



DEGREES OF PROGRESS

eNews from the State Regents for Higher Education

OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
Improving our future by degrees



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STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS TO MEET OKLAHOMA'S WORKFORCE NEEDS

By Chancellor Allison D. Garrett

When my children were young, their career aspirations varied, sometimes weekly. There are few openings for princesses or drivers of a giant hot dog. Over time, their aspirations better aligned with actual employer needs. In Oklahoma, we need many more teachers, nurses, doctors, computer scientists and engineers, and we need them now.

College graduates earn more money. A correlation exists between the number of Oklahomans with college degrees and the state's average per capita income. Nationally, earnings growth for college graduates nearly equals the total gain in earnings since 1994. In Oklahoma, most of our 100 critical occupations require an associate's degree or higher. Despite an 11% increase in degree production over the last decade, Oklahoma ranks 45th in the nation for adults with an associate's degree or higher.

Meeting our state's workforce demands requires continued investment in young people and higher education. Oklahoma faces a crisis, needing more college graduates in healthcare and STEM fields. While bachelor's degrees in STEM disciplines increased 47% and health professions degrees increased more than 26% over the last decade, severe shortages persist in these sectors.

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education approved a FY24 budget request seeking an increased investment of 11.9% over our current appropriation. Funded at that level, our average per-pupil funding will still remain below the national average. Yet cost of attendance at our public universities is significantly lower than our national and regional peer institutions.

Our budget request includes strategic investments to expand capacity in nursing education and physician residency programs to address the



state's shortage of nurses and doctors. Funds will also support efforts to increase enrollment and graduation in STEM disciplines, such as engineering and computer science.

To increase the number of degree holders, Oklahoma must maintain college affordability, increase college access, and offer needed student services. Investing in financial aid programs and student retention services are crucial strategies for student success.

The State Regents' budget request reflects ongoing support to expand the National Guard Educational Assistance scholarship program and the Oklahoma Future Teacher Scholarship and Employment Incentive Program ("Inspired to Teach"). Additionally, funds are earmarked to fully fund the concurrent enrollment program for high school juniors and seniors, which strengthens student preparation, reduces college costs, and decreases the time required to complete a degree. Investment is also needed to provide incentives for adult students to complete a degree they started or pursue an industry-recognized micro-credential or certificate.

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 Oklahoma State Regents

CASC RECEIVES GRANT TO STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS WITH AREA BUSINESSES, CONNECT LEARNERS WITH OPPORTUNITY

By Dr. Jay Falkner, President, Carl Albert State College

In November, [Strada Education Network](#) selected Carl Albert State College (CASC) to receive a grant through Strada's Employer and Community College Partnership Challenge. Strada awarded this \$400,000 grant as part of an effort to support innovative collaborations across the country between community colleges and employers in their region. CASC also will participate with Strada in a community of practice to learn from other select community college-employer partnerships around the country.

CASC is excited about this venture for many reasons. This partnership will build on current and establish new working relationships with both local educational and employer partners to increase the number of qualified applicants in rural eastern Oklahoma for positions in healthcare and child care. The program will integrate with CASC academic programs, as well as the Indian Capital Technology Center and Oklahoma Schools Advisory Council, to provide the educational components needed to help fill open positions in both healthcare and child care in the area.

Through this program, CASC will also collaborate with the Cherokee Nation, City of Sallisaw, Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs and Adventure Head Start, evaluating educational needs to prepare and help fill local workforce openings. In addition, the program will strengthen pipelines of students from the public schools, CASC, the City of

Sallisaw, Indian Capital Technology Center, Cherokee Nation and others, working to support local educational and healthcare needs. Much of rural Oklahoma exists within a "child care desert," and it's commonly known that, throughout our state, building a qualified healthcare workforce remains a critical issue.

Strada Education Network created this grant-making initiative as the first step in a strategy to partner with community colleges to support stronger local economies and communities. Strada Impact President Ruth V. Watkins calls community colleges "engines of opportunity" with unique insight into local dynamics and needs and a crucial partner as Strada works to align measures of success with the outcomes that matter most to learners: career mobility and earning potential, meaningful work and the chance to contribute to their communities.

CASC is thrilled to be among an elite few to benefit from the resources and support that will inevitably flow from this partnership. We're proud to be part of the solution to local economic challenges and look forward to playing a small part in a much bigger team initiative to provide local opportunities to shape the future of rural Oklahomans.



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The State Regents are requesting funding for performance-based college and university allocations to address operational needs and support strategic collaborations and shared services. Investments in data analytics, digital transformation, and cybersecurity will continue, and our budget request reflects capital funding for upgrades to enhance campus safety, including the demolition of unsafe, obsolete facilities.

States with an educated workforce have more diversified and stronger economies. The Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce reports that associate and bachelor's degree holders earn a median income 25% and 75% higher, respectively, than those with only a high school diploma. Investing in higher education drives economic opportunity for Oklahomans and attracts high-wage employers, creating vibrant communities across our state.

