

April 12, 2021

House Education Committee

Alaska Performance Scholarship Program Review and Recommendations

Prepared for:



McKINLEY RESEARCH
GROUP, LLC

PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- Overview and Study Purpose
- APS Eligibility and Use Trends
- Survey and Interview Findings
- Literature Review
- Key Findings
- Recommendations
- Q&A



APS BACKGROUND

Approved in 2010 “... to provide scholarships for high school graduates who are Alaska residents to attend a qualified postsecondary institution in the state” (AS 14.43.810)

Goals:

- Drive increased K-12 rigor
- Keep high-achieving students in state

Separately established \$400 million Higher Education Investment Fund

Administered by Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education



APS OVERVIEW

Two award types

- Degree (academic)
- Certificate (career and technical education)

Three award levels

- Level 1: \$4,755/year
- Level 2: \$3,566/year
- Level 3: \$2,378/year

Three eligibility criteria

- Grades
- Standardized test score
- Coursework

Other considerations

- Students can receive award for 8 semesters
- Must be used within 6 years of graduation
- Continuing eligibility requirements apply

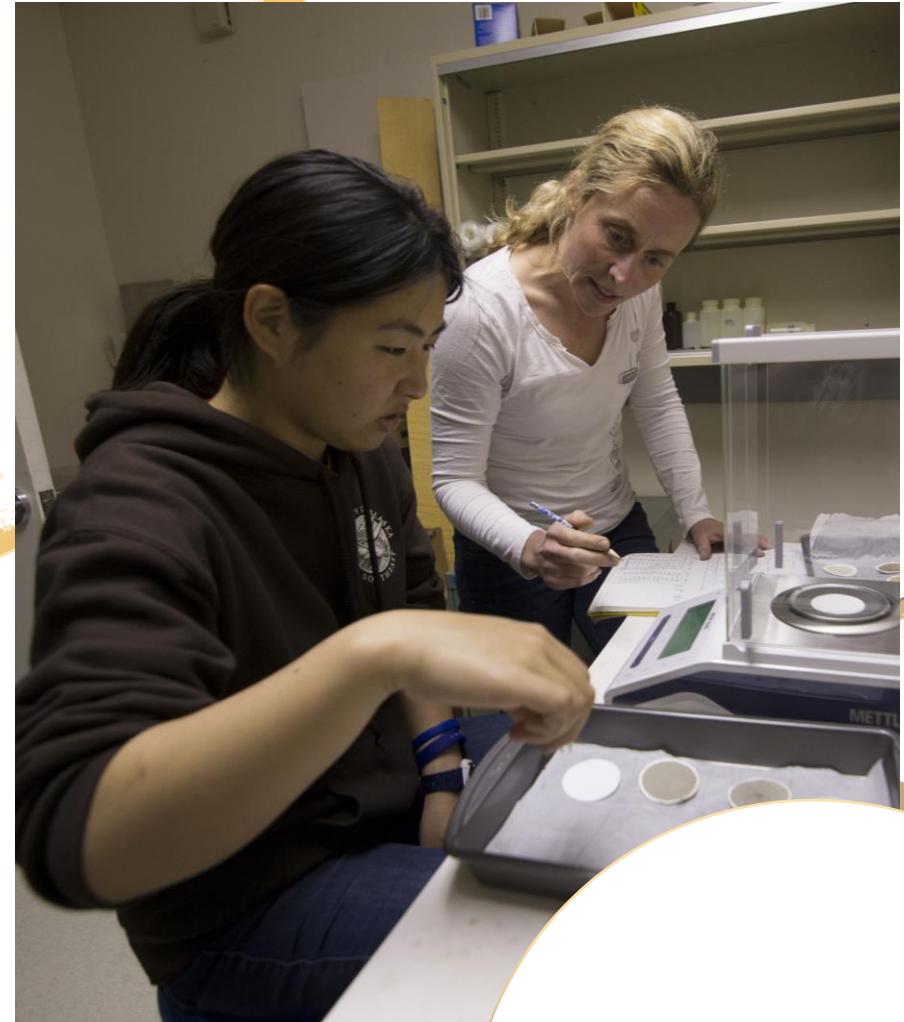
STUDY PURPOSE

- Annual awards are about **half what was anticipated** in dollars awarded and students served.*
- After peaking in 2016, overall **use has declined**.*
- Low use of the APS **means missed opportunities** for Alaskans and Alaska.

