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## **Some Changes in Store for Opportunity Scholarship**

PIERRE, S.D. – As a result of legislative action this year, students qualifying for the South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship will see a few changes in the way the program is administered.

These changes, impacting both initial and continuing eligibility, are a result of two bills approved in the 2008 session, the South Dakota Board of Regents said. Since 2004, the state has awarded the Opportunity Scholarship, worth up to \$5,000 over four years, to qualifying high school graduates who complete a college-prep curriculum and maintain certain academic standards.

One of the requirements is that high school students must score at least a 24 ACT (or equivalent SAT score) to qualify for the Opportunity Scholarship. The law was changed this year to give students two more months to earn that qualifying score. “In the past, students had to earn their qualifying ACT score before they graduated from high school and the last possible test date was in April,” said Paul Turman, director of academic assessment for the Board of Regents. “Now they will need the necessary ACT score before beginning their postsecondary education,” he said.

With this change, high school students who graduate this spring may take the ACT test administered in June to see if they can obtain a qualifying score. For those students intending to earn an Opportunity Scholarship this fall, there are two remaining ACT test dates available to establish their eligibility: April 12, 2008, and June 14, 2008.

Other scholarship changes adopted by the Legislature this year:

- Recognize the Department of Education’s new distinguished high school graduation requirements as the curriculum needed to establish eligibility for the Opportunity Scholarship. “The distinguished curriculum is nearly identical to the Regents Scholar requirements we have used in the past,” Turman said. “This change will make it easier for schools, students, and parents to know exactly what courses qualify, since South Dakota high schools are already familiar with the state’s graduation requirements.” Turman said this change will be implemented as the state’s new graduation requirements become effective for the high school graduating classes in 2010.
- Allow a student’s Opportunity Scholarship eligibility to continue for up to four academic years or until receiving a bachelor’s degree, whichever comes first. In the past, a student’s eligibility ended if they first received a postsecondary certificate or two-year degree. Turman said this change will allow more technical school graduates to maintain scholarship eligibility if they choose to go on for a four-year degree.
- Permit the Board of Regents to designate a SAT score that is equivalent to the required ACT score for scholarship eligibility. A minimum SAT score of 1090 is currently equivalent to the ACT score of 24.

Turman noted that the legislature considered other Opportunity Scholarship changes this year, but those proposals were not adopted. The maximum scholarship amount remains at \$5,000, the minimum ACT score of 24 needed to qualify for the scholarship remains unchanged, and students must continue to complete 15 credit hours per semester to maintain their scholarship eligibility.