



News Release

Contacts: Jack R. Warner, Executive Director and CEO
jack.warner@sdbor.edu

Janelle Toman, Director of Communications
Janelle.toman@sdbor.edu

Telephone: (605) 773-3455

Fax: (605) 773-5320

www.sdbor.edu

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Friday, March 23, 2012

Opportunity Scholarship Encourages Better College Preparation

PIERRE, S.D. – A new report on South Dakota’s merit-based scholarship program confirms that more high school students are graduating prepared with the right curriculum to be successful in college, while at the same time a greater share of high-achieving students remains in the state for postsecondary education and to work.

“The Opportunity Scholarship is delivering on its intended outcomes: we see better-prepared college students who remain here for their education and are more likely to stay in South Dakota after graduating,” said Jack Warner, executive director and CEO for the South Dakota Board of Regents. The Board of Regents administers the state-funded scholarship program, which provides up to \$5,000 over four years of postsecondary study to students who complete a rigorous high school curriculum, earn at least a 24 ACT score, and maintain their grades and course load through college.

The scholarship is open to all qualifying students who attend regionally accredited public, private, and technical institutions in South Dakota.

“We are at a critical juncture in the Opportunity Scholarship program, however,” Warner noted. “The full value of this scholarship, \$5,000, has not been adjusted since its inception. We are at a point where policymakers will likely need to consider the scholarship’s future buying power and whether it offers the same level of incentive to students and parents,” he said. The value of the program has been significantly reduced when considering both inflation and tuition and fee increases since its inception in 2004.

A report to be presented next week to the Board of Regents documents 8,577 South Dakota high school graduates have established initial scholarship eligibility since the program started. There has been a 48 percent increase in enrollments over the past eight years, and the largest number of recipients enrolled during the most recent fall 2011 semester.

South Dakota State University enrolls the most Opportunity Scholars at 40 percent, followed by The University of South Dakota, South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, Augustana College, Black Hills State University, and Northern State University. Altogether, those six schools accounted for more than 87 percent of all recipients.

Scholarship – 2

Engineering is the most common major sought by Opportunity Scholarship recipients, with just over 10 percent pursuing that field. Other popular disciplines are biological sciences, nursing, humanities, and business or business administration.

Since the scholarship program began, public university students needing math remediation has dropped by 5 percent and English remediation declined by 3.8 percent. The number of South Dakota school districts reporting no students who require remediation support has also increased, from 12 percent to 15 percent, since 2003.

Prior to the scholarship, 22 percent of South Dakota high school graduates received a 24 or higher on the ACT college entrance exam. That percentage inched up to 23 percent in the first year the scholarship was offered. Last year, the state reported a marked increase to 28 percent of students earning a 24 or higher on the ACT. Before the scholarship was offered, about 80 percent of high-achieving college students were retained into their fourth year of study in South Dakota, but that percentage has grown to 88 percent of the Opportunity Scholars.

A survey of Opportunity Scholarship graduates also shows many of these students remain in South Dakota to work or pursue further graduate study. The survey is conducted each spring; last spring's data indicated 55 percent of the respondents had already secured employment or been accepted into graduate study, with 68 percent of that sub-set of students choosing to remain in South Dakota.

-30-

On the Net:

South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship 2012 Annual Report:

<http://sdos.sdbor.edu/pubreports/documents/10-OpportunityScholarshipAnnualReport-2012.pdf>