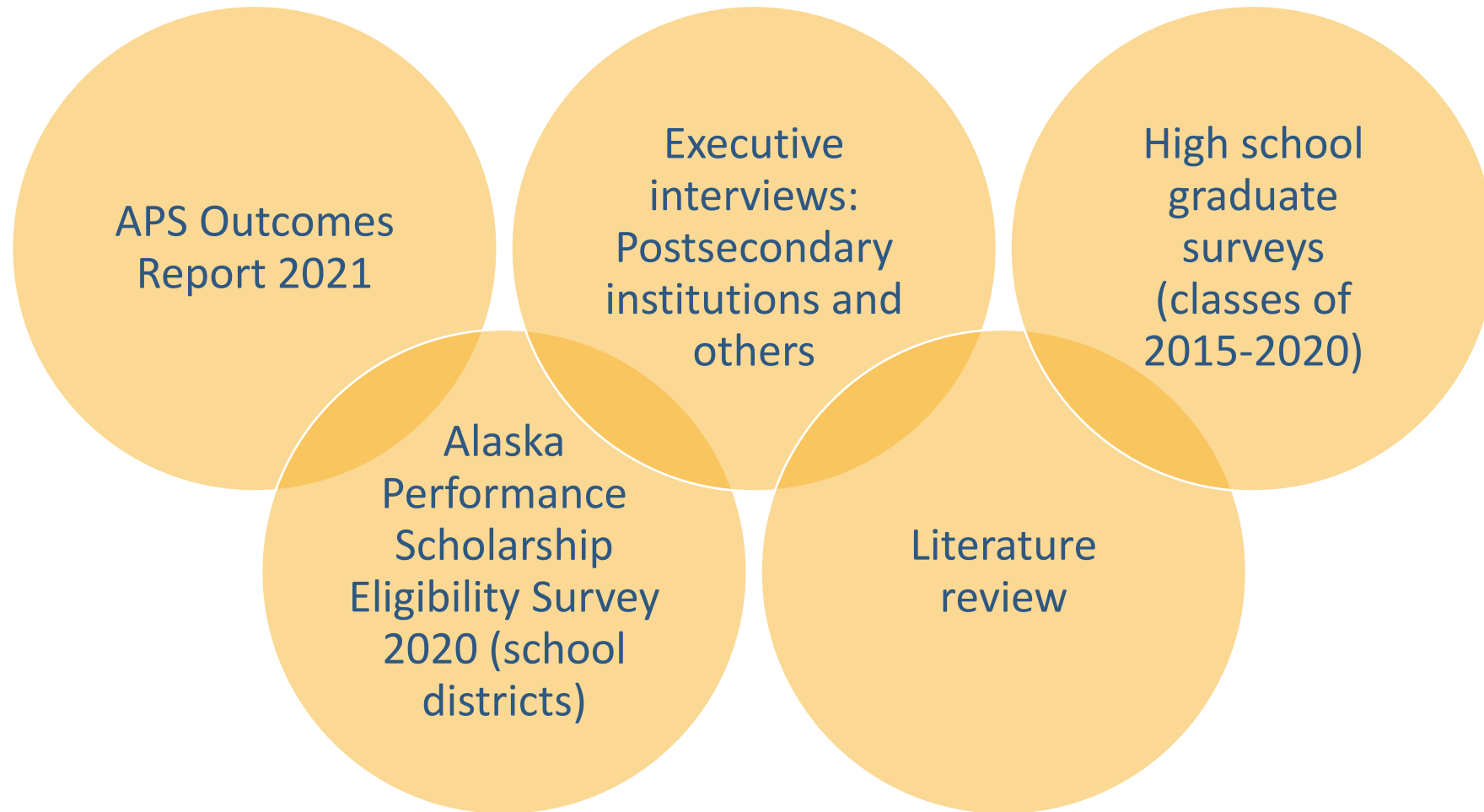
KEY QUESTIONS:

- Why are APS eligibility and use low and falling?
- What changes would improve the program?

*2020 is an outlier.



