

Meeting of the
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
2:00 pm March 25, 2026

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS: LUCIA DICKINSON

Adam Johnson; Alyssa Provencio; Amy Goddard; Angela Sliger; Anna Hearn; Annie Pearson; Barbara Waxman; Brittany Blake; Cari Keller; Chad Blew; Chelsea Phillips; Cindy Bendabout; Crystal Palacios; Dan Mabery; Daniel Will; Ed Quillin; Elizabeth LuCasss; Emma Mullins; Eva Burkala; Goldie Thompson; JC Sanders; Jaimie Henson Joel Dean; Jerrid Freeman; Joyce Burch; Kandy Rutledge; Kassandra Sereno; Kathleen Austin; Kellie Monroe; Kirstin Krug; Kristen Rowan; Kriston Gerler; Krystle Lane; Kyle Foster; Lindsay Fields; Liz Largent; Macey Scotten; Mark Hays; Matt Mounger; Matt Short; Michelle Campbell; Michelle Canan; Michelle Owens; Morgan Grovenburg; Norma Navarro; Pete Selden; Rachel Beckner; Richard Hoenes; Sandy Whomble; Shannon Schwabler; Talina Lee; Tim Williams; Tracey Romano; Trevor Cox; Tricia Duncan; Trisha White; Vanessa Anton; Whitney Alvis

2. (SHEEO)- WORKFORCE PELL UPDATE WITH COREY GHEESLING, ED.D. (ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT)

The meeting began with a presentation from Corey Gheesling, Associate Vice President at the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), who provided a comprehensive overview of Workforce Pell and its implications at the federal, state, and institutional levels. Gheesling explained that SHEEO is a bipartisan organization representing chief executive state higher education agencies across all 50 states, two territories, and Washington, D.C., serving as a key liaison between state systems and federal policy.

He noted that federal policy is increasingly positioning higher education as a critical component of workforce infrastructure and broader talent development efforts. The current administration has placed a strong emphasis on workforce development—framing it as both an economic priority and a national security imperative—while prioritizing short-term credentials, apprenticeships, and measurable employment outcomes.

Workforce Pell expands Pell Grant eligibility to short-term, non-credit programs, but introduces significant accountability requirements. Programs must align with state-defined high-demand occupations and demonstrate strong outcomes, including minimum thresholds of 70% completion and 70% employment in related fields. As a result, implementation will require deeper collaboration across state entities, particularly among governor’s offices, state workforce agencies, and state higher education systems. While governors and workforce agencies are formally designated as leads in federal guidance, Gheesling noted that many SHEEO offices are currently acting as “shadow leaders,” coordinating efforts due to gaps in formal leadership.

He emphasized that Workforce Pell will fundamentally shift how institutions manage short-term programming. Programs that have traditionally operated with flexibility and limited oversight will now require integration into broader institutional systems, including student information systems, reporting structures, and accountability frameworks. This transition will require significant investment in data tracking and cross-agency coordination.

Gheesling identified healthcare—particularly allied health programs—as the leading sector for Workforce Pell eligibility, followed by advanced manufacturing, due to strong alignment with workforce needs and measurable outcomes. He also highlighted the growing role of registered apprenticeships, especially in healthcare, as emerging models that blend education and employment through partnerships between institutions and employers.

A major challenge discussed was data infrastructure. Workforce Pell requires states to track not only employment outcomes but also specific occupations, which most states currently lack the capacity to do. Developing enhanced wage record systems will likely require legislative action and long-term investment. While some states are making progress, nationwide readiness remains uneven.

Gheesling stressed that the July 1 implementation date should be viewed as a starting point rather than a final deadline. States are expected to take a phased approach, beginning with limited program offerings and refining processes through 2027 and beyond. He advised institutions to approach Workforce Pell strategically and cautioned against relying on it as a primary funding source, instead positioning it as a supplemental opportunity.

During the discussion, participants raised questions about program eligibility, approval processes, and federal guidance. Gheesling noted that states vary widely in their readiness, with some conducting comprehensive program inventories while others remain in early planning stages. He also indicated that while federal agencies are seeking to provide clarity, significant flexibility is being delegated to states, and a standardized national template for implementation is unlikely.