We are thankful for the support public higher education received last year. The state's continued investment in tomorrow's workforce is a catalyst to forge a better, brighter future for Oklahoma.

CELEBRATING INNOVATION

Grants Awarded to 11 Community College Employer Partnerships



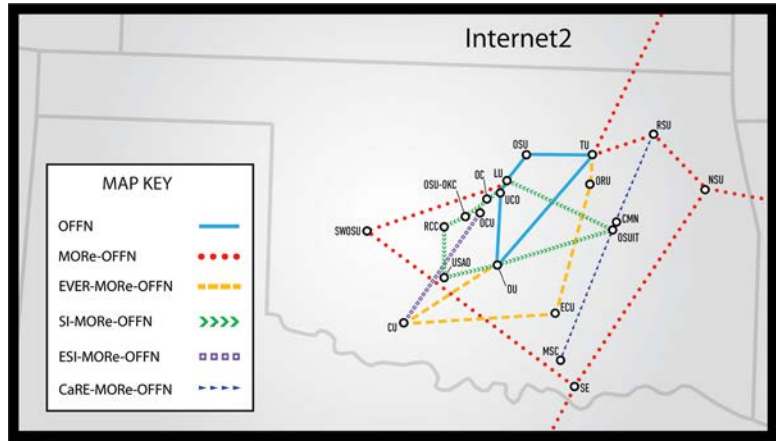
ONENET: OFFN EXPANDS RESEARCH COMPUTING TO SMALLER CAMPUSES IN OKLAHOMA

Through a series of National Science Foundation Campus Cyberinfrastructure CC* awards, OneNet is expanding research computing to smaller colleges and universities across the state of Oklahoma. OneNet is utilizing \$1.5 million in grant funding to connect nine campuses to Oklahoma's dedicated research network, the OneOklahoma Friction Free Network (OFFN).

OFFN utilizes OneNet's network infrastructure and provides 10 to 100 Gbps connectivity to give higher education institutions a dedicated alternative route to traditional internet pathways. Among other advantages, this allows researchers to access supercomputing resources across the state and allows for faster data transfer.

OneNet received its first CC* award in July 2020. The Small Institution Multiple Organization Regional OneOklahoma Friction Free Network award connected Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology, Oklahoma State University-Oklahoma City, Redlands Community College, Oklahoma Christian University and the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma to the network.

Researchers and students are utilizing the network for both science and learning. Students in OC's big data management course put the new connection to work when they used the University of Oklahoma's supercomputing cluster, Schooner, to perform a class assignment that gave them experience working with large data sets. Science & Arts utilized several universities' supercomputers to conduct chemistry research by transferring



research data on their OFFN connection. Students presented the results of their research at the 2022 Oklahoma Research Day Symposium.

NSF granted OneNet's second award in September 2021. The Extended Small Institution Multiple Organization Regional OneOklahoma Friction Free Network connects Oklahoma City University and the Cameron University FISTA campus to the network. Fiber builds are currently underway to both of these campuses, so that OFFN can provide high-speed connectivity to both sites.

In May 2022, OneNet received its third award. The Campus Research & Education Multiple Organization Regional OneOklahoma Friction Free Network connects Murray State College and College of the Muscogee Nation to the network and upgrades connectivity for Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology and Rogers State University. The OneNet team is currently procuring fiber builds to three of these institutions and ordering the network equipment. These

connections will bring the total number of institutions connected to OFFN to 21.

"As Oklahoma's partner in research and education, OneNet is utilizing NSF CC* funding to increase research computing capabilities for our state's higher education campuses," said Brian Burkart, OneNet's chief technology officer and the principal investigator for the grant awards.

"Our goal is to engage faculty and students in scientific discovery and innovation through OFFN's data transfer capabilities and high-speed connections to supercomputing resources, instruments and datasets. These investments not only foster new discoveries but enhance educational opportunities for students in our state."

OneNet plans to continue applying to the NSF CC* program to expand OFFN's reach. Burkart and the OneNet team are working on a new proposal to connect four additional colleges and universities to the network.



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OKCOLLEGESTART SUPPORTS ICAP EFFORTS

OKcollegestart.org is the free college and career planning portal provided by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education and the Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP) for students, educators, parents and the general public. OKcollegestart offers a series of advanced, interactive tools for planning, preparing and paying for education after high school. Key features include robust academic mapping and career planning tools, financial aid resources, campus profiles and the online Oklahoma's Promise scholarship application. Free OKcollegestart accounts are available to Oklahomans of any age, and site text is mobile-friendly and available in more than 100 languages.

As required by state law, students at public high schools are completing an Individual Career Academic Plan (ICAP) in grades nine through 12. During the ICAP process, students complete career and college interest surveys; update written postsecondary and workforce goals annually; take an intentional sequence of courses in high school that reflects their postsecondary goals; track academic progress through college readiness tests, concurrent enrollment and career certifications; and participate in service-learning or work environments. The class of 2023 is the first to graduate with four full years of ICAP work.