METHODOLOGY: Review and Synthesis of Multiple Sources

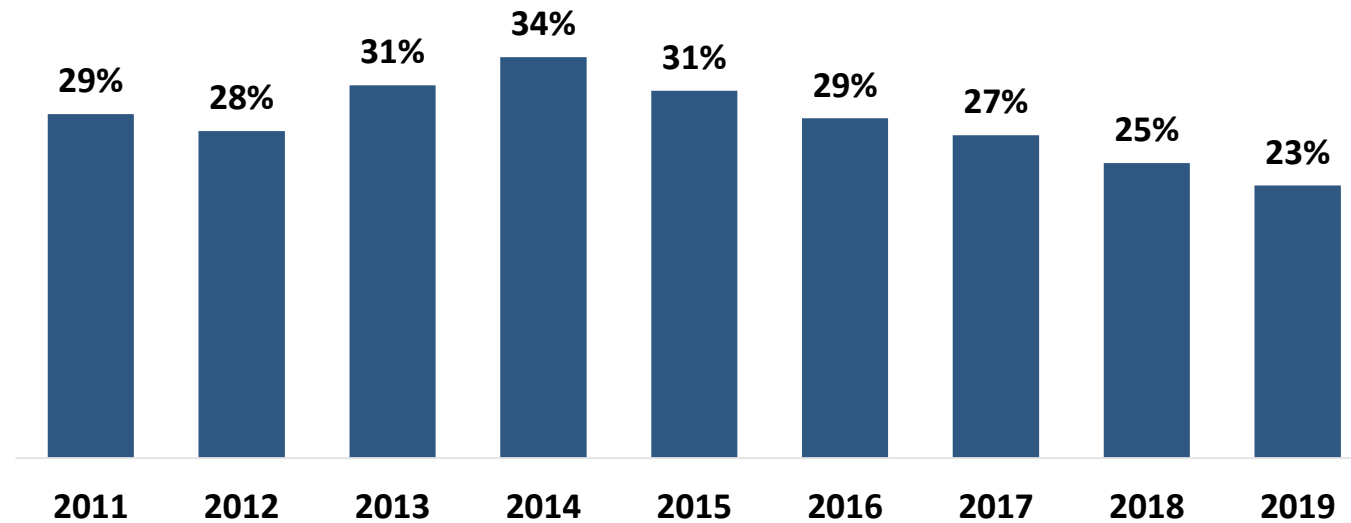


APS ELIGIBILITY (set in statute)

| | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 |
|--|--|-------------------------------|---|
| Award Amount | Up to \$4,755 per year | Up to \$3,566 per year | Up to \$2,378 per year |
| 1. Required GPA | 3.5 or greater | 3.0 or greater | 2.5 or greater |
| 2. Required Testing | | | |
| ACT/SAT (for degree or certificate) | ACT 25/SAT 1210 | ACT 23/SAT 1130 | ACT 21/SAT 1060 |
| WorkKeys (for certificate only) | Combination score of 13 or higher with no score below 4 is required in Applied Math, Locating Information, and Reading for Information *CTE award level determined by GPA | | |
| 3. Required High School Curriculum | Math & Science Science 4 Credits Math 4 Credits Social Studies 4 Credits Language Arts 4 Credits | OR | Social Studies & Language Arts Science 3 Credits Math 3 Credits Social Studies 4 Credits Language Arts 4 Credits World Language 2 Credits |

