OLNEY CENTRAL COLLEGE

KNIGHTLINE

FEBRUARY 2026

CALENDAR

February

16 — Presidents Day, Campus Closed

18 — IECC Career Fair, 9 a.m.-noon

27 — TRIO Upward Bound STEM Lab Open House, OCC Learning Commons, 3-5 p.m.

March

5 — OCC SPIN Night, Student Union, 5-7 p.m.

6 — Midterm

9 — Pulaski Day Observed, No Classes

10-13 — Spring Break

17 — Summer & Fall Registration Begins

25 — CTE Showcase

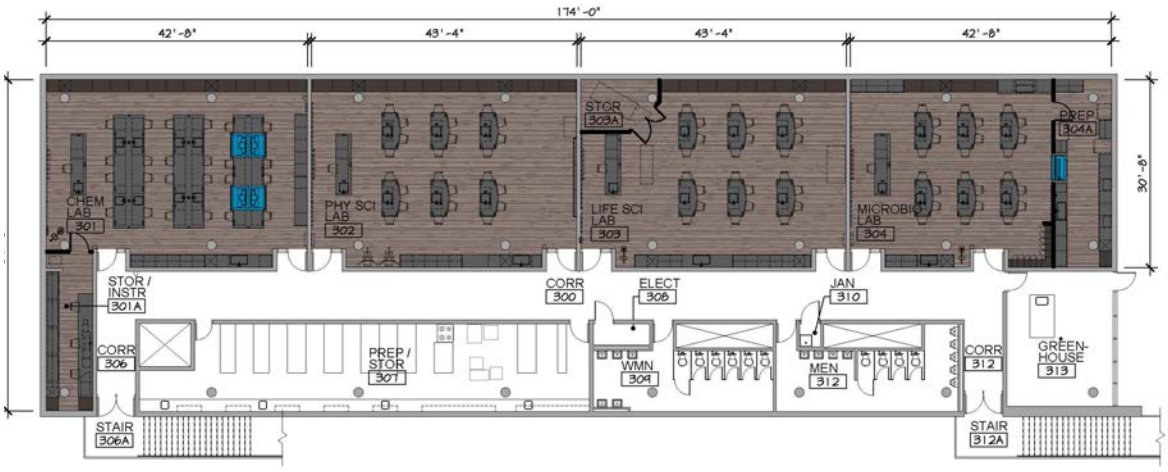
Campus Visits

Tables will be located in the hallway outside Student Services.

Feb. 25 — Southern Illinois University - Edwardsville Representative Amandos Fisher will be here, 1:30-3:30 p.m.

March 3 — Eastern Illinois University Representative Mackenzie Taylor will be here, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

March 18 — University of Southern Indiana Representative Pandora Wells will be here, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.



Floor plans designed by ADG Architecture for the Science Labs renovation project.

Wattleworth Hall Science Labs to get 21st-Century Upgrade

Olney Central College is undertaking an extensive $2 million project to renovate four science labs in Dr. Kent L. Wattleworth Hall. The work will focus on transforming the third-floor physics, chemistry and two biology labs into modern, high-tech learning spaces.

Olney Central College President Chris Simpson said the upcoming renovations will be a much-needed addition to the campus.

"There really hasn't been a lot done to the labs since Wattleworth Hall opened in the early 1970s," he said. "All of the original cabinetry and a lot of other original items are still there so it is very much overdue. I know that I'm really looking forward to the renovations and am excited about the improvements."

The remodel will encompass everything from new cabinetry, flooring and furniture to the upgraded tools and equipment needed to support effective faculty instruction.

"The new science labs will provide a more modern, updated 21st Century-type of environment for teaching and learning," Simpson said. "I know that both students and faculty members will appreciate the new labs. A modern, well-designed lab can make STEM courses more engaging for students. As we have seen with our recently opened Health Professions Center, these new and updated spaces have a major impact on teaching and learning. It allows for new approaches to instruction for our faculty members and is much more visually appealing to the students."

