



For Immediate Release

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Contact: Mike Keckler
208-332-1591 (office)
208-866-5734 (cell)
Mike.Keckler@osbe.idaho.gov

Idaho's College Going Rates May be Showing Signs of Improvement

By Dr. Linda Clark, President, Idaho State Board of Education

Early figures this fall from Idaho's colleges and universities show an uptick in the number of resident students enrolling this year, which may indicate that a long downward trend in college going on rates may finally be reversing. While it is way too early to declare victory, this is certainly positive news.

The college going rate is a measure of high school students who enroll in college academic or career-technical programs immediately after graduating from high school, and high school graduates who wait a few years before resuming their education.

Three years ago, the pandemic exacerbated an enrollment decline in Idaho that actually started before anyone had heard of COVID-19.

State Board of Education researchers have been looking closely at this trend, particularly the gap we see in college going rates between females and males - a gap that exists for all students including those most likely to succeed in college.

Fall Immediate College Going Rate

Overall, Idaho's immediate college going rate (students who enrolled and attend college in the fall immediately after graduating from high school) for 2022 was just 42 percent – down nine percentage points from 51 percent for 2017 graduates.

Three Year College Going Rate

The college going rate dramatically improves when applied to students who enroll within three years of graduating from high school, but there is still a decline when compared to past years. In 2017, 64 percent of graduates enrolled in a postsecondary program within 3-years of graduating high school. In the 2019 academic year, the last year in which 3-year college going rates are available, the rate was down five percentage points to 59 percent.

The Gender Gap

More females than males have been enrolling in college for many years. In 2021, 52 percent of female high school graduates enrolled and attended college in the fall after graduating compared to 36 percent of males, a 16-percentage point difference.

The gender gap narrows within three years. The fall immediate college going gender gap for 2019 graduates was 18 percentage points while the three year gender gap for the same students was 13 percent – still a sizable gap.

Gender Gap Persists with High-Achieving Students

The gender gap also exists for high-achieving students.

For the 2021 graduating class, more than two-thirds of females who scored proficient on the Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) enrolled in college that fall (68 percent) while barely half (51 percent) of their male counterparts who also scored proficient went immediately to college; a 17-percentage point difference.

History shows that the gap also narrows within three years for these students. For the 2019 graduating class, the gender gap in college going between those proficient was 21 percentage points for students who immediately enrolled but only 12 percentage points for students who enrolled within three years.

My fellow State Board members and I are particularly concerned about the gender gap overall and how it affects higher-achieving students.

Potential Causes for the College Going Rate Drop

Prior to COVID, Idaho had one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country, and that low unemployment rate returned after the pandemic. Many students, particularly males, may have chosen to go to work in high-paying jobs such as construction or attend a trade school, which is not captured in the college going rate.

We do know that many young Idahoans join the military or serve religious missions after high school although specific data are not available. Some of these high school graduates and others who enter college after a gap are included in the three year college going rate, which accounts for the increase between the fall immediate and the three year college going rates. Even with these additional students, the college going rate is still too low.

Idaho LAUNCH

Beginning this year, Idaho LAUNCH grants will be available to 2024 graduating high school seniors. It pays for 80 percent of the cost of an education or training program that leads to an in-demand career up to \$8,000

High school seniors must apply for [Idaho LAUNCH](#) grants during their senior year. If they meet certain criteria, they can request an extension to use their LAUNCH grant, but they need to apply no later than April 15, 2024. LAUNCH recipients can request an extension for one of five reasons; religious service, military service, structured volunteer service (specific to AmeriCorps and the Peace Corps), medical, or program availability (the student would be placed on a wait list for a program placement spot to become available). We also hope LAUNCH will help us better track additional educational pathways of students who choose to attend trade schools and serve in apprenticeships.

For students attending or planning to attend one of Idaho's four-year institutions, the [Idaho Opportunity Scholarship](#) makes \$3,500 per year available and is renewable for up to four years.

Idaho needs higher numbers of well-trained individuals to meet current and future workforce needs in high-demand fields in the trades, in career-technical and academic professions. Governor Little and the Legislature have made an enhanced commitment to ensure students can “go on” for additional learning and training opportunities and not be hampered by a lack of resources. GO ON, Idaho students!