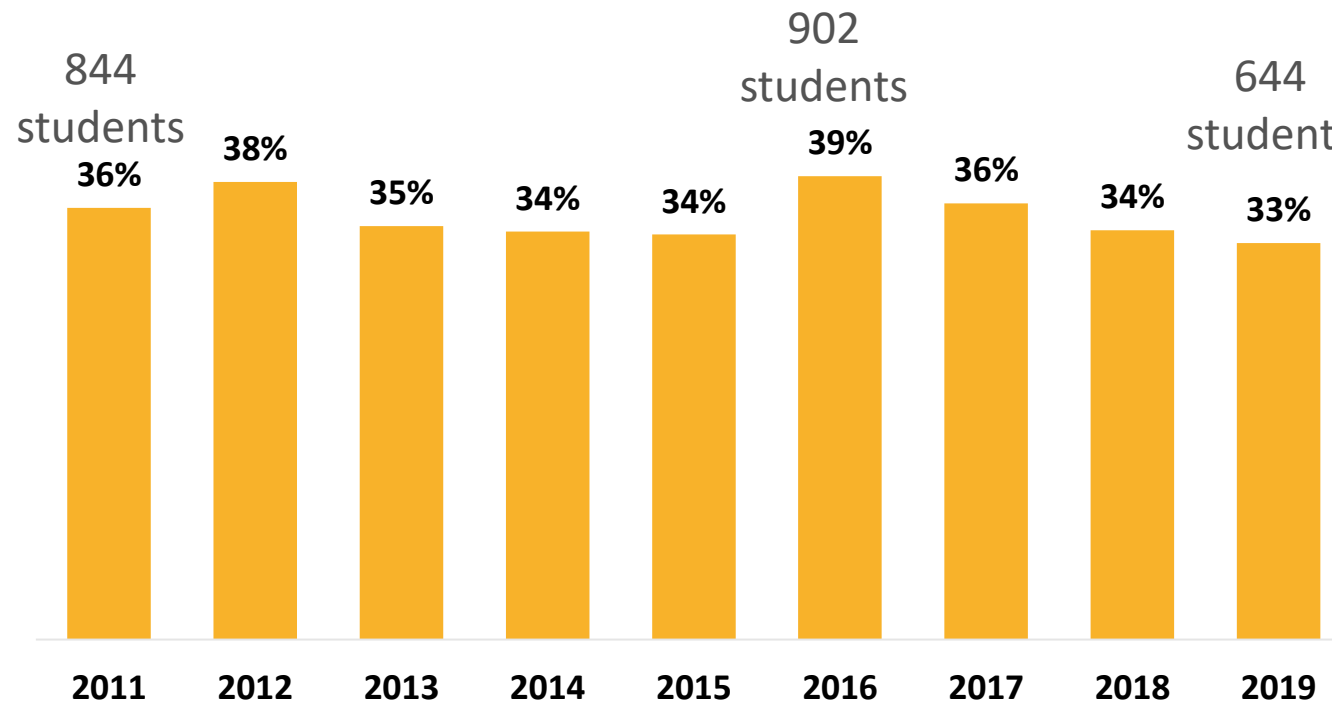
APS ELIGIBILITY: 2011-2019

Public High School Graduates Eligible for APS



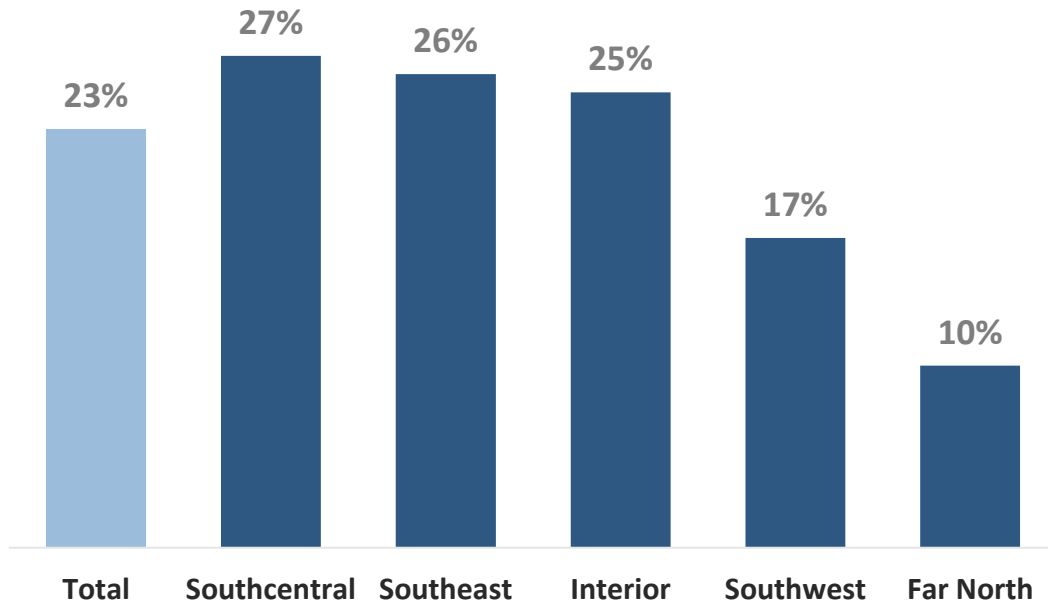
APS USE: 2011-2019

