

Schools see more students, less money from state

BY NANCY TOWNSLEY

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Even while enjoying a sizeable uptick in enrollment this year, Oregon's community colleges have been bracing for bad news from Salem about future finances. The fear has been that the state's giant budget shortfall could trickle down to **Clackamas Community College**, Portland Community College, Mt. Hood Community College and other similar schools in a big way.

Turns out, the anxiety was only partially justified. When the 2009 Legislative Assembly was gavelled to a close late last month, Oregon's 17 community colleges made out a bit better than they originally expected – getting a \$450.5 million piece of the public education pie. And while that dollar amount is roughly \$34.5 million under what Gov. Ted Kulongoski proposed for the 2009-11 biennium, it's more than what some in the Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development thought it might be.

The governor wanted \$485 million to be shuttled to community colleges over the next two years, with an additional \$15 million added back in during the February 2010 special Legislative session, said Pam Teschner, director of operations for the Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development's fiscal team. As it is, community colleges will get 10 percent less than they did in 2007-09, when revenue from the state came in at \$500 million.

The funds will be used to serve an estimated 200,000 students during the coming two-year period, a \$2,252 per-student allocation. "Given the economic situation and the legislators' priorities, the governor's proposal, as it was originally, didn't happen," Teschner said. "They tried to hold up K-12 education, and in that process we got shorted."

Still, there aren't too many hard feelings at the Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development.

"There was a lot of relief that (the budget) was \$450.5 million," Teschner noted. "It felt like a win in some respects – it could have been a lot worse."

For those on the ground on community college campuses, the final number translated into fewer raw nerves, but no less of a headache.

CCC already had to cut \$6 million from its budget last year, leading to staff layoffs. CCC President Joanne Truesdell said the cuts haven't been as bad as the 2003 fiscal crisis, when community colleges lost \$70 million in the middle of the year, but they can still be painful.

"When you cut somewhere, up and down the line it restricts the ability to provide service programs to every single person at every single time," she said.

Anthony Roberts contributed to this report.