Through workshops, webinars, and one-on-one training, OKcollegestart has



assisted school counselors, teachers and administrators in the planning and implementation of ICAP with students. "We're always thrilled to support students as they make plans for life after high school," said Theresa Shaklee, OCAP's student portal coordinator. "It's been inspiring to watch educators design and implement an ICAP process that best supports the students in their districts."

OKcollegestart educator tools include a customizable ICAP feature used by over 60% of public Oklahoma high schools to fulfill and track the ICAP graduation requirement. OKcollegestart accounts belong to users for life, so graduating students continue to have access to past work and can make use of job search and resume building tools, the scholarship search feature and other career and postsecondary education planning tools.



QUARTERLY NEWS AT A GLANCE

- [State Regents approve plan to meet Oklahoma's workforce needs](#)
- [State Regents approve policy for free speech committee](#)
- [Enrollment doubled in State Regents' Scholars for Excellence in Child Care program](#)



OKLAHOMA HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE NEWS

- [OU renews pledge to take 'all qualified applicants' for nursing program next year](#)
- [Google gift to OSU to open doors for young Oklahomans](#)
- [RSU to offer chemical engineering degree](#)
- [Science & Arts offers collaborative nursing degree with OU](#)
- [Quick course at OCCC could lead to jobs in set construction](#)
- [Rural & Tribal healthcare benefit from RCC, WOSC partnership](#)
- [RCC recruits British company to benefit film students](#)
- [RSC offers micro-credential program for drone mapping](#)
- [TCC receives \\$40k grant to develop artificial intelligence lab](#)

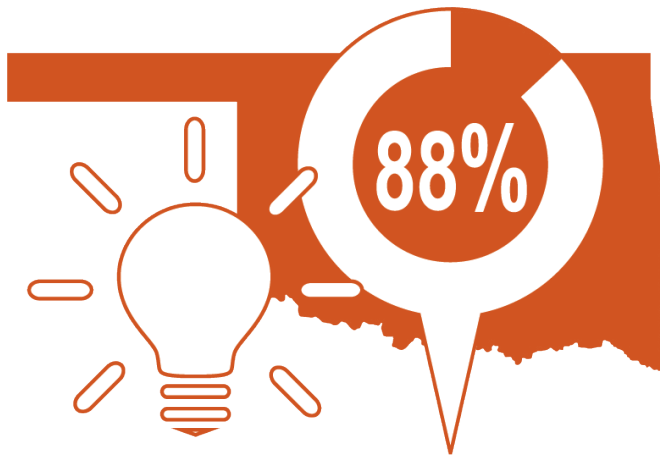
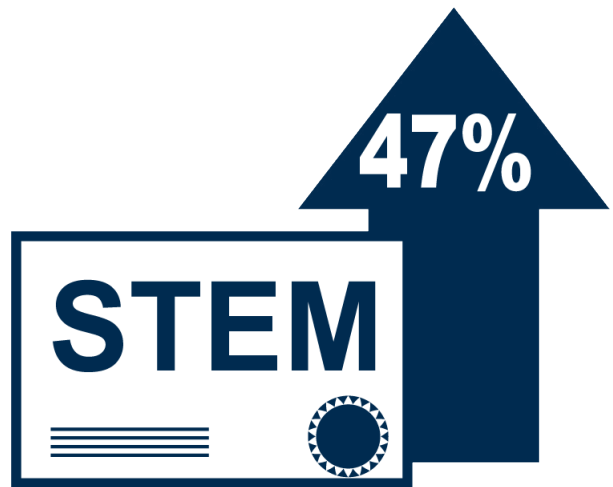
The screenshot shows the OKcollegestart.org website. At the top, there are social media icons (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) and a search bar. Below that are links for "Sign In" and "Create an Account". The main navigation menu includes: OKCOLLEGESTART.ORG (CLICK · COMPARE · CHOOSE), CAREER PLANNING, HIGH SCHOOL PLANNING, COLLEGE PLANNING, FINANCIAL AID PLANNING, and YOUR PORTFOLIO. The main banner features the text "How do I succeed in high school?" and "Explore what classes you need to graduate and how those courses align with your career goals." Below the banner are "Sign In" and "Create an Account" buttons. At the bottom, there are icons for different user types: Middle School, High School, College, Adult, Parent, and Professional.

Keep in touch with OCAP OCAP.org

- @OKMoneyMatters
- OklahomaMoneyMatters
- ReadySetRepay
- UCanGo2
- OKcollegestart
- OKCollegeAssistance

DID YOU KNOW?

The number of STEM bachelor's degrees conferred by state system institutions increased **47%** over the last decade, and increased **29%** at all degree levels.



Of STEM graduates from our state system colleges and universities, **88%** of Oklahomans – and almost two-thirds of non-resident students – remain and work in the state one year after graduation.



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Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education
655 Research Parkway, Suite 200
Oklahoma City, OK 73104
Phone: 800-858-1840 or 405-225-9100
www.okhighered.org