



News Release

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Report: Opportunity Scholarship Makes an Impact

PIERRE, S.D. – A state report says the five-year-old South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship program has positively impacted high school students' overall academic preparation for college, with significant and documented results: a decline in the need for remedial education, increased ACT scores, and improved retention once students transition into higher education.

The report notes the number of students in the public university system requiring remedial work in mathematics dropped by 8 percent since the scholarship program started in 2004, and English remediation also declined by 3 percent in the past five years. The number of South Dakota school districts with no students requiring remedial help has increased to 18 percent, compared to only 12 percent in 2003.

“The level of remedial enrollments has shown a continuous decline since the start of the Opportunity Scholarship,” said Jack R. Warner, the Board of Regents' executive director and CEO. “That is no coincidence, especially when paired with the corresponding increase in ACT performance. No other state can document this kind of outcome from a state policy initiative.”

Students eligible for the scholarship must earn at least a 24 ACT composite score. Twenty-two percent of South Dakota high school graduates scored a 24 or higher on the ACT in the year leading up to implementation of the Opportunity Scholarship. That increased to 24 percent in 2004, and was followed by a marked increase to 28 percent in 2009.

Retention rates for high-achieving students also improved since the scholarship's inception. Prior to 2004, about 80 percent of those students were retained into their fourth year of college. The percentage has climbed to 88 percent since the Opportunity Scholarship was awarded.

A total of 6,144 South Dakota high school graduates have met initial eligibility for the scholarship since the fall of 2004. The program has experienced a 35 percent increase in enrollments in the past five years. However, there was a 4 percent decline in newly-eligible students last fall, after four straight years of continued growth. “This concerns us,” said Warner. “Inflation does erode the scholarship's value over time. A \$5,000 scholarship today buys something less than it did in 2004.”

“The current legislative debate over the future of the Opportunity Scholarship should refocus instead on how to increase its value, so we encourage more students to take rigorous high school courses and stay in South Dakota for their higher education experience,” Warner said.

Scholarship – 2

The report also includes the following facts about the South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship program:

- South Dakota State University has enrolled the most scholarship recipients each year (40 percent), followed by The University of South Dakota, South Dakota School of Mines & Technology, Augustana College, and Black Hills State University, which accounted for more than 83 percent of all recipients.
- Biology is the most common major pursued by Opportunity Scholarship recipients, followed by psychology, mechanical engineering, business management, and nursing.
- Opportunity Scholarship recipients are more likely to enroll in majors resulting in career fields such as medicine, science, mathematics, engineering, and business.
- 71 percent of scholarship recipients maintain their eligibility into the second year of the program; 58 percent sustain eligibility into their final year of college.
- 68 percent of scholarship recipients who responded to a graduation survey said they were employed in South Dakota or enrolled in graduate education in state.

A link to the full report is available at

<http://www.sdbor.edu/board/items/documents/FULLBOR0310M.pdf>