Eligible Students Using APS Fall Following Graduation

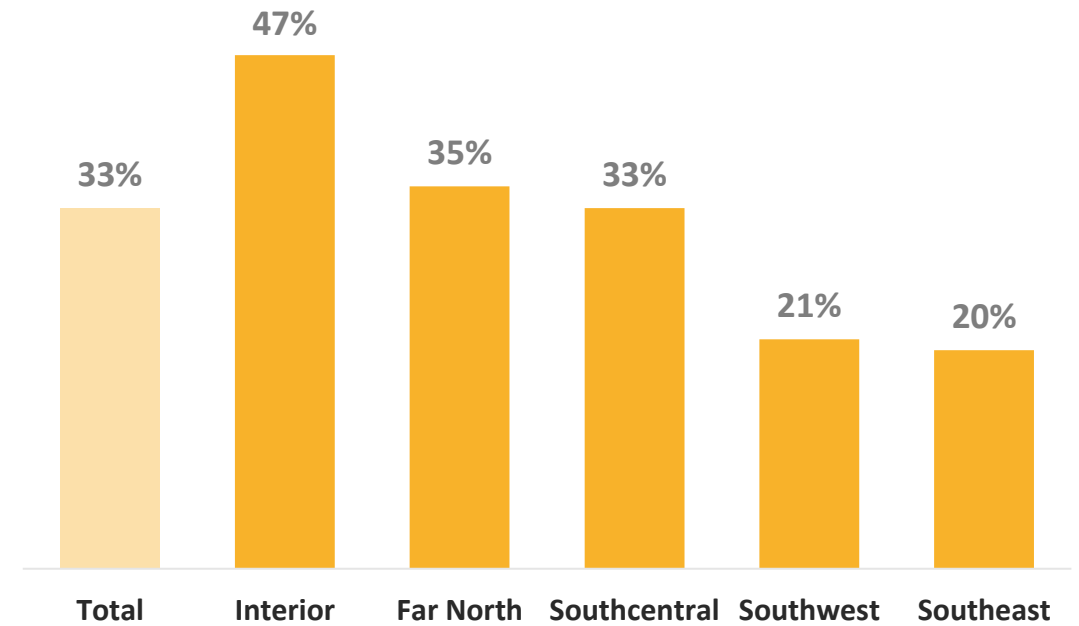


APS ELIGIBILITY AND USE BY REGION: 2019

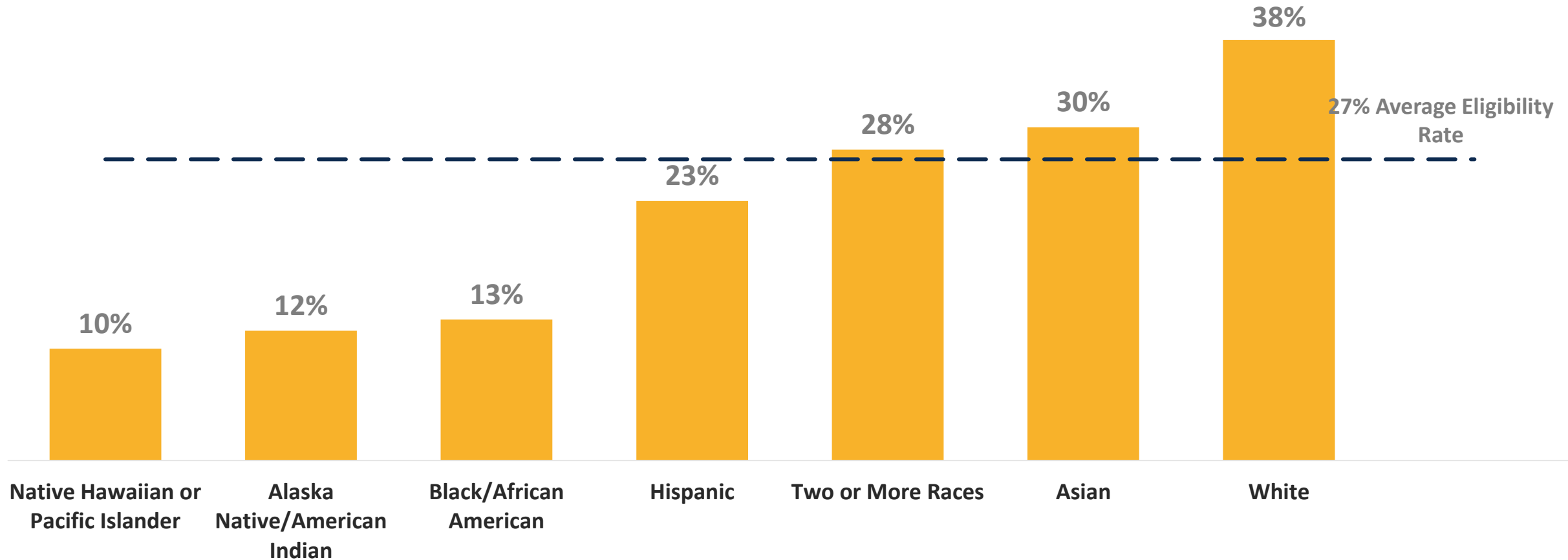
% of Public School Students Eligible for APS