Additional discussion addressed the role of four-year institutions, with Gheesling highlighting opportunities for continuing and professional education units to expand into short-term credential offerings. He also noted that accrediting agencies are generally supportive of these efforts, provided institutions maintain strong documentation, transparency, and student outcomes.

You may find [Corey's presentation here](#).

3. WORKFORCE PELL GRANT UPDATE (OKLAHOMA FOCUSED): CASS MINX

Following the presentation, Cass provided a state-level update on Oklahoma's progress toward Workforce Pell implementation, noting that current efforts are focused on two primary areas: data infrastructure and program approval processes.

Oklahoma has an existing data-sharing agreement with the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission, which allows the state to track graduate employment

outcomes at the industry level through annual record exchanges. However, the state currently lacks the ability to track employment at the occupation level, a requirement under Workforce Pell. Addressing this gap will require the development of enhanced wage records. Cass noted that ongoing conversations with the Commission have been positive, and there is optimism that the state will be able to build this capacity.

At this time, a formal approval process for Workforce Pell programs has not yet been established, as authority for this process rests with the Governor's Office. However, it is anticipated that program approvals will likely be routed through the Governor's Workforce Council, with representation from both CareerTech and higher education. In the interim, institutions are being encouraged to begin inventorying existing programs to identify those that may meet Workforce Pell eligibility requirements.

Cass emphasized the importance of a strategic and measured approach to implementation, advising institutions to prioritize quality over quantity. Rather than launching a large number of programs initially, institutions are encouraged to focus on a small number of high-quality programs with strong completion and employment outcomes. Healthcare programs were identified as strong initial candidates due to their alignment with Workforce Pell requirements and demonstrated success in workforce placement.

Additionally, institutions were encouraged to explore opportunities to modify existing certificate programs to meet eligibility criteria, rather than developing entirely new offerings. Cass noted that additional guidance, training opportunities, and clearer direction from both federal and state entities are expected in the coming months as rules are finalized and implementation progresses.

4. LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: JOEL DEAN

Joel provided a legislative update, noting that the Oklahoma Legislature is currently in a busy phase with key deadlines approaching. Higher education-related bills remain active and continue to move forward, though some unfavorable proposals are still under consideration. Budget discussions are ongoing, with early indications suggesting a slightly reduced budget compared to initial expectations. While no major cuts are anticipated, funding levels are expected to be tight.

Joel also shared that there is continued advocacy for deferred maintenance funding, though it will likely be limited and provided as one-time funds rather than ongoing support. Additional conversations are taking place regarding potential funding reallocations, including those connected to the TSET program. A more definitive budget proposal is expected in the near future as legislative negotiations progress.

Members were reminded of upcoming events at the Capitol, including Higher Education and Oklahoma Promise Day, where students and institutional representatives will engage with legislators, attend committee meetings, and participate in scheduled activities. A group photo opportunity is also anticipated as part of the day's events.

5. WORKFORCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE: LUCIA DICKINSON

Lucia thanked the council for submissions for the press release. It was announced that the official State Regents Press Release will be April 3rd. An update was provided on the development of the new Workforce Scholarship program, which is nearing final approval stages. Members of the Economic Development Council were invited to serve as blind reviewers for scholarship applications. The anticipated timeline includes application submissions in September, review periods in October and November, and final selections in January and February.

The scholarship is designed to cover approximately one semester of tuition and fees, with tiered awards based on institution type. There is interest in expanding the program in future years, potentially through employer partnerships to increase funding and impact.

6. FY 2026 EDC MEETING DATES AND TIMES: LUCIA DICKINSON

- May 27, 2026 – EDC Annual Training
- July- TBD

7. MAY TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS: LUCIA DICKINSON

At this time, no recommendations were made.

8. EVENTS: LUCIA DICKINSON

- 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

9. OTHER BUSINESS

[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

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting concluded with final remarks and appreciation for participants' engagement. Attendees were encouraged to reach out with questions and to continue internal discussions regarding Workforce Pell program identification and readiness.

Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education

Workforce Pell Update

Corey Gheesling, Ed.D.
Associate Vice President



SHEEO

State Higher Education
Executive Officers Association

About SHEEO

National association serving chief executives of statewide governing, policy, and coordinating boards of postsecondary education and their staffs.



