

Meeting of the
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
2:00 pm January 14th, 2026

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS: WHITNEY ALVIS

Bart Collins, OSU; Kyle Foster, RSC; Dan Mabery, NSU; Macey Scotten, RCC; Joel Dean, OSRHE; Whitney Alvis, RSC; Michele Hockersmith, SE; Jamie Henson, CASC; Joyce Burch, OU; Pete Selden, TCC; Cass Minx, OSRHE; John Claybon, OCCC; Daniel Will, OSU; John Dolezal, NOC; Kelsey Martin, NW; Kristen Rowan, OSU-OKC; Ryan Blanton, OPSU; John Spradling, EOSC; Kim Pringle, SSC; Heather Turner, Department of Commerce

2. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE ANNUAL UPDATE: HEATHER TURNER

The meeting featured a presentation by Heather Turner from the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, who provided an overview of the agency's mission to foster economic growth through business retention, recruitment, community development, and workforce partnerships. She explained the structure of the department, highlighting the CORE division, which focuses on supporting existing Oklahoma businesses, communities, and education partners, and the EDGE division, which leads efforts to recruit new businesses to the state. Heather emphasized that workforce development is central to Commerce's work and that collaboration with colleges, universities, and CareerTech centers is essential to building strong workforce pipelines aligned with industry needs.

Heather reviewed recent accomplishments and economic impacts across the state, noting that most Commerce-supported projects involve expansions of existing Oklahoma businesses rather than new recruitment. She shared data on job creation, capital investment, and international engagement, including partnerships with aerospace, defense, manufacturing, and technology companies. Key industry sectors discussed included advanced manufacturing, aerospace and defense, agribusiness, critical minerals, energy, life sciences, and transportation and logistics. A significant workforce concern highlighted was the anticipated retirement of a large portion of Oklahoma's manufacturing workforce within the next five years, increasing demand for education and training programs.

The presentation concluded with a detailed explanation of the Public-Private Partnership (P3) for Education and Workforce Development program, which allows educational institutions to partner with businesses to develop training programs and receive reimbursement through redirected withholding taxes. Heather reported that the program has recently awarded funding to several institutions and has additional projects in progress. She also discussed ongoing efforts to support Main Street revitalization, certified business incubators, and quality-of-life initiatives that contribute to talent attraction and economic sustainability. The meeting ended with a brief question-and-answer session, during which Heather confirmed that incubator reimbursement funding may be used for both new and expanding incubators,

followed by expressions of appreciation from attendees. Please see full powerpoint [here](#).

3. WORKFORCE SCHOLARSHIP DESIGN UPDATE: CASS MINX

Cass Minx shared updates on changes to how Economic Development Grant funds will be used, based on feedback from the EDC and the Council of Presidents. Historically, these funds supported small institutional grants tied to workforce development initiatives. Moving forward, the funds will be repurposed to create a new Workforce Scholarship Program that awards funding directly to students. While the Regents Business Partnership Excellence Award (RBPEA) event will no longer be held, institutional-business partnerships will continue to be recognized through a coordinated Regents-level press release. An optional application will be distributed to institutions, with a narrative submission deadline set for the end of February, allowing institutions to highlight their current business partnerships.

Cass explained that the Workforce Scholarship Program is still in development, but the intent is to focus on how higher education shapes students' career trajectories rather than academic performance alone. Scholarship recipients may be invited to speak at Higher Education Day at the Capitol and be recognized at a Regents meeting. The initial plan is to award one scholarship per institutional tier—two-year, regional, and research—with the possibility of additional awards in the first year due to available funding. A volunteer committee from the EDC will be formed to conduct blind reviews of scholarship applications. Cass emphasized that further details, including award amounts and eligibility criteria, will be shared first with the EDC for feedback before finalizing the application.

