



# DEGREES OF PROGRESS

eNews from the State Regents for Higher Education

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## BUILDING WORKFORCE CAPACITY IN CRITICAL OCCUPATIONS

By Chancellor Allison D. Garrett

As one who enjoys movies, I often find that certain roles in a production don't just play a part in telling the story — they are critical for the story to unfold fully, with precision, purpose and ultimately, triumph. The same is true as we work together to build Oklahoma's workforce for today and tomorrow. While all roles are important, some are especially crucial to the well-being and growth of our communities.

A recent study from *Unlocking Career Success*, an initiative of the U.S. Departments of Education, Commerce and Labor, forecasts that 70% of jobs across the country will require education beyond high school by 2027. To help Oklahoma thrive and foster future progress, our public colleges and universities focus on expanding the labor force for high-demand jobs.

We are investing in programs that incentivize students to pursue teaching, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) and healthcare careers. Over the last decade, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded in STEM fields by Oklahoma's public universities increased 42%, and STEM degrees awarded at all levels increased 24%. Degree and certificate production in nursing increased more than 26% and increased more than 15% in health professions over the last 10 years. Across all fields, we are strengthening college access, persistence and completion.

Oklahoma Works released workforce projection data through 2030 for Oklahoma's **100 critical occupations**, jobs identified as critical to economic development and wealth generation in our state. More than half of our state's 100



critical occupations — and each of the top 29 highest-paying professions — require an associate degree or higher. All of the top 10 highest-paying jobs require a bachelor's degree or higher. Eight of the top 10 critical occupations with the highest growth potential require an associate degree or higher.

The State Regents' strategic plan, *Blueprint 2030*, prioritizes aligning academic programs to meet evolving workforce needs. With a goal to produce 100,000 degrees and other credentials in STEM and critical occupations by 2030, understanding the current and coming workforce landscape is an important step to keep moving forward.

To continue innovating and spur economic advancement, Oklahoma needs more workforce-ready graduates in critical fields like engineering, computer science, nursing and education. We also need graduates who learn here to earn here — to stay in the state and join our workforce.

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# MSC, AEL PARTNER TO ENHANCE EMERGENCY HEALTHCARE EDUCATION

By Tim Faltyn, President, Murray State College

The Air Evac Lifeteam (AEL) and Murray State College (MSC) have entered into a partnership to enhance clinical simulation and emergency healthcare education for the crews of AEL in Oklahoma and the MSC nursing program.

MSC's simulation lab in Ardmore is used to train new flight clinicians and further educate current flight teams operating in Oklahoma. The lab offers educators to enhance the scenarios that the teams will face, while also making Ardmore a centralized hub for clinical education in the AEL footprint. This location is also utilized for clinical practice meetings to develop education for the company, and serves as the host location for an Oklahoma/Texas Clinical Simulation Competition.

AEL operates nearly 180 locations throughout the United States, with 18 bases in Oklahoma. More than 150 experienced flight clinicians are currently practicing in the state. A flight team is composed of flight paramedics and flight nurses. Flight paramedics must have three years of experience in Advanced Life Support ambulance transport. Flight nurses must have a minimum of three years of experience in the emergency room or intensive care unit. All flight clinicians complete a six-month orientation and are board-certified to practice in a critical care flight environment within one year of hire.



This innovative partnership allows MSC nursing students to interact with AEL flight nurses, exposing them to the pre-hospital career field. The AEL educators and flight clinicians can also teach courses related to the field for MSC's nursing students. AEL flight paramedics will be introduced to MSC's Career Mobility Program, a paramedic-to-nursing bridge program. The program has been ranked first in the nation by [registerednursing.org](http://registerednursing.org) for two consecutive years.

## BUILDING WORKFORCE CAPACITY IN CRITICAL OCCUPATIONS

*Continued from page 1*

Fortunately, nearly 90% of Oklahomans and almost two-thirds of non-residents who graduate from a state system college or university remain and work here one year after graduation.

Increasing our educated workforce empowers Oklahoma to meet the demands of growing industries, attract new businesses, and upgrade our citizens' earning potential. We continue collaborating with our state's CareerTech system to achieve this shared goal, including recent joint meetings with CareerTech Director Brent Haken and executive leadership from Canoo, Enel, and Google.

I am thankful to serve a higher education system valued by state, business and community leaders who are dedicated to elevating Oklahoma and individual Oklahomans to compete on a national and global stage.



# 2024 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



## OKLAHOMA'S PROMISE

The Oklahoma's Promise scholarship program has been named by the Southern Regional Education Board as a top promise scholarship program in the nation. Goals for the 2024 legislative session include reducing administrative barriers to increase scholarship access and participation. Strategies may include streamlining high school course requirements; implementing an adjustable, annual formula for eligibility income limits; and developing an appeal process to assist students facing unique circumstances to ensure no qualified student is excluded.



