



**KLAMATH**  
Community College

## Media release

Gerry O'Brien  
Public Information Officer  
Phone: 541-880-2386  
Cell: 541-880-8587  
Email: [obrien@klamathcc.edu](mailto:obrien@klamathcc.edu)

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# KCC and SOU partnership gives education students a seamless path toward a degree

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. — Students in the Klamath Basin who dream of becoming elementary school teachers no longer need to leave the community to earn their degree. Through a seamless partnership between Klamath Community College (KCC) and Southern Oregon University (SOU), aspiring educators can complete their coursework locally and online while continuing to live and work in the Basin.

The pathway begins at KCC, where students can earn a 2-year Associate of Applied Science degree in education or a 1-year paraeducator certificate. From there, credits transfer directly to SOU, allowing students to continue toward a teaching degree — primarily through online coursework — without relocating.

“This partnership is what makes a real difference for our students,” said Peggy Bullock, KCC’s education program lead and full-time faculty educator. “College credits transfer from KCC to SOU with no loss of credit. Once the student is enrolled at SOU, they pay SOU tuition and fees. It removes many of the barriers that prevent people from becoming teachers.”

Stearns Elementary teacher Chey Belcher is a product of such a partnership.

“I’m a senior at SOU, but live in Klamath Falls,” Belcher said. “I would not have been able to earn my degree without this partnership. I have small children and could not afford to drive back and forth to Ashland every day. This way, I can work toward my degree on my own time.”

Now she is teaching math, history, and hands-on project-based learning to fourth graders and thoroughly enjoys it. It is such a rewarding career. It's a very hard career in many different aspects, but it is so rewarding working with the kids and building a relationship with them,” she said.

Ashley Doty teaches third grade at Conger Elementary school. Returning to school later in life seemed intimidating, but being welcomed at KCC made all the difference.

“I began my educational journey at Klamath Community College in 2021 after I was out of school for over a decade, through the support and guidance of the Education Department, I was able to earn my

associate's degree, and I also from there, I transferred to Southern Oregon University to get my teaching degree," she said.

"I chose KCC because it felt approachable and supportive, especially after being out of school since 2008 and I started college in 2021. I knew I needed a place that would ease me back into education rather than overwhelm me. Starting in person at KCC helped me build confidence. I continued my KCC journey online the whole time while I also attended SOU at the same time."

The program is designed for students interested in teaching kindergarten through sixth grade. Most coursework is offered online, allowing students to work at their own pace while balancing employment and family responsibilities. A small number of courses are offered in hybrid or live Zoom formats that require scheduled attendance.

KCC offers an AAS degree in Paraeducator, which meets the requirements for individuals seeking work as paraprofessionals or teacher's aides in local school districts. Paraprofessionals support classrooms in a variety of ways — working one-on-one with students, assisting in special education, rotating between classrooms, or supporting school libraries.

"For students who want to work in schools as paraprofessionals, they must either earn an associate degree or pass the paraprofessional test, which we offer here in our testing center," Bullock said.

While paraprofessional positions provide valuable classroom experience, they are often part-time and lower paying. Many paraprofessionals discover a passion for teaching and decide to pursue licensure. The KCC-SOU partnership allows them to do exactly that — earning college credits while continuing to work locally.

"Paraprofessionals can move forward toward a teaching degree without having to uproot their lives," Bullock said.

"It's really amazing because it's flexible," Belcher said. I really liked how organized it was. Peggy had set up a schedule of every class I needed to get my degree when I could take it. I took a lot of the classes through KCC, all of them were directly relevant to getting my bachelor's degree. It is really a bridge between my paraeducator and bachelor's degree."

Interest in education careers fluctuates, but the program continues to draw a diverse range of students. Currently, approximately 30 students are enrolled in various stages of KCC's education pathway. Students range in age and background, from recent high school graduates to working paraprofessionals who are returning to college part time.

KCC also partners with the Klamath County School District to offer a high school education pathway program. Through dual credit classes, high school students can earn up to 17 college credits, saving both time and money while getting a head start on an education career.

"These students enter our program already on their way," Bullock said. "It's a smart, affordable option for students who know early on that they want to work in education."

By combining local instruction, online learning, and a strong university partnership, Klamath Community

College is helping grow the next generation of teachers in the Basin.

For more information about KCC and its programs, visit [www.klamathcc.edu](http://www.klamathcc.edu).

*(Portions of this press release were edited with the help of AI).*



KCC photo

Stearns Elementary 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher Chey Belcher poses with a bouquet of flowers given to her by a student.



KCC photo

Ashley Doty is a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher at Conger Elementary. She loves the challenge of the work and plans to earn a masters degree in the future.

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