



# News Release

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## **Opportunity Scholarship Reaps Positive Impacts**

ABERDEEN, S.D. – Rigorous course-taking requirements tied to the state’s merit-based scholarship has resulted in fewer students needing to take remedial courses, improved performance on the ACT exam, and enhanced student retention once they are enrolled in college.

Those are the findings of a comprehensive review of the South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship (SDOS) program in its fifth year of operation. A total of 5,007 South Dakota high school graduates have met initial eligibility requirements for the scholarship since the first group of students qualified in fall 2004. The program encourages students to take a rigorous high school curriculum and remain in South Dakota for their postsecondary education. Students who qualify may receive up to \$5,000 over four years.

“The requirements established by the Legislature when developing the program have resulted in a number of positive results for the overall academic preparation of graduates as they make the transition into their postsecondary experience,” the report noted. Among the report’s findings:

- Since the scholarship program started in 2004, the level of enrollments in remedial coursework has experienced a continuous decline. In the past five years, students requiring remediation in math has dropped by 9 percent, while English remediation declined by 8 percent.
- The percentage of South Dakota high school graduates who have earned a 24 or higher on the ACT exam increased from 22 percent in 2004 to 28 percent four years later.
- College retention rates for high-achieving students also improved significantly. Before the scholarship started, about 80 percent of those students were retained into their fourth year of college; that number is now at 88 percent. Fifteen percent of high-achieving students used to leave prior to the start of their second year of college. Since the scholarship program began, only 7 percent of SDOS recipients do not start their second year of college within the state.

Looking at the initial cohort of recipients who received the scholarship back in 2004, 58 percent maintained eligibility into their final semester of college. The most common reasons for losing

## Scholarship – 2

scholarship eligibility were failing to meet the 15 credit-hour requirement each semester or failing to satisfy GPA requirements.

South Dakota State University has enrolled 40 percent of the SDOS recipients each year of the program, followed by The University of South Dakota, South Dakota School of Mines & Technology, Augustana College, and Black Hills State University. These five institutions accounted for more than 84 percent of all recipients.

Biology is the most common major among SDOS recipients, followed by psychology, mechanical engineering, business management, and special education. “Opportunity Scholarship recipients are more likely to enroll in majors resulting in career areas such as medicine, science, mathematics, engineering, and business,” the report said.

A survey of SDOS recipients who graduated last spring found most intended to enter the workforce immediately after graduation or pursue graduate studies. Seventy percent of those graduates chose to remain in South Dakota.