## ADULT DEGREE COMPLETION

More than 400,000 Oklahomans have earned some college credit, but no degree. As part of the *Blueprint 2030* strategic plan, the State Regents will create more efficient pathways to degree completion for adult learners, including supporting development of micro-credentials across the state system. Providing financial support for these students as they complete degrees or upskill through micro-credentials is an important strategy to increase Oklahoma's overall educational attainment and fill workforce gaps.



## GROW OKLAHOMA'S STEM WORKFORCE

Bachelor's degree production in critical STEM disciplines increased more than 42% over the last 10 years, and production increased 24% at all degree levels. Higher education will continue working to increase STEM degree completion to meet the bold goals outlined in the State Regents' *Blueprint 2030* strategic plan. Priorities include:

- ▶ expanding STEM exploration opportunities for middle and high school students.
- ▶ incentivizing students to pursue STEM majors (e.g., nursing, engineering, computer science) and remain in Oklahoma after graduation.
- ▶ developing and promoting well-defined career pathways in critical workforce areas, including teacher education, healthcare and STEM.
- ▶ removing administrative barriers to empower state system colleges and universities to pursue academic programs aligned with workforce needs.
- ▶ incentivizing institutions to produce graduates in fields aligned with Oklahoma's workforce needs through a new performance funding formula.
- ▶ supporting competitive faculty salaries in fields aligned with Oklahoma's workforce needs.
- ▶ promoting collaboration and coordination among public colleges and universities to ensure access for qualified students in critical programs of study.



## ENHANCE CAMPUS SAFETY AND SECURITY

State system institutions must be equipped with the necessary personnel and financial resources to effectively mitigate risks in their service communities and respond to on-campus and cybersecurity threats, challenges and incidents.



## STABILIZE MANDATORY COST INCREASES

Our colleges and universities face significant operational cost increases. Rising property insurance rates have created a financial burden that impacts the current and future financial environment for every institution. Examining the property insurance process, practices and market in Oklahoma is an important step to identify solutions to help mitigate this substantial expense across the state system.



## MAINTAIN CAMPUS INFRASTRUCTURE

The maintenance and preservation of public college and university facilities is a state system priority. Campus buildings across the state need repairs and/or upgrades that have been deferred due to limited resources. Creating a sustainable fiscal model that allows public institutions to access funding for infrastructure requirements will support proper maintenance of current physical spaces while lowering costs and reducing the need for new construction.



## STAFF SALARY SUPPORT

Campus staff across the state system provide tremendous support services for students, including advisement, counseling, academic engagement and co-curricular activities. The State Regents propose additional financial resources available for merit salary increases for institutional staff whose efforts directly impact recruitment and retention efforts at each college and university.



## CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT

The concurrent enrollment program, which continues to grow across our state, strengthens student preparation, reduces family college costs and decreases the time required to complete a degree. Focusing on recommendations from the Concurrent Enrollment Task Force and legislative studies, the State Regents will evaluate concurrent participation options, financial models and course delivery modes to strengthen the program for Oklahoma students.

# 2024 FUNDING REQUEST

**FY 2024 BASE APPROPRIATION.....\$1,003,794,375**

## FY 2025 BUDGET NEED:

<b>1. Legislative Initiatives and Programming.....</b>	<b>\$9,475,817</b>
A. Inspired to Teach Program Full Funding.....	\$8,500,000
B. Concurrent Enrollment Participation Expansion.....	\$975,817
<b>2. Strategic Funding.....</b>	<b>\$112,922,054</b>
A. Critical Workforce Needs.....	\$41,500,000
i. STEM and Other Critical Workforce Degrees and Credentials.....	\$11,500,000
ii. Nursing Direct Instruction and Workforce Needs Response.....	\$10,000,000
iii. Medical Residents and Related Healthcare Degrees.....	\$10,000,000
iv. Adult Degree Completion Outreach and Financial Aid.....	\$10,000,000
B. Institutional Excellence and Student Success.....	\$71,422,054
i. Performance-based Allocations (5.0% Increase in Total Allocations).....	\$40,672,054
ii. Risk Management Cost Increase Funds (Preliminary).....	\$12,500,000
iii. Student Support/Career Navigators for Student Success.....	\$12,500,000
iv. Institution Collaboration and Consolidation Assistance Fund.....	\$5,000,000
v. OSRHE Institutional Shared Services Initiatives.....	\$750,000