Simpson recently reached out to the OCC Foundation to explore a partnership with the college to purchase new scientific equipment. The Executive Board agreed making it a focal point of the OCC Foundation's 2026 Campaign for Excellence.

"I knew that our foundation would be very supportive of this project because we are going to have not just construction as part of this, but we are going to need to significantly upgrade the equipment that is there," he said. "We're thinking about things like scales or glassware in the chemistry lab. You find similar types of things in the biology lab or in the human anatomy and

Wattleworth Hall's third-floor science labs will undergo extensive remodeling this summer. OCC President Chris Simpson says the project will create a "more modern, updated 21st Century-type of environment for teaching and learning."

physics lab. All of these areas are going to require some improvements and upgrades with equipment, and we appreciate the foundation's support and being a key partner in helping with these improvements."

The Illinois Eastern Community Colleges Board of Trustees will review project bids during its next meeting. Once approved, work is expected to begin at the conclusion of the spring semester. Renovations will continue throughout the summer and should be completed prior to the start of fall semester classes.

Simpson said this will be an extensive project that includes not only asbestos abatement, but the disposal of outdated materials.

"Over the years there has been an accumulation of a lot of chemicals and various other pieces of equipment," he said. "Many of those items you just can't put in the dumpster so we'll need to go through a disposal process with many of those items and that will take time."

Simpson noted the college has been exploring the project for several years. Faculty involvement has been vital in the planning process to ensure the renovations meet the current and future needs of OCC students.

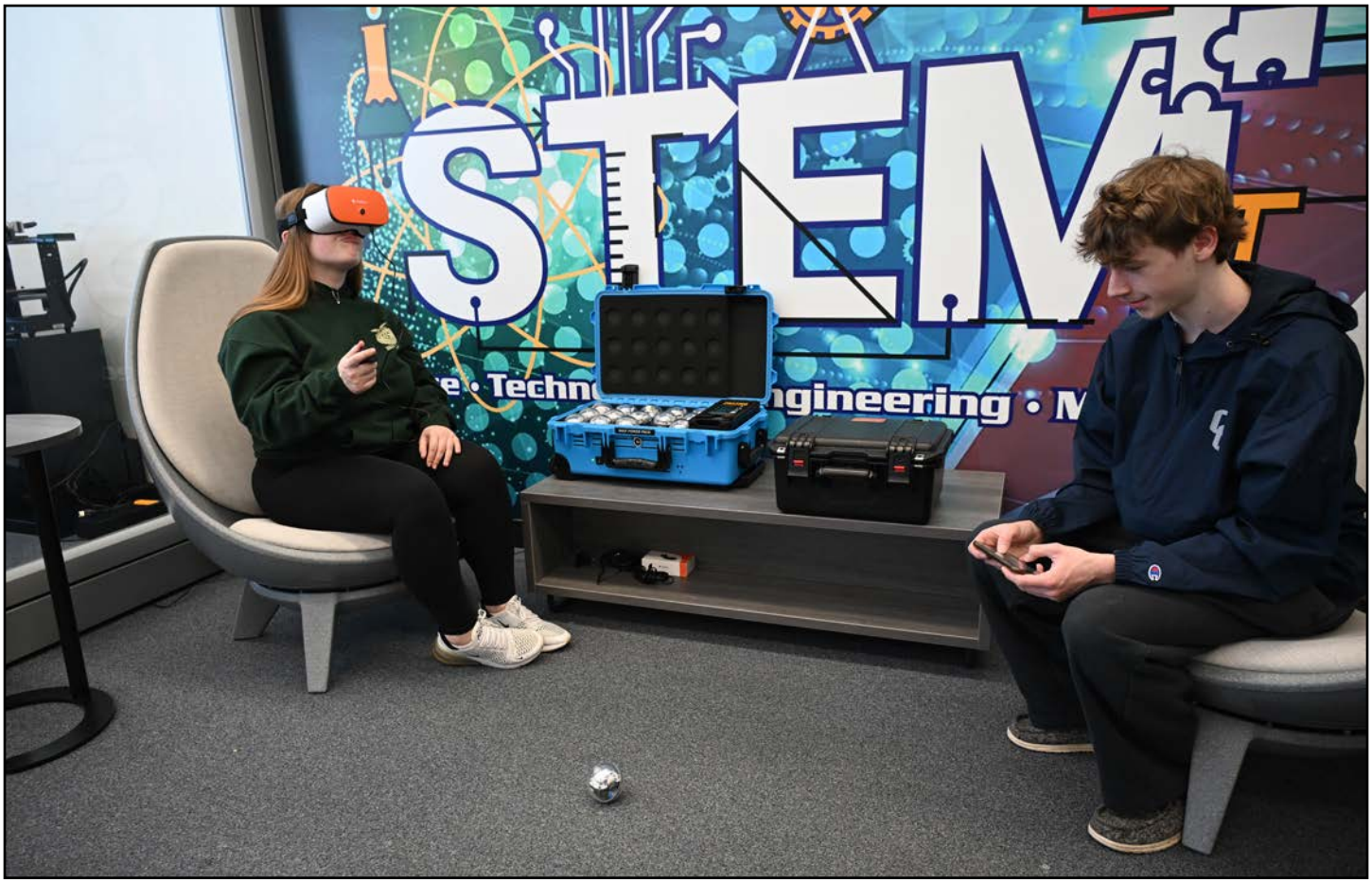
"The faculty input is something that we wanted to provide right from the very beginning" Simpson said. "Having the opportunity to provide that input, we thought was essential because they're the experts in teaching those areas. The faculty input was really, key to this entire project."