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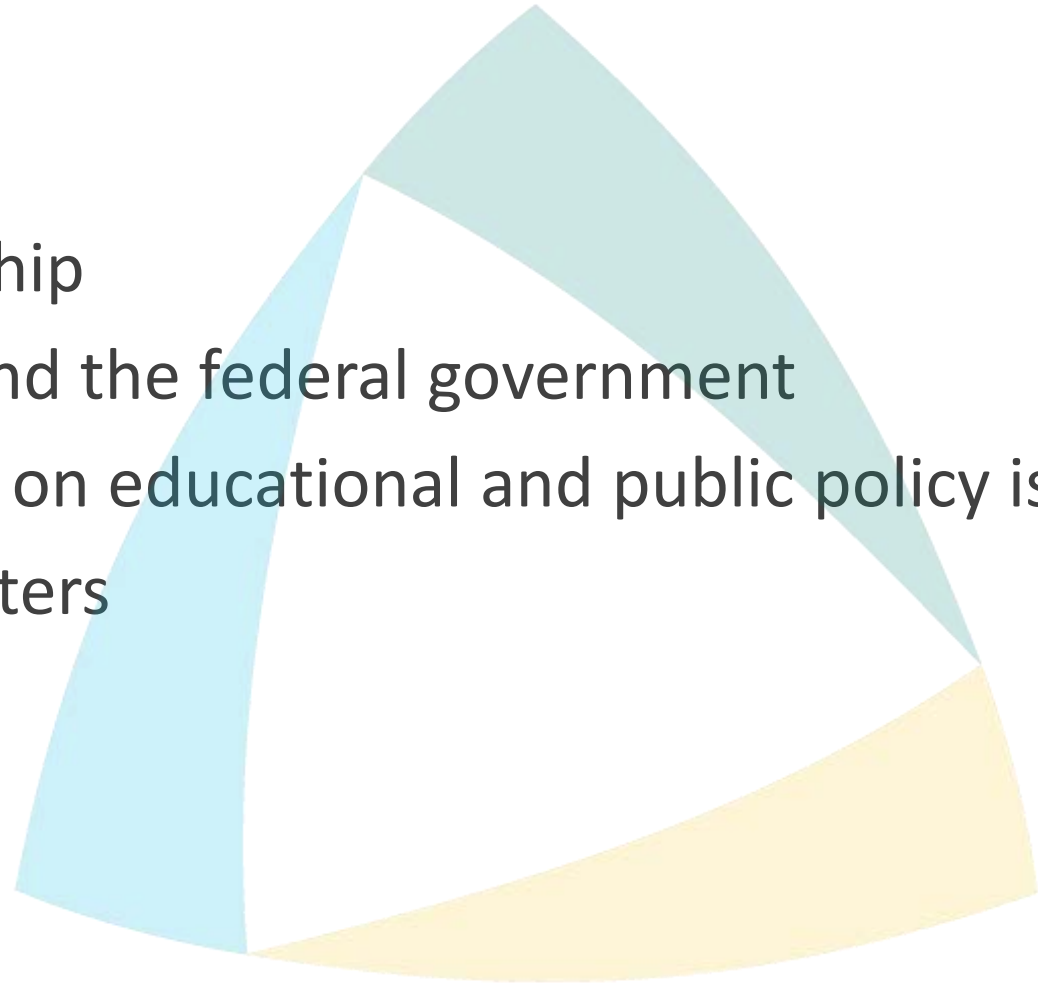


61 MEMBERS

**50 STATES
2 TERRITORIES
+ D.C.**

About SHEEO

- Advocate for state policy leadership
- Act as a liaison between states and the federal government
- Provide information and analysis on educational and public policy issues
- Recognize that state context matters



Federal Context



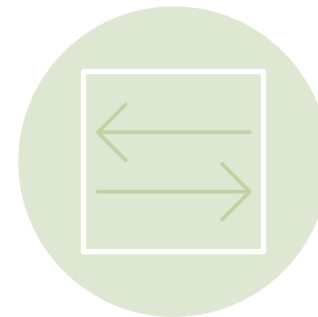
Federal policy increasingly situates higher education as workforce infrastructure and a component of broader talent development efforts