**FY 2025 TOTAL BUDGET NEED ..... \$1,126,192,246**

- \$ Difference from FY 2024 State Appropriation ..... \$122,397,871
- % Difference from FY 2024 State Appropriation ..... 12.2%

### **CAPITAL AND SPECIAL FUNDING..... \$200,000,000**

- **One-time Funding for a Revolving Capital Fund**
  - Deferred Maintenance
  - ADA Compliance
  - Campus Security
  - Cyber Security
- **Other Special Requirements**



# ONENET: GRANT AWARD EXPANDS OKLAHOMA'S RESEARCH NETWORK

## OKLAHOMA HIGHER EDUCATION NEWS

- [OU to launch multidisciplinary sustainable energy systems program](#)
- [New OSU nursing bachelor's degree program hopes to address state shortage](#)
- [McCortney and Johns come through for ECU](#)
- [NSU named top institution in the nation to pursue an online degree in 2023](#)
- [UCO to offer doctoral program in forensic science](#)
- [LU agreement to bring opportunities for students at Tinker](#)
- [Southern Tech and MSC partner to provide students occupational therapy pathway](#)
- [NOC, OSU Researchers Awarded NSF Funds to Study Rural Resilience](#)
- [OCCC announces award of more than 12,000 micro-credentials](#)
- [TCC flight instructor aims for rare air as female commercial airline pilot](#)

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has awarded the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE) and OneNet a \$1,179,147 Campus Cyberinfrastructure (CC\*) grant to connect additional campuses to the OneOklahoma Friction Free Network (OFFN). This marks the fourth award to OSRHE and OneNet to expand the OFFN network.

Administered by NSF's Office of Advanced Cyberinfrastructure, the CC\* grant program invests in campus-level cyberinfrastructure improvements for science applications and research projects. Previous NSF awards have connected a total of 21 Oklahoma research and regional public and private colleges and universities to OFFN.

Under the terms of this two-year grant cycle, Mid-America Christian University (MACU), Northwestern Oklahoma State University (NWOSU), Oklahoma State University Biomedical Imaging Center (OSU-BIC), Rose State College (RSC) and Western Oklahoma State College (WOSC) will become the next group of campuses enabled to harness the expanded capabilities of the OFFN network connection. The OFFN connection strengthens collaboration and provides new research and education experiences for faculty and students throughout the state.

OFFN is a 10 and 100 Gbps research network that provides higher education institutions with a dedicated route to internet and research networks that is much faster than traditional internet highways. This alternate pathway allows researchers to transmit data at higher speeds.

This CC\* project will support a wide range of scientific disciplines at the five newly connected sites, including cybersecurity, natural science, biomedical imaging, nursing, and other STEM-related teaching. The grant award also will fund an optical fiber build to OSU-BIC and a service upgrade to NWOSU with 10 Gbps connections to OneNet and the OFFN network. MACU and WOSC's connectivity will also increase to 10 Gbps.

The award will be managed by OneNet, the state system of higher education's comprehensive digital communications entity. Brian Burkhart, OneNet's chief technology officer, will serve as principal investigator. Dr. Steven Maier of NWOSU will lead research and education application adoption, and Johnny Corona of RSC will lead campus technology deployment. Sky Pettett of OneNet will manage network technology implementation and training, and April Goode of OneNet will provide planning, communications and coordination services for grant implementation.

As Oklahoma's research and education network, OneNet has leveraged NSF CC\* funding to expand and enhance research computing at Oklahoma's colleges and universities. This project builds on the success of previous projects and extends OFFN's high-speed connections and data transfer capabilities to the state's smaller institutions. These investments foster science, innovation and new discoveries, enhancing economic growth for Oklahoma.

Keep in touch with OneNet

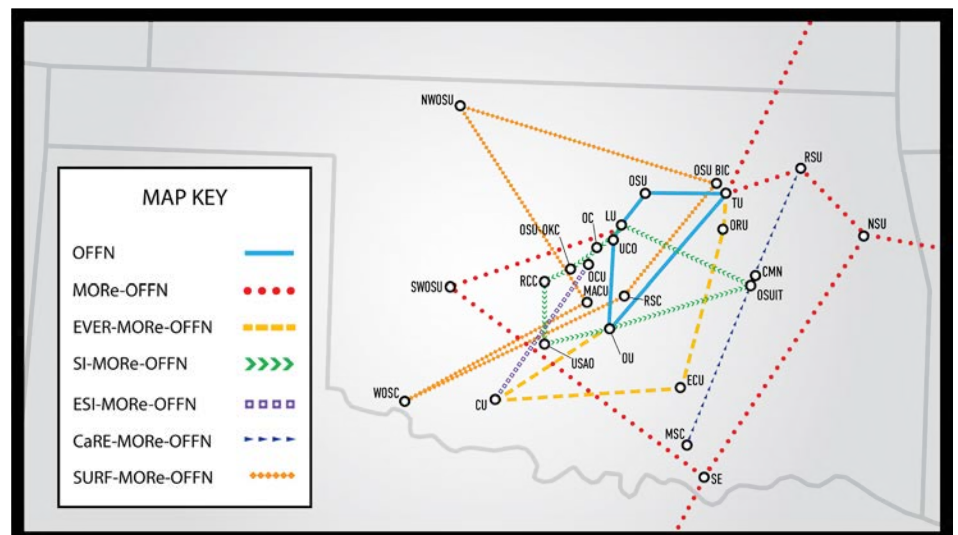
[OneNet.net](http://OneNet.net)