% of Eligible Students Using APS Fall Following Graduation

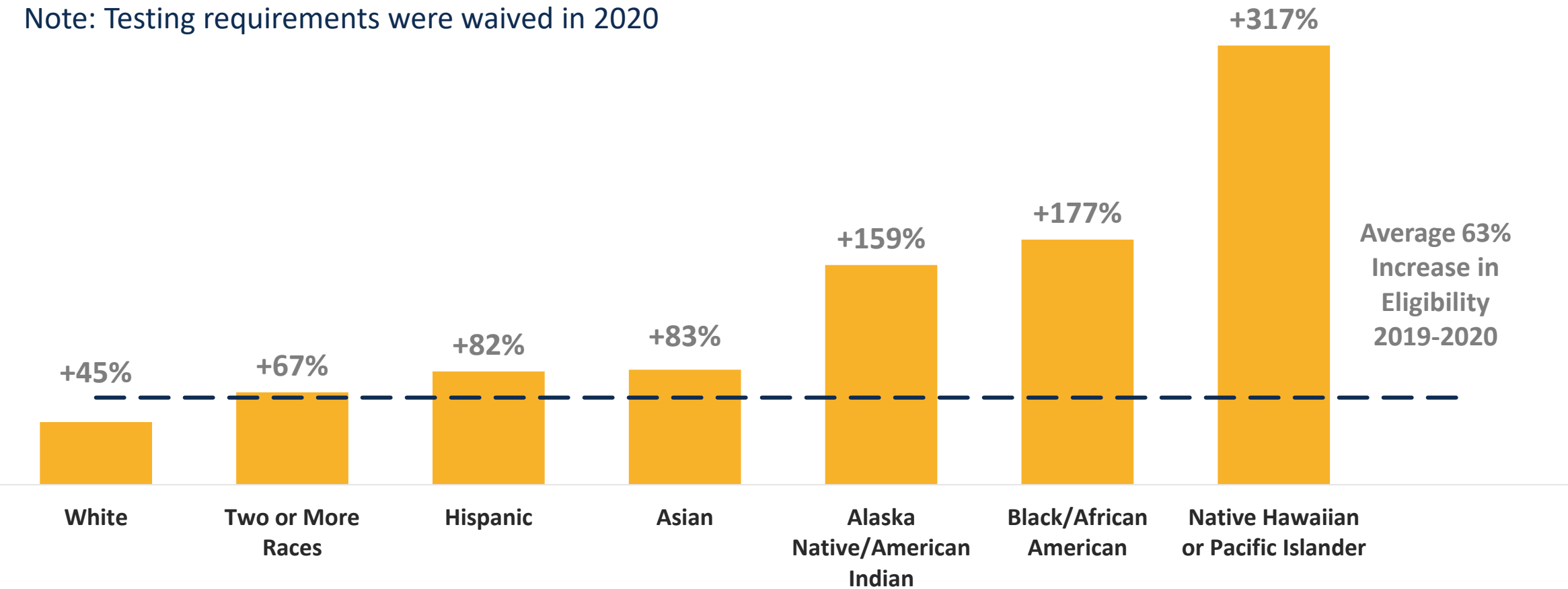


APS ELIGIBILITY BY RACE/ETHNICITY: AVERAGE 2015-2019



INCREASE IN APS ELIGIBILITY BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2019-2020

Note: Testing requirements were waived in 2020



DISTRICT SURVEY (PRINCIPALS/COUNSELORS)

Eligibility: Test scores are the top barrier to eligibility, followed by curriculum requirements

Use: Funding instability, UA instability are top student concerns

“We have many students who are college-bound and who do very well, but the minimum **test scores for some can prevent ELL students in particular from qualifying.**”

“With the **cuts in funding this year to UA**, I had a couple of students decide to go out of state.”

“As funding decreases, so do these opportunities ... Five years ago we had three counselors and they made regular in-person visits to all our schools, but now **we only have one counselor for the entire district.**”

“Students do not meet the ACT scores. **This is the first standardized timed test that most of the students take.** There is very little test prep in the district.”

