

**Governor signs record education budgets  
He says it's the largest increase in aid in a decade**

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With several strokes of the pen Thursday, Gov. Ted Kulongoski spent more than half the state's two-year tax-supported budget on education, from pre-kindergarten through graduate school.

To an audience of lawmakers, education officials and students gathered in the Capitol rotunda, Kulongoski said the budgets he proposed seven months ago and signed Thursday represent the largest increases in state aid in more than a decade.

"My message then was that this is an era of great opportunity," Kulongoski said barely an hour after the 2007 Legislature ended.

Education programs claim more than half the state's \$15.1 billion general fund, which comes largely from personal and corporate income taxes. Kulongoski said the Legislature delivered on his top priority, education, to enhance the state's future economic prospects.

The new budgets will enable 75 percent of eligible 3- and 4-year-olds from low-income families to enroll in Head Start, boosting enrollment by 3,200, and help school districts reduce class sizes and restore programs cut during the past five years.

State universities will get more direct support to handle student enrollment, reduce student-faculty ratios, and recruit more students in rural areas. State grants to college students, which will set a record, are contained in a bill that Kulongoski will sign separately.

The two-year support fund for the state's 17 community colleges is a record \$500 million, less than the \$529 million they wanted, but more than the governor or budget writers proposed initially.

"For us, it makes a significant difference," said Gretchen Schuette, whose final day as Chemeketa Community College president is today, and who attended Thursday's ceremony.

"We wished for more, and some colleges will still be cutting. But because of how we have managed our budget, Chemeketa will be able to keep things level -- keep tuition flat, which is extremely important -- and continue to have some of our programs grow, such as horticulture and pharmacy technology."