Apprenticeships, short term programs, and work-based learning are central to federal talent strategy



Federal grants prioritize connecting talent, employer partnerships, and measurable employment outcomes



These goals may not align with state economic development goals and initiatives

National Context

- Federal policy is placing education within labor
- In many states, state economic and workforce development is further ahead than federal policy
 - More robust and flexible workforce training financial aid
 - States are updating WIOA and Perkins V plans in accordance with federal guidance
 - While federal grants aspire to connect the sectors, critical capacity, data, and policy issues remain

What Workforce Pell Changes

- Expands Pell to short-term, non-credit programs
- Requires deeper cross-agency collaboration
- Elevates apprenticeships, priority occupations, and working learners

State and Institutional Changes

- State legislators view short-term programs as quick wins and have high political capital and utility
 - Low investment
 - Rapid response
 - Clear the desk
- Institutions
 - Enjoyed autonomy with minimal regulatory and administrative burden
- WFP ends this

Workforce Pell – High Level

- Increase collaboration between the governor's offices, state workforce agencies, and state higher education agencies
- Barriers to entry may limit opportunity
- Clear connection to state-defined priority occupations
- Provides on-ramps to:
 - Rapid workforce training
 - Inclusion of non-credit degrees
 - Working adults needing support in a changing economy
- Brings short-term programming into main campus operations
- Winners may be occupations and sectors that can define their own requirements (e.g., health care)

Registered Apprenticeships and WFP

- Registered apprenticeships: Pell eligible only for related technical instruction (RTI)
 - Formal instruction that teaches theory, technical knowledge, and foundational concepts necessary for the occupation
 - Community colleges
 - On-the-job training
 - Union and trade shops
 - Employer-run trainings
 - Regulated by the DOL – National Apprenticeship Act
 - Only 25% of RTI can be delivered by a third-party provider
- Great interest in academic medical institutions to use RA to transform training in the allied health and nursing fields
 - Both employer and educator
 - The University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health is launching a new center to help expand

Workforce Pell - Governance

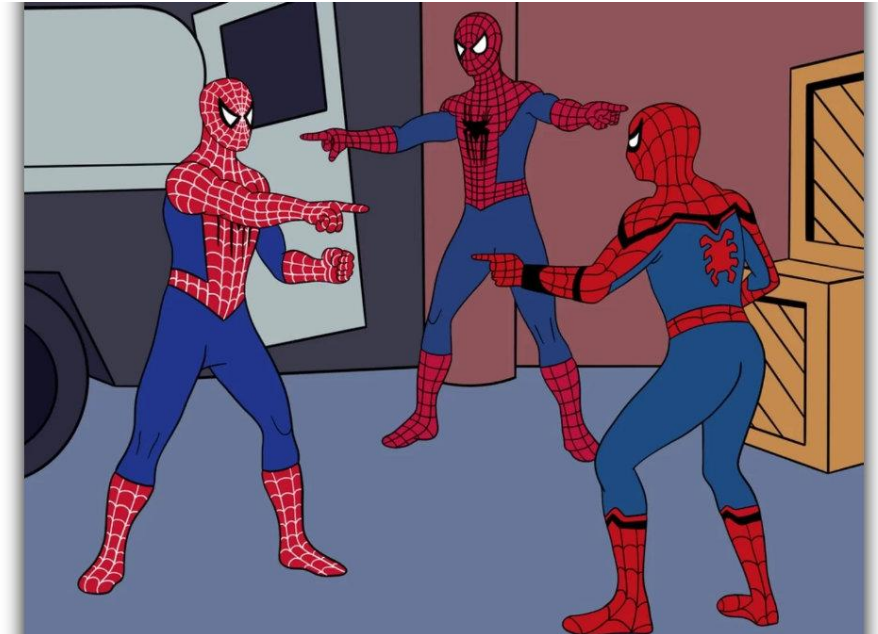


Workforce Pell - Governance

- Background
 - SHEEOs are not explicitly named in statutory text or in rulemaking
 - Deference is given to the Governor's offices, then Workforce Agencies (SWA)
 - Subregulatory guidance for WFP is going to clarify that governors can delegate WFP duties to other agencies, like the SHEEO
 - NPRM was released and we are still reading through, but do not see these changes included
 - Federal backdrop of HE functions moving to DOL, creating further uncertainty
 - WFP rulemaking, including certain Title IV elements and others from WIOA