During Fall 2024, OCC administration and faculty toured updated lab facilities at Parkland College, Richland Community College, Kaskaskia College and Southwestern Illinois College. Through the experience, they were able to view different layouts and see how those institutions were able to integrate instructional spaces within their labs.

"It was a good opportunity to generate ideas among our faculty so that when they were working with the architects, they were able to provide some ideas and some input on the design," Simpson said.

For the students, the labs will open many new and exciting opportunities.

"The new science labs align very well with the newly developed transfer pathways that the IECC has developed," Simpson said. "These pathways provide a better sequence of courses for students, and the new labs will enhance learning opportunities for students. I think the students that leave Olney Central College are well prepared for their next steps, whatever that may be. If the student transfers to a 4-year institution, these upgrades to our science labs are going to enhance their ability to be successful as they transfer on."



TRIO Upward Bound will celebrate the completion of its new STEM Lab in the OCC Learning Commons with an Open House from 3 to 5 p.m. on February 27.

TRIO Upward Bound Celebrates Completion of New STEM Lab with Open House

TRIO Upward Bound will celebrate the completion of its new STEM Lab with an Open House from 3 to 5 p.m. on February 27 in the OCC Learning Commons.

The new space represents a major milestone for the program and expands hands-on learning opportunities for students across the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges district.

"I believe that if you are willing to put in the work, anything is possible," IECC TRIO Upward Bound Program Director Tiffany Cowger said reflecting on the project. "One year ago, the STEM Lab existed only as a concept shared among the TRIO Upward Bound staff. Following the formation of a dedicated committee and consultations with TRIO leaders in Chicago, Texas, and Alaska, as well as collaboration with several IECC staff members, a comprehensive implementation plan was developed for the OCC Learning Commons. After multiple design iterations and rendering updates, the vision began to take shape."

Through the unwavering support of IECC, the project secured nearly $60,000 in funding, transforming this ambitious idea into a fully realized learning space.

Cowger said the STEM Lab is designed to be more than just a physical location — it reflects a broader commitment to innovation, creativity and problem-solving.