4. WORKFORCE PELL UPDATE: CASS MINX

Cass described as a significant and fast-approaching opportunity. Workforce Pell expands federal Pell Grant eligibility to include short-term workforce credentials, with an implementation date of July 1, 2026. Cass noted that this change is particularly relevant for micro-credentials and short-term programs and encouraged institutions to begin preparing immediately. She explained that draft federal rulemaking was released in December and that final rules are expected in early 2026. In the meantime, Regents staff are working to inventory potentially eligible credentials, with outreach already underway to institutions.

Cass outlined the eligibility requirements as they are currently understood, including program length, prior existence of the credential, Title IV eligibility, alignment with critical or high-wage occupations, stackability, employer recognition, and state approval. Programs will also be required to meet performance metrics known as the “70–70 rule,” which includes a 70 percent completion rate and a 70 percent job placement rate within a defined timeframe. Cass acknowledged several challenges, including the lack of occupation-level wage data in Oklahoma and ongoing federal discussions about whether non-credit credentials will be eligible. She also emphasized that Workforce Pell counts

toward a student's lifetime Pell limit, making student advising especially important.

The discussion concluded with questions and comments from attendees, including concerns about data reporting requirements, program eligibility timelines, and the need for enhanced wage records to support compliance. Cass shared that she is actively working with the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission and federal partners to address these issues and will continue to provide updates as more guidance becomes available. She encouraged institutions to identify key contacts for Workforce Pell communications and reiterated her commitment to keeping the EDC and Council of Presidents informed as implementation progresses.

5. WORKFORCE COMMISSION UPDATE: CASS MINX

Cass Minx provided an update on the Oklahoma Workforce Commission, noting that the Commission, which has been established for nearly two years, finalized and approved its strategic plan at its December meeting. She reminded members that the Commission was created to serve as a statewide coordinating body for workforce development, requiring collaboration among the State Regents, higher education institutions, CareerTech, the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission, and K–12 education. Cass explained that the strategic plan assigns responsibility for several action items to the state system of higher education. While some initiatives align closely with the Regents' Blueprint 2030 strategic plan and are already underway, others will require further discussion with institutional leadership to determine feasibility. One particularly complex proposal involves expanding Oklahoma's Promise to include critical occupation degrees, which could convert to a loan if graduates leave the state, presenting administrative and staffing challenges at the Regents level. Cass also highlighted growing interest in competency-based degree programs, explaining that while not all programs are suited to this model, Oklahoma has an opportunity to proactively identify appropriate programs rather than having mandates imposed by the legislature.

Cass also shared that the Workforce Commission has launched a public data dashboard known as [OK Wire](#), which includes information on education pipelines, workforce data, and skills trends. She explained that the dashboard uses Lightcast as its primary data source but cautioned that its figures may differ from Regents-produced analyses because the Commission's data includes private and for-profit education providers, which the Regents typically exclude. Members were encouraged to review both the [strategic plan](#), formally titled the Oklahoma Workforce Transformation Plan, and the OK Wire dashboard and to share feedback with Cass, who regularly participates in Commission meetings and relays higher education perspectives. A brief discussion followed regarding data sources and comparability, after which Cass confirmed that links to these resources would be included in the meeting materials.

6. LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: JOEL DEAN

Joel Dean then provided a legislative update, explaining that the bill filing deadline was imminent and that the current legislative session had already surpassed 1,000

filed bills, with more expected. He noted that a comprehensive bill list would be distributed the following week due to the Martin Luther King Jr. Day holiday. Joel highlighted several emerging issues, including legislative efforts targeting accreditation agencies in a manner similar to recent DEI restrictions, as well as proposed changes affecting teacher training programs and graduation requirements. He also discussed anticipated legislation related to Oklahoma's Promise, particularly efforts to clarify eligibility for teachers while noting that some legislators may seek to expand benefits to other school personnel. Joel emphasized that the Regents' position is to clarify original legislative intent while remaining open to expansion if accompanied by appropriate funding. He concluded by noting that additional updates related to Workforce Pell may follow after reviewing federal briefings.