Workforce Pell - Governance

- What does this mean
 - SHEEOs may not be top of mind for WFP expansion in their states
 - Politics between the Governor's office, SHEEO, and SWA
 - WFP obscured by OBBB changes and funding cuts to critical SWA programs and services
 - When a void in leadership exists, making a path forward is essential



Workforce Pell - Governance

- Recommended steps for SHEEOs
 - Marshal internal assets and capabilities
 - Relevant policies and program approval for short-term programs
 - Licensing for proprietary organizations and businesses
 - Inventory of short-term programs
 - Data for short-term programs
 - Accountability and evaluation processes
 - Financial Aid and Auditing abilities
 - SME
 - SLDS, Transfer and articulation, credit and learner mobility, non-credit-credit conversion, etc.
 - Be prepared
 - How many programs would qualify for WFP?
 - Where are they?
 - What are the existing strengths and challenges facing WFP based off initial review?

Workforce Pell - Governance

- Reports from the SHEEOs
 - Convening the following stakeholders for initial meetings:
 - Governor's offices staff
 - SWA Eligible Training Providers List (ETPL) and Labor Market Information (LMI) leadership
 - CC System leadership, if applicable

Workforce Pell

- For the Governor's office staff
 - Need to determine:
 - How to define high-need, in-demand
 - Whether to use WIOA or new methods
 - Consider regionality
 - An approval process
 - Handling interstate sharing of programs
 - Record management for the ED that persists through administrations
 - Support SIS enhancement to support WFP

Workforce Pell

- For the SWA office staff
 - Need to determine:
 - Effort required to build new duplicative reporting structures from institutions
 - ETPL eligibility process
 - If wage records are currently sufficient for the ED accountability framework
 - Related Technical Instruction that may apply for Registered Apprenticeships
 - How to match outcomes data, particularly across state lines
 - Where does apprenticeship lie?

Workforce Pell - Governance

- Outcomes
 - Reports from the field show that SHEEOs are already serving as “shadow” leaders of WFP implementation in their states
 - Most commonly
 - Tasked with conducting ecosystem scans of short-term programs and WFP readiness
 - Utilizing SME
 - Inventorying existing programs
 - Surveying institutions for readiness
 - ID’ing critical stakeholders
 - Developing implementation plans
 - Considering how students and employers will know about WFP

Interagency efforts

- Reports from the field
 - Leadership void = Opportunity
 - SHEEOs leveraging convening power, SMEs, and internal assets
 - Ohio, North Carolina, and Minnesota
 - Early moving states demonstrating advantages of proactive leaderships
 - Tennessee is building on years of P20 work, clock to credit hour conversion at TCATs, and effective leadership
 - Visibility and initiative help shape implementation
 - NCCCS is creating implementation tools and frameworks for institutions
 - State actions
 - VA (HB 551) – aligns WFP eligibility with existing state workforce programs and state aid
 - WV (SB 490) and MD (509) – state workforce boards formally tasked to assist governor in approving programs
 - KS (SB 406) creates an interagency process for programs to apply for eligibility and appeal decisions

Data Infrastructure

- Workforce Pell has multiple data infrastructure issues
 - Many non-credit programs are not included in state program inventories and outcomes data is unavailable
 - Many non-credit programs are not included in institutional enterprise data systems and student information systems
 - WFP necessitates SHEEOs and SWAs collaborating on their Eligible Training Provider Lists, which may/may not include providers under SHEEO oversight
- Conflation of WIOA and Title IV
 - Managing stackability and portability requirements
- Deference to the states creates issues for students learning/working between states

Workforce Pell – Next Steps for SHEEO

- See effective WFP as a multi-year and stage process
 - Implementation – July 1, 2026
 - Fortifying – 2026-2027
 - Innovation and Improvement– 2027 and beyond
- Preparing a series of blogs and other resources
 - Program approval
 - Stackability and Portability
 - Data and Accountability
 - Financial Aid
 - Other areas as requested
- Ongoing partnership with NGA’s WFP Implementation Readiness Academy

Questions

Thank you

- cgheesling@sheeo.org