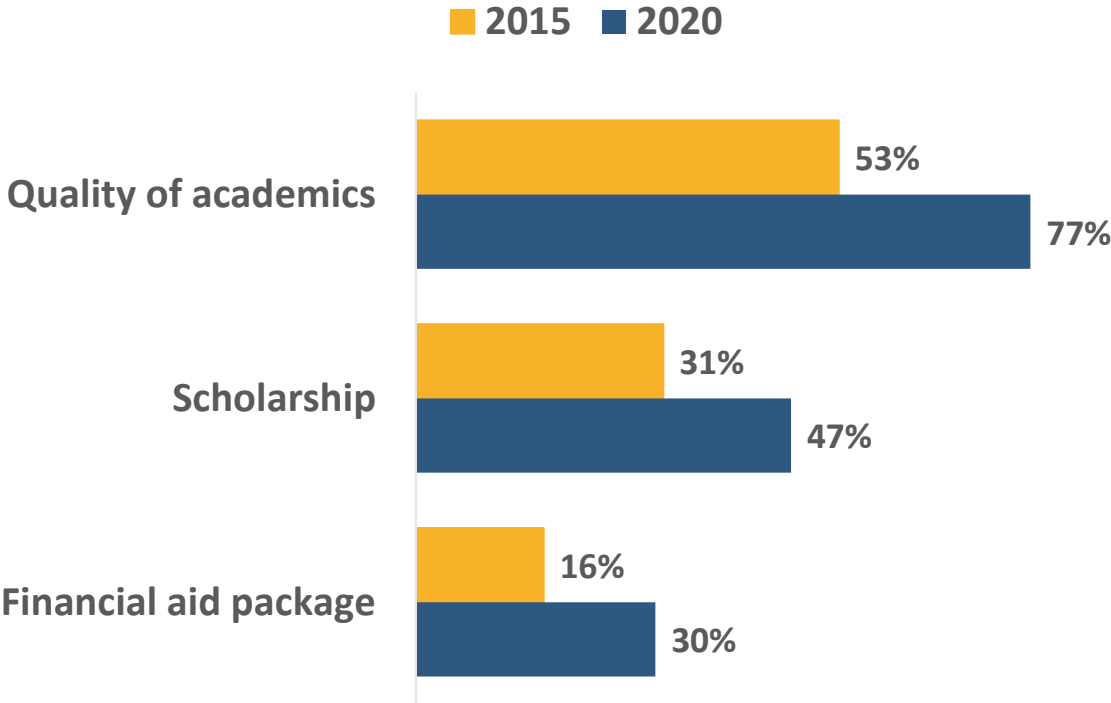
“APS requirements are just different enough from [our] graduation requirements and state requirements that **many students miss it by just a semester of one or the other.**”



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE SURVEY: APS-ELIGIBLE

Reasons for Attending Out-of-State: Changes in Selected Responses, 2015-2020

Base: APS-Eligible Graduates



A survey of APS-eligible high school graduates from the classes of 2015 to 2020 was conducted in fall 2020; 3,121 responded.

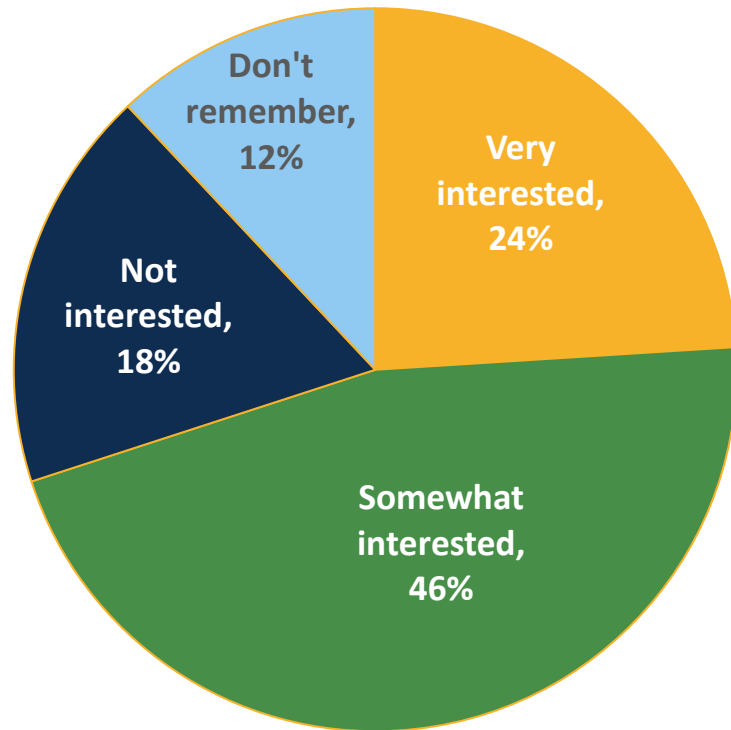
- Among graduates who enrolled out-of-state, the reasons for going out-of-state have recently shifted, reflecting a **decline in confidence in Alaska institutions** as well as **better financial options elsewhere**.



