

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Monday, Jan. 24, 2011
CONTACT: Mary Stadick Smith, South Dakota Department of Education, (605) 773-7228,
mary.stadicksmith@state.sd.us

Grant promoting access to postsecondary education expands

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota College Access Challenge Grant is expanding to include six Board of Regents' institutions.

The six state-supported universities will receive a total of \$216,000 in federal funds to develop and implement strategies designed to increase the retention and success rate of American Indian, and other under-represented students entering those universities.

The College Access grant has existing efforts to partner with the technical institutes and tribal colleges and universities in South Dakota.

"With the College Access grant, we are paving the way for American Indian students to find success at the postsecondary level – whether that's a two-year program or a four-year degree – and to make sure that they are adequately prepared for the transition," said Dr. Melody Schopp,* interim secretary for the state Department of Education. "With the addition of these Board of Regents' institutions, we have the key players on board."

The South Dakota College Access Challenge Grant is administered by the state Department of Education. Funding comes from the U.S. Department of Education.

"Our public universities are pleased to partner with the Department of Education as we work to provide greater opportunities for American Indian students and other under-represented populations," said Jack Warner, executive director and CEO for the South Dakota Board of Regents. "Funds available will allow the campuses to implement programming that supports enrollment, retention and graduation of identified students," Warner said. "This clearly fits with our overarching goal to increase the number of citizens in South Dakota with postsecondary degrees."

The College Access grant targets all under-represented students in South Dakota. However, it has a special emphasis on American Indian students. Currently, American Indian students make up just 1.9 percent of the student population enrolled in the state's public universities, and 3.5 percent of those enrolled in the state's technical institutes.

The universities will use the funds to engage in outreach activities, to help smooth the transition from high school to college, and to bolster retention efforts.

*Schopp (SHAHP)