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# WHAT'S NEW WITH THE FAFSA?

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a student's first step in applying for financial aid — it's used by colleges, universities and career technology centers across the country. In Oklahoma, the FAFSA is also used to determine eligibility for the Oklahoma Tuition Aid Grant and the Oklahoma's Promise scholarship.

In 2020, Congress passed the FAFSA Simplification Act to update the system used to award federal student aid. The majority of these changes will go into effect for the upcoming 2024-25 FAFSA. Key updates include:

- ▶ **The FAFSA will have fewer questions and be more user-friendly.** The new form will reduce the maximum number of questions from 108 to 46.
- ▶ **Students may have their FAFSA sent to as many as 20 colleges.** Previously, students could request their FAFSA results be sent to no more than 10 colleges.
- ▶ **SAI will replace EFC.** For years, the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) was a number based on parent and student information entered into the FAFSA and used to help colleges determine financial aid eligibility for students. Now that number will be known as the Student Aid Index (SAI).
- ▶ **The 2024-25 FAFSA will be available in 11 languages.** Currently, the FAFSA is only available in English and Spanish.
- ▶ **Students will now include information on the FAFSA for the parent who provided the most financial support in the last 12 months.** In the past, students included information for the parent they lived with the most in the last 12 months.
- ▶ **The number of students in college will not be used to determine the SAI.** Previously, if there were two or more dependents in the household attending college, the EFC was divided equally for each student.
- ▶ **Students and parents must give consent to allow tax information to be downloaded from the IRS into the FAFSA.** Families can no longer decline this option.



- ▶ **The 2024-25 FAFSA will be released in December 2023.** The 2025-26 FAFSA will return to the customary Oct. 1 release date.
- ▶ **All students and parents contributing information on the FAFSA will be required to create an FSA ID.** The Federal Student Aid ID (FSA ID), is a username and password that students and parents create to electronically sign the FAFSA. Starting with the 2024-25 FAFSA, anyone contributing information must have an FSA ID. Parents without a Social Security number will also be able to create an FSA ID.



The Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP), an operating division of the State Regents, is working with high school counselors, educators, students and parents to provide up-to-date information about these changes to the 2024-25 FAFSA. The OCAP Outreach team is teaching workshops and attending school events to share valuable information and answer questions about completing the FAFSA. OCAP is also developing new publications, FAFSA Learning Modules and presentations to assist families navigating the new FAFSA.



## QUARTERLY NEWS AT A GLANCE

- [Oklahoma Legislators Receive Higher Education Distinguished Service Awards](#)
- [Oklahoma's College App Week Set](#)
- [State Regents Approve Initiatives to Strengthen Teacher Recruitment](#)
- [Online Consortium of Oklahoma Wins National Award](#)
- [State Regents Approve Plan to Meet Oklahoma's Workforce Needs](#)

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[OCAP.org](https://www.okcap.org)

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 ReadySetRepay

 UCanGo2

 OKcollegestart

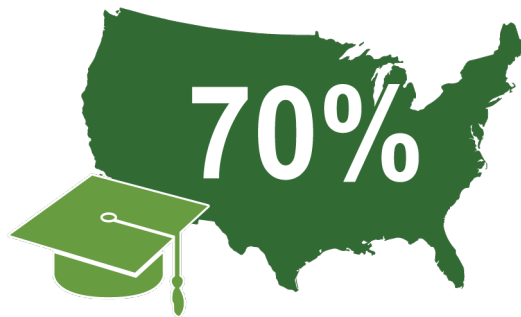
 OKCollegeAssistance

## DID YOU KNOW?



Oklahoma state system institutions generate an average return on investment of nearly **\$870,000** per graduate over a career lifetime.

*Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce*



By 2027, **70%** of U.S. jobs will require education and training beyond high school.

*Source: Unlocking Career Success, an initiative of the U.S. Departments of Education, Commerce & Labor*



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*Improving our future by degrees*

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