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE SURVEY: APS-INELIGIBLE

Interest in Qualifying for APS

Among APS-Ineligible Graduates aware of APS



A survey of APS-ineligible high school graduates from the classes of 2015 to 2020 was conducted in fall 2020; 2,995 responded.

- Among graduates aware of APS, **70% were at least somewhat interested** in qualifying for APS, suggesting significant unmet demand.
- Among those interested in APS, **the number one reason for not qualifying was test scores (31%)**.



POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION FINDINGS

UA reports APS students are more successful than their peers in postsecondary education

➤ Higher readiness, persistence, and completion rates

Factors contributing to decline in APS eligibility and use:

- Complexity and burden of eligibility and program design
- Timing of award notifications
- Declining real value of awards
- Continuing eligibility requirements
- Lack of flexibility between CTE and academic awards
- Unequal access
- External factors

“Small burdens in trying to gain eligibility for APS (lack of required curriculum, no free testing, etc.) build to a point at which students find it difficult to overcome and likely give up trying.”

“As far as competitiveness goes, the APS doesn’t benefit Alaska schools because **students have already made their decisions** when the awards come out.”

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grades are more predictive than ACT/SAT.

- U Chicago: GPA 5x better predictor of college success than ACT.
- U California system: GPA better predictor of college success than tests.

SAT/ACT tests have inequitable impacts and serve as barriers to underrepresented groups.

- Brookings Institution: SAT scores highly correlated with family income.
- National College Access Network (NCAN): Removing test requirements boosts diversity in higher ed without reducing student quality or success.

The role of the SAT/ACT is declining in higher education admissions and financial aid decisions.

- NCAN: More than 300 schools went test-optional since 2005.
- COVID is accelerating this trend.



KEY FINDINGS: APS ELIGIBILITY



- There is a high level of interest in the APS among ineligible students – this indicates unmet need.
- Standardized test requirements are the top barrier to APS eligibility.
- Eligibility fell after 2016 when the state stopped requiring and paying for all students to take standardized testing.
- The program’s complexity serves as a barrier to eligibility.
- The distinction between academic and CTE awards limits some students’ aspirations.
- There are significant disparities in eligibility by race/ethnicity, and by region.
- Evidence increasingly shows that the SAT/ACT is less predictive of student success than other factors.

KEY FINDINGS: APS USE

- Evidence suggests the APS is declining in competitiveness compared to other financial aid packages.
- Reduced appeal of in-state institutions is a contributor to declining interest in the APS.
- The late timing of APS award notifications means it is not a factor in many students' postsecondary decisions.
- Continuing eligibility requirements are out of step with student needs and with other scholarship requirements.



RECOMMENDATIONS: BROAD PRINCIPLES

The Education Commission of the States recommends states redesigning financial aid programs ensure programs are:

- **student-centered**
- **goal-driven and data-informed**
- **timely and flexible**
- **broadly inclusive**



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Simplify program eligibility.

- Eliminate distinction between academic and CTE awards.
- Offer alternative pathways to demonstrate academic rigor.
- Use 3 years of high school for eligibility determinations.
- Consider round numbers for award levels.

2. Simplify and increase flexibility of awards.

- Revise continuing eligibility requirements to better match student needs.
- Consider aligning with Satisfactory Academic Progress or University Scholars standards.
- Extend 6-year window for APS use.



RECOMMENDATIONS



3. Increase access and commit to equity.

- Eliminate testing requirement. *This also eliminates distinction between CTE and academic tracks.*
- If testing continues to be required...
 - require and pay for all students to take test
 - consider replacing statutory cut scores with regulatory criteria (technical)
- Ensure all students get early and ongoing counseling to meet requirements.
- Include subgroup analysis in annual outcomes reports.

4. The dollar values of APS awards will need to be amended.

- Consider introducing statutory flexibility or a trigger mechanism.



McKinley Research Group, LLC is a team of respected professionals with nearly 50 years experience providing research, consulting, and advisory services to clients seeking answers to questions and solutions to organizational complexities.

Except for the photo above, all photos in this presentation are © University of Alaska Southeast, used by permission.

Questions?

Thank you!



Formerly McDowell Group