"This lab allows students to engage in hands-on, project-based learning experiences that foster curiosity, inquiry and discovery," she said. "By integrating tools and technologies for coding, robotics and esports, the lab promotes 21st-Century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication and creativity — skills essential for college and career readiness."

Many IECC students and TRIO Upward Bound participants come from rural, low-income, and first-generation

The TRIO Upward Bound STEM Lab serves as a meeting space for OCC's new Esports Club.

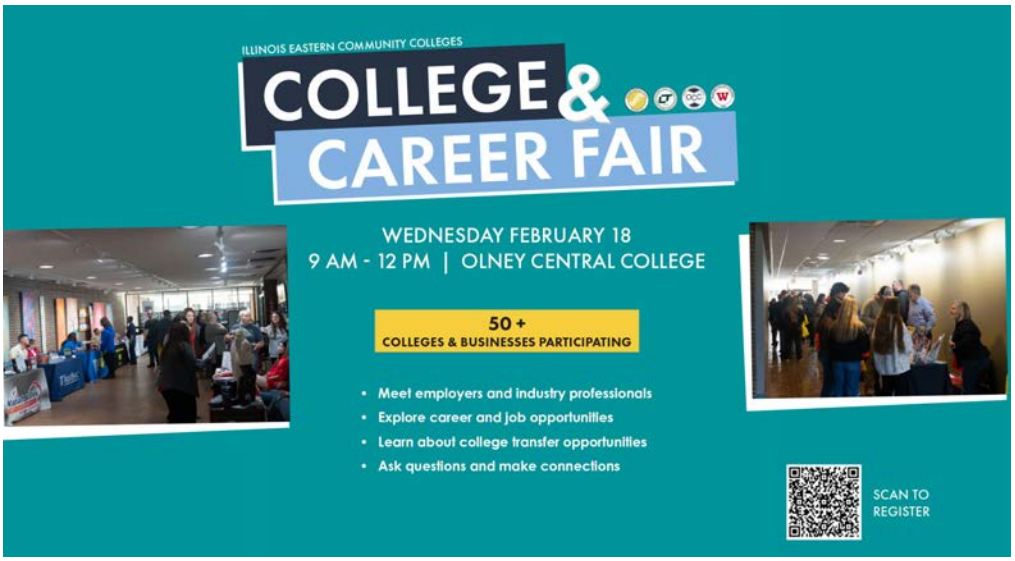
backgrounds, where access to quality STEM resources can be limited, Cowger explained.

"This lab bridges that gap by providing a collaborative environment that inspires students to explore their passions, develop technical competencies and build confidence in STEM fields," she added.

The STEM Lab was developed with clear goals in mind, including increasing student exposure to STEM fields and careers; developing STEM knowledge, skills, and competencies; fostering curiosity, inquiry, and discovery; and stimulating creativity, innovation, and problem-solving. Additional goals include encouraging collaboration, communication, and presentation skills, inspiring passion and talent in STEM, and empowering students' sense of agency, identity, and confidence.

The lab represents a long-term investment in student success and community development, Cowger said. By strengthening curriculum, expanding educational opportunities, and creating pathways to high-demand STEM careers, the STEM Lab will benefit both students and the local community for years to come.

Community members are encouraged to attend the Open House and explore the new space while learning more about the impact of TRIO Upward Bound and its commitment to student success.



Sports Schedule

Women's Basketball

Feb. 14 — vs. Shawnee, 1 p.m. at home
Feb. 18 — at John A. Logan, 5 p.m.
Feb. 21 — vs. Wabash Valley, 1 p.m. at home
Feb. 25 — at Vincennes, 4 p.m.
Feb. 28 — vs. Southwestern Illinois, 1 p.m. at home

Men's Basketball

Feb. 14 — vs. Shawnee, 3 p.m. at home
Feb. 18 — at John A. Logan, 7 p.m.
Feb. 21 — vs. Wabash Valley, 3 p.m. at home
Feb. 25 — at Vincennes, 6 p.m.
Feb. 28 — vs. Southwestern Illinois, 3 p.m. at home

