

April 12, 2021

House Education Committee

# Alaska Performance Scholarship Program Review and Recommendations

Prepared for:



# 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

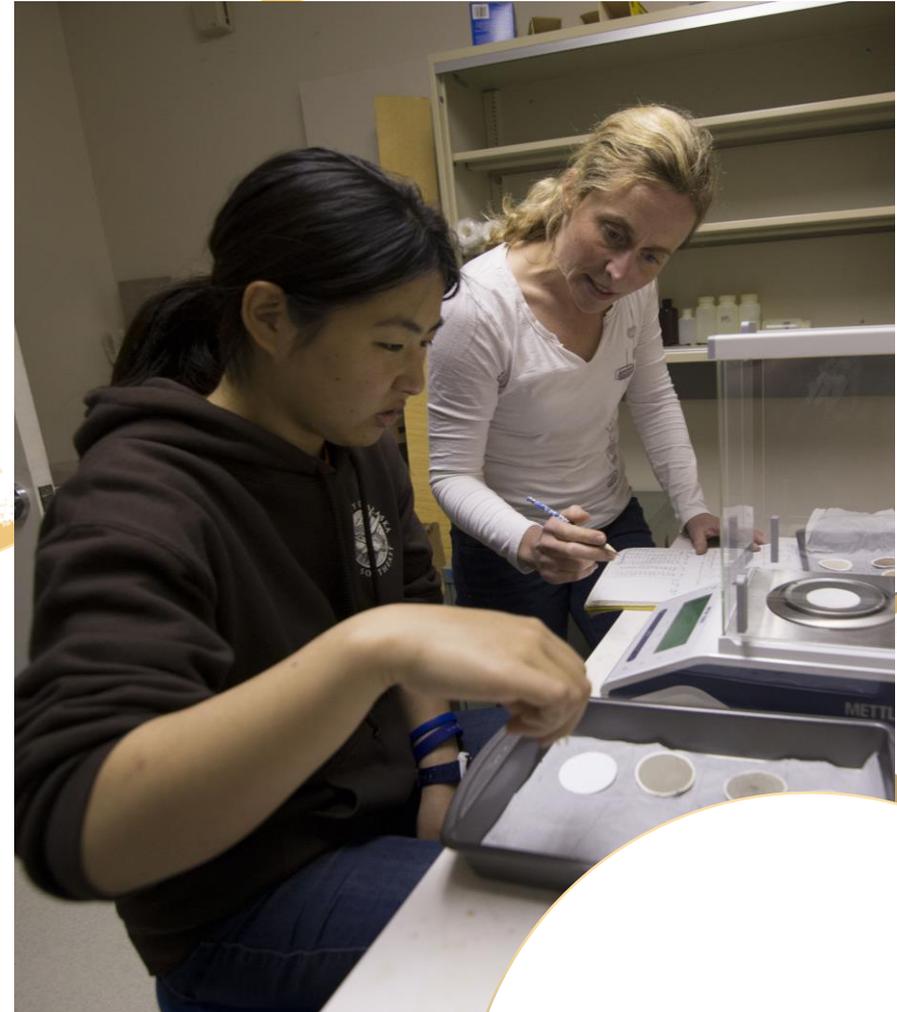
# STUDY PURPOSE

- 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.

