exactly were those incomes?

Per Chemeketa Community College, seniors in a family of 4 making roughly \$100k AGI per year lost the Oregon Promise scholarship in July of 2024. This is not a high income family! Per studies done with the 2023 Consumer Expenditure Survey [a Living Wage in Oregon for a family of four is roughly \\$132k per year](#). A recession, and current inflation and tariffs are likely to push those families further into economic struggle. Oregon needs to prepare to educate her own.

Please:

- Tell Governor Kotek that the state must prioritize funding community college higher education in Oregon to help address homelessness in the future.
- Fund the Oregon Promise community college grant/scholarship with enough funds for ALL eligible seniors to receive the community college scholarship. Do NOT allow the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to place an Oregon Promise FAFSA SAI/income limit on our middle income families by under funding the Oregon Promise community college grant/scholarship.

- Fund the ASPIRE program at the Higher Ed Commission. It is one of the few programs in the state that offers career and college resources and support into Oregon's middle and high schools offering students career and college access, exposure, and resources. Where ASPIRE programs exist we see significantly higher completion of FAFSA and Oregon Promise and access to all forms of higher education.
- Please **immediately** encourage HECC to allow 2025 graduating seniors to complete either the FAFSA or ORSAA in Oregon to receive the Oregon Promise. Our mixed status families are facing serious concerns about filling out a federal FAFSA form regarding their safety. Both California and Washington have approved the use of either FAFSA or CADAA or WASFAA for their seniors to access their state grant aid. Oregon has yet to approve allowing mixed status families to do either the FAFSA or the ORSAA to access the Oregon Promise grant aid.

Regarding the last point, the majority of our mixed status families have a primary household member who has an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). McNary High School sits near many farms in the Willamette Valley and serves a diverse population.

As a college and career coach at one of the state's larger high schools, I rarely see (truly) undocumented parents coming to help their senior Celt (who has an SSN) to file the FAFSA with truly no parent documentation on the part of the parents. Most often, both parents have an ITIN and are contributing to the Oregon and U.S. tax base.

But we do have families with only one parent with an ITIN, but who would love for both parents to have an ITIN. Yet, due to our broken federal immigration process the process is long and slow. These mixed status families are putting their home address and safety at risk when doing a FAFSA form because parents in this mixed family status situation must both make a Federal Student Aid account (FSA ID) and complete a parent section of the FAFSA to help their student complete the FAFSA process - as required by the newly designed FAFSA. Putting personal information into the newly designed FAFSA form is not safe for some of our families, and they are currently required by Oregon to do the FAFSA form in order to receive the Oregon Promise community college scholarship for their (SSN holding) seniors. HECC could allow these families to pivot to doing the ORSAA if a mixed status family.

Unfortunately, the Higher Education Coordinator Commission has not stepped up and followed the precedents set in California and Washington and allowed high school seniors with an SSN in Oregon with mixed status parents to choose either the FAFSA or ORSAA to meet the obligations of the Oregon Promise community college grant/scholarship. *It's time.* Please put pressure on HECC immediately to implement these changes so that Oregon can educate her high school seniors and her future tax base. The lack of flexibility in this matter is disheartening to say the least, when we could easily offer these families access to the Oregon Student Aid form

(ORSAA) to satisfy the requirements of the Oregon Promise grant scholarship and not ask them to do the FAFSA. We are absolutely seeing a reduction in FAFSA and Oregon Promise completions this year across our high schools due to this concern and safety issue.

Oregon needs to educate her own, and remove barriers to education as education is poverty reduction. Put enough funding in the General Fund for every qualifying senior to receive the Oregon Promise.

Finally, regarding the overall community college funding landscape in Oregon, know that while the federal landscape may change, **low income Oregon high school seniors currently receive FAFSA funds, Oregon Opportunity Grant, and Oregon Promise when they file their FAFSA (or ORSAA) forms and the Oregon Promise application.**

These seniors frequently have EXCESS funds to attend community college, and it can be excess funds in the thousands of dollars. (Federal Pell max: \$7395, Oregon Opp Grant max: \$3900, and an Oregon Promise award on average for these HS seniors: \$1200 = \$12,495 to attend community college for one single year!) Yet the average cost of a 4 credit class at Chemeketa is about \$600. Thus, a student who takes 3-4 classes per term at Chemeketa is looking at costs of about \$2,000 x 3 terms = roughly \$6,000 plus books and fees per year. Our very lowest income students may have up to \$12,495 hitting their financial aid account at Chemeketa due to the above funding. They have barriers to higher education, but it is rarely on the funding side.

The lowest income students who file their Oregon Promise and their FAFSA or ORSAA, far exceed in funding their required costs for an Oregon community college.

Conversely, there is an Oregon senior who simply does not qualify for federal need (federal Pell grant), does not receive Oregon need based aid (Oregon Opportunity Grant), and the moment their family made roughly \$100,000 or more they lost out on the Oregon Promise grant/scholarship in 2024. These families are Oregon tax payers and they feel and see the discrepancy in higher education funding which feels directly aimed at their families.

Whenever HECC puts a FAFSA SAI limit on the Oregon Promise for a senior class, we have a large group of Oregon seniors who receive absolutely nothing to go to community college. They receive neither federal aid nor the Oregon Promise state grant scholarship. This is why it's so critical to give Oregon Promise to all seniors who qualify. Either put enough money in the higher education bucket to fund all Oregon seniors on the Oregon Promise or do not allow for seniors who get Oregon Opportunity Grant to also receive the Oregon Promise - *if they are attending Oregon community college*. If funding is a concern, do not allow the very lowest income students in Oregon to double dip on both the Oregon Promise and the Oregon Opportunity Grant as that

same student is also stacking federal dollars in their college financial aid account. Do not leave one student high and dry while another has generous excess to attend community college.

Please help all Oregon seniors “fly with their own wings”. Put enough money in the Oregon Promise community college fund to allow all graduating seniors to access the scholarship if they meet the 2.0 high school GPA requirement.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Kim Conolly  
College and Career Access Specialist  
McNary High School  
National AVID Demonstration School  
National ASPIRE School  
Keizer, Oregon