Baseball

Feb. 13 — vs. Indian Hills at Millington, Tenn., noon; vs. Southeast Arkansas, 4 p.m.
Feb. 14 — vs. Jefferson College at Millington, Tenn., 11 a.m.
Feb. 26 — vs. Northern Oklahoma at Kansas City, Mo., noon & 3 p.m.
Feb. 27 — vs. Northern Oklahoma College, TBA

Softball

Feb. 13 — at Northwest Florida State, noon; vs. Daytona State College, 2 p.m.
Feb. 14 — vs. Daytona State College at Northwest Florida State, 11 a.m.
Feb. 27 — vs. Moberly Area at Branson Showtime Classic, noon; vs. Heartland, 2:30 p.m.
Feb. 28 — vs. Lincoln Land, 9 a.m.

From Classroom to Career

CTE Programs Power the Local Workforce

Olney Central College's Career and Technical Education programs blend academic learning with practical, real-world training designed to prepare students for workforce success. Each February, OCC joins educational institutions across the nation in celebrating National CTE Month.

At Olney Central College, CTE programs serve learners of all ages and backgrounds — from current high school students enrolled in dual-credit courses such as welding or automotive, to recent high school graduates preparing for their futures, and returning students seeking new skills and career opportunities.

Olney Central College introduced its first CTE program in 1969. Today, the college offers degrees and certificates in CTE fields ranging from Accounting and Administration of Justice to healthcare professions such as Nursing and Radiography, as well as high-tech manufacturing areas like Industrial Maintenance.

Industrial Maintenance and HVAC Instructor Joe Young provides hands-on instruction to students during class.

"CTE programs are key to the overall educational program at Olney Central College, and they are key to the local region," said OCC President Chris Simpson. "Students that leave OCC after completing one of our CTE programs are in a position to enter the workforce with the skills and knowledge to be successful."

It's not only students who benefit from OCC's CTE programs — local workforce and industry partners do as well.

According to Advance CTE, 77 percent of employers reported hiring a candidate in part because of their CTE experience. Olney Central College is helping train those needed workers.

"One of the comments local businesses often make is that it is difficult to find capable and qualified people to fill open positions," Simpson said. "Student that have completed one of the CTE programs at Olney Central College meet that need with the skills and knowledge they have attained. Our graduates from these CTE programs are workforce ready."

Industrial Maintenance Technology and HVAC Instructor Joe Young said numerous employers have reached out to him looking for graduates to fill open positions. Among those employers are North American Lighting, Hella, Hershey's, US Weight, Mac Plastic, Walmart and Marathon Petroleum.

"The industrial maintenance sector is facing a severe labor shortage, with approximately 400,000 skilled trade jobs unfilled in the U.S. as of late 2025," Young said. "Projections indicate that the manufacturing skills gap could leave up to 1.9 million to 2.1 million jobs unfilled by 2030. The demand both locally and nationally is very high. Other jobs are being displaced by automation and AI, but this is increasing the need for people who can repair and maintain those systems."

Young said CTE programs are essential in preparing students for the future.

Students are able to take what they learn in CTE programs and apply it directly to their lives, Young explained. "Not only are they getting the hands-on experience they need to prepare them for the workplace, but they are also learning skills that they will be able to use all the time."

He added, "In IMT for example, a lot of our focus is on critical thinking and problem solving. Students work with real equipment they will see in the field and, also gain the deeper understanding of how it works. This enables them to build, repair and maintain equipment they have never seen before. Learning how to learn is a big part of what we do."

Young encourages students to explore CTE programs such as Industrial Maintenance Technology and HVAC.

"Students will gain skills and knowledge that they can take with them anywhere. The demand for IMT and HVAC is growing nationally," he added. "We can fix just about anything, and there is always something that needs to be fixed."