7. FY 2026 EDC MEETING DATES AND TIMES: CASS MINX

- January 14, 2026 (Regular Meeting via Zoom)
- March 25th (Workforce Pell Update Meeting)
- May 27, 2026 – annual training

Cass announced that an end-of-March meeting will replace the traditional Regents Business Partnership Excellence Awards event and, along with the May 27 training, will focus heavily on Workforce Pell implementation. Institutions were encouraged to ensure that appropriate representatives involved in workforce development, micro-credentials, or financial aid attend these sessions.

8. MAY TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS: WHITNEY ALVIS

Whitney Kolb Alvis led a discussion on dedicating the May training entirely to Workforce Pell and related micro-credential eligibility issues, with consensus support from attendees. Cass confirmed that the Regents are forming an internal committee to coordinate Workforce Pell information across multiple policy and operational channels.

9. EVENTS: WHITNEY ALVIS

The group also reviewed upcoming statewide events of interest, including Higher Education Day at the Capitol, Oklahoma Promise Day, Aerospace Day at the Capitol, and several economic development and small business conferences. The meeting adjourned with final remarks and appreciation for participants' engagement.requirements.

- 2026 State of Small Business, Small Business Exchange, February 11, 2026
- 2026 Technical Summit- Hosted by Grow Choctaw and Select OK, Feb 24, 2026
- Higher Ed Day/ OK Promise Day at the Capital: March 31st, 2026
- Aerospace Day at the Capital- Wednesday, April 1st 9am-2pm
- Main Street Now 2026 – April 12- 15

10. OTHER BUSINESS

Although not shared in the meeting here are a few other national workforce workshops in case anyone is interested.

[AACC WDI](#) : January 28-31, 2026 New Orleans, LA

[SXSW EDU](#): March 9-12, 2026 Austin, TX

[HLC's Higher Learning 2026](#): March 21-24 Chicago, IL

[AACC Annual Convention](#): April 10-14, 2026 Seattle, WA

[SME Fusion](#): May 5-6, 2026 Nashville, TN

[NASPA Conference in Student Success in Higher Education](#): June 10-13, 2026 Austin, TX

[Horizons](#) presented by Jobs for the Future: July 13-14, 2026 Washington, DC

[2026 ACT Summit](#): July 13-15, 2026 Nashville, TN

[ACTE Postsecondary CTE Summit](#): Sept. 16-18, 2026 Arlington, VA

[NCWE Annual Conference](#): October 20-22, 2026 Palm Springs, CA

11. ADJOURNMENT

WORKFORCE PELL GRANT OVERVIEW

Subject to finalized federal rulemaking

Workforce Pell Grants are a new federal financial aid opportunity expanding the traditional Pell Grant to include **short-term workforce training programs**.

- Implementation date: July 1, 2026
- Designed to help learners gain skills to quickly enter the workforce
- Pro-rated based on program length
- National Governors Association is launching a national focus group for Workforce Pell

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

Programs must meet **all federal and state criteria**:

- Short-term: 8–15 weeks
- Offered by a Title IV–eligible, accredited institution
- Aligned with in-demand or high-wage occupations
- Leads to a recognized, stackable credential
- Meets federal & state quality/performance metrics
- Approved by the Oklahoma and U.S. Department of Education

RULEMAKING AND PERFORMANCE METRICS

- Negotiated rulemaking completed December 2025
- Consensus reached on draft regulatory framework
- 30-day public comment period
- Final rules expected **early 2026**
- 70/70 Rule**
 - **70% Completion Rate** (within 150% of normal time)
 - **70% Job Placement Rate** (related employment ~180 days)

CONCERNS

- **Quality & Data:** Strong outcomes tracking required; may limit early offerings
- **Noncredit Programs:** Eligibility remains under debate
- **Lifetime Pell Usage:** Counts toward a student's lifetime Pell limit
- **System Coordination:** Alignment needed across higher education, workforce, and employers