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Getting the Word out about Idaho's Adult Learner Scholarship

By Matt Freeman, Executive Director, Idaho State Board of Education

More than a year has passed since the Opportunity Scholarship for Adult Learners went into effect. To date, just over 600 Idahoans have applied for the scholarship. "I'd like to see double that number a year from now," said Byron Yankey, the State Board's college and career advising program manager.

Yankey hopes to accomplish that with outreach materials aimed at adult learners interested in returning to college to finish work on a degree or a career technical certificate. "Our scholarship program manager and I have visited college and university campuses over the summer and have taken posters, postcards and other materials to them for use on and off campus," Yankey said. "We're also planning to distribute these materials to various businesses and companies to post in breakrooms and for potential use as part of their human resources packages."

Yankey worked with the Idaho Workforce Development Council to create the outreach tools, which are already in circulation at various institution-sponsored events. "For example, this summer Lewis-Clark State College used some of these materials at nearly a half-dozen community events in the Lewiston area and in Boise to help us promote the Adult Opportunity Scholarship," Yankey said.

The tools are designed to encourage people to visit OpportunityIdaho.com to learn about the scholarship and eligibility requirements. Last month, the State Board of

Education approved new rules intended to increase the number of Idahoans eligible to apply.

The rules include:

- Adult Learners with a 2.5 GPA can apply for the scholarship and renew it as long as they maintain a minimum 2.7 GPA after returning to school.
- Adult Learners must have “stopped out” of college or career technical school for two years or more but an exception is made for students who enrolled in a maximum of two courses during that time.
- Directs institutions to work with Adult Learner scholarship recipients to determine if they can receive college credits for prior learning gained during military training or industry.
- Students must show progress to degree in order to maintain eligibility.

The Opportunity Scholarship for Adult Learners provides up to \$3,500 per year for returning students to enroll in a variety of postsecondary programs and they can apply up to three weeks prior to the semester.

“The Workforce Development Council supports outreach for the Adult Opportunity Scholarship because we desperately need Idahoans to pursue credentials that will lead to in-demand careers to enhance their quality of life, support employer needs, and grow our economy,” said Wendi Secrist, the Council’s executive director.

Over the past year, Yankey has attended career fairs around the state where he discussed both the Opportunity Scholarship for recent high school graduates, and the Adult Learner version for parents. He’s noticed that it isn’t just young adults who are showing interest in returning to school. “Folks in their late 30’s and 40’s are visiting with us because they view the Adult Learners scholarship as a mid-career opportunity,” Yankey said. “Moving forward, we need to continue to look for ways to appeal to this segment of adult learners because the challenge for them personally is not the interest to return to college, it is finding and committing the time to actually do it.”

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