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Idaho's Opportunity Scholarship for Adult Learners; a Ticket to Success

By Debbie Critchfield, vice-president, Idaho State Board of Education

Amanda Salama can't wait for January. That is when the 30-year old Treasure Valley resident will resume her education at the College of Western Idaho. Idaho's Opportunity Scholarship for Adult Learners is making her return to the classroom possible. "A lot of the scholarships out there are for younger people and I was really happy to find one for me," she said. "I've been in the workforce a long time without having a degree, working customer service, sales and waiting tables. I just want to do something that is more rewarding and maybe eventually have my own business."

Ms. Salama is the type of Idahoan that legislators and Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter had in mind when they passed and signed legislation earlier this year creating the Adult Learner scholarship. "I congratulate Amanda for taking advantage of this new program that promises long-term rewards for working adults with some college education but no degree or certificate," said Governor Otter. "We know there are thousands of Idahoans just like Amanda who started college but ended up side-tracked. The Opportunity Scholarship for Adult Learners gives those folks some support to finish their education, improve their workforce skills and help grow our economy!"

Since the law took effect July 1, the State Board of Education had just 40 days to promote the scholarship, accept applications and vet candidates before the fall

semester began. Of the 116 applicants, 28 met the criteria and received the scholarship this fall. “I think we did rather well, considering the short window of time we had,” State Board President Dr. Linda Clark said. “We were able to get 28 recipients who had not only decided to return to college, but had heard about the Opportunity Scholarship for Adults Learners, and had the time to apply and get prepared before fall classes started.”

To date, 108 adult learners have applied for the scholarship for the spring semester, which provides up to \$3,500 per year for returning students meeting the following criteria:

- Minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) of 2.7
- Students must have “stopped out” for two years or more
- Students must show progress in order to maintain eligibility

Students can enroll in academic or career technical programs either fulltime or part-time (award is prorated based on number of credits in which they are enrolled) and they can apply up to three weeks prior to the start of the semester.

The State Board is teaming with the Idaho Workforce Development Council to get the word out about the Opportunity Scholarship for Adult Learners, establishing a website and promoting the scholarship via social media. “Education and workforce development must work in tandem in order to solve Idaho’s workforce demands,” Idaho Workforce Development Council Executive Director Wendi Secrist said. “This project is one way we can support connecting Idahoans with training for in-demand careers.”

Earlier this month, [Lumina Foundation](#) awarded the State Board a \$400,000 grant to be used to continue to raise awareness about the Adult Learners scholarship. Idaho will also use Lumina funds to create policies ensuring veterans get college credit for experienced gained while in the military and to work with community libraries in 10 underserved counties to provide higher education resources including student advising.

“We are getting the right pieces and partnerships in place to help make sure our population of working adults hears about the Opportunity Scholarship for Adult Learners, and takes advantage of it,” Clark said. “We hope hundreds of Idahoans recognize they can improve their career prospects and their lives by using the scholarship to go back to school and earn that certificate or degree.”

That is exactly what Amanda Salama plans to do first in CWI's media arts program and possibly enrolling in a four year institution pursuing a bachelors' degree. "It has been three years since I last attended college and there are a lot of people like me that want to go back to school and want that chance to do something good with their lives. I'm really grateful for the Adult Learners scholarship and I'm so happy."

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