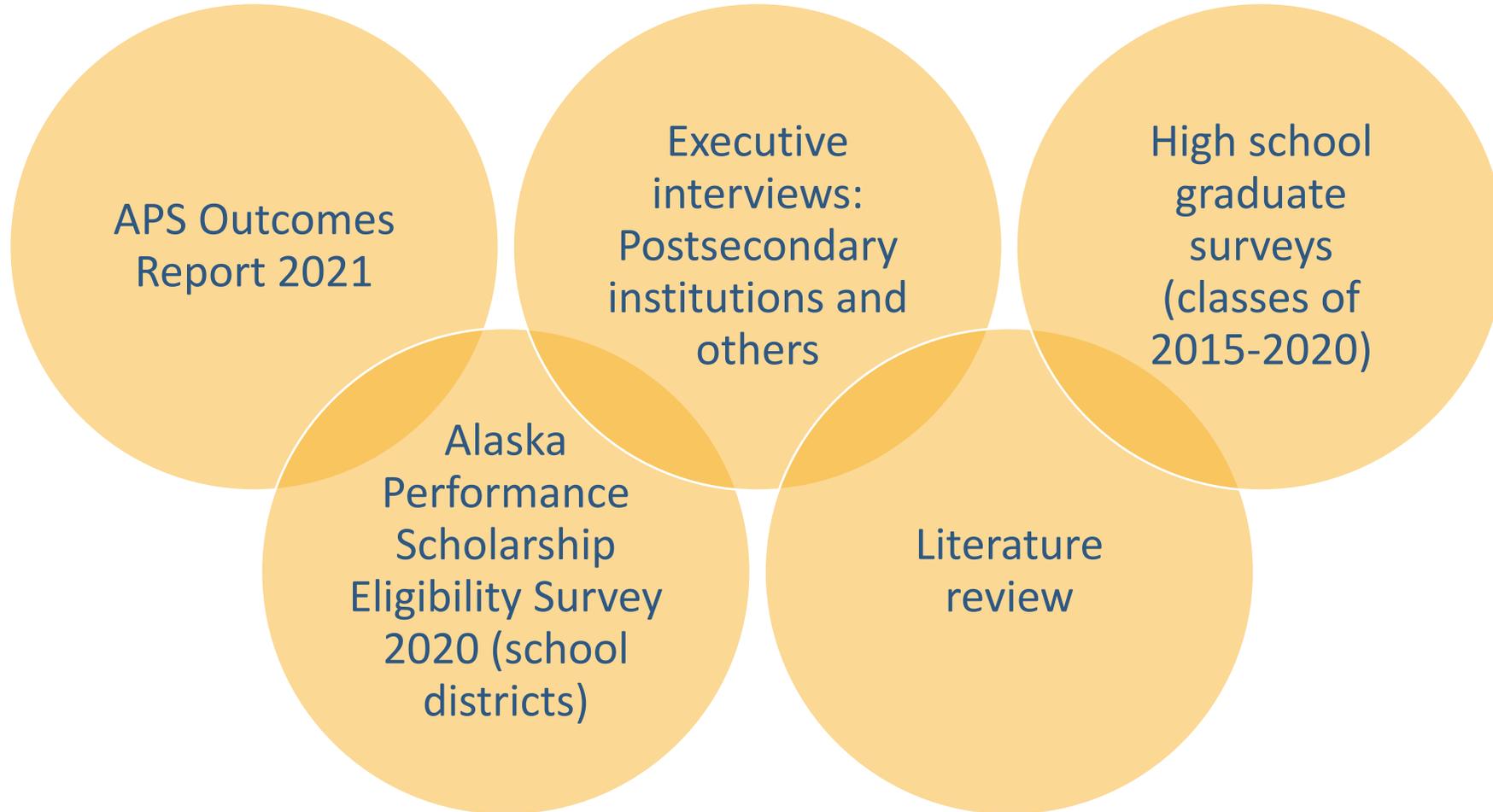
## KEY QUESTIONS:

- 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

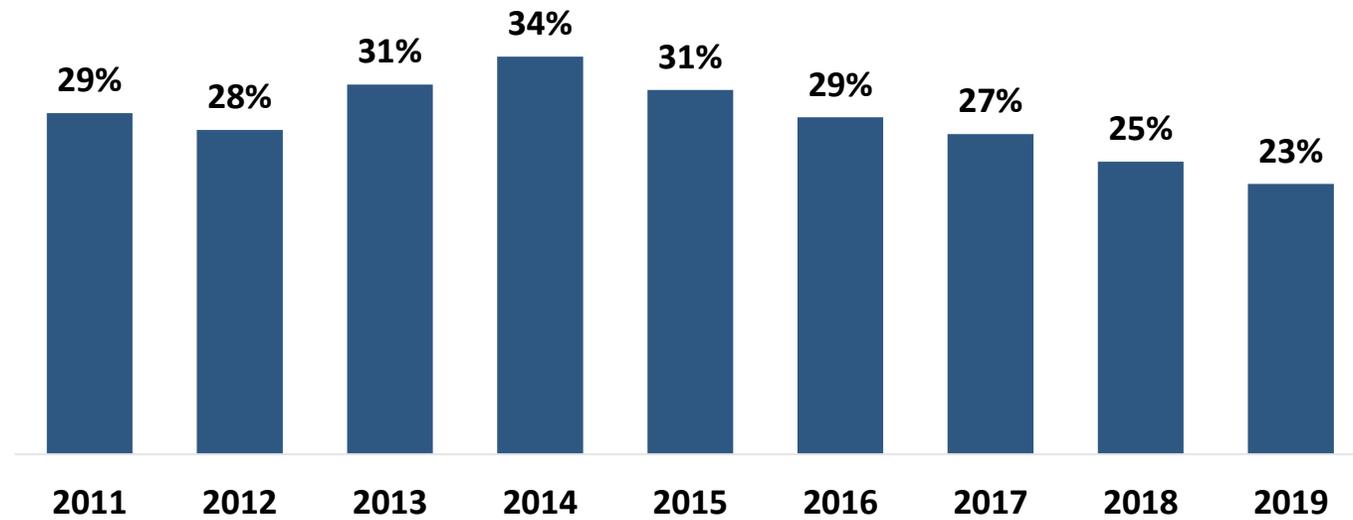


# APS ELIGIBILITY (set in statute)

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
<b>Award Amount</b>	Up to <b>\$4,755</b> per year	Up to <b>\$3,566</b> per year	Up to <b>\$2,378</b> per year
<b>1. Required GPA</b>	<b>3.5</b> or greater	<b>3.0</b> or greater	<b>2.5</b> or greater
<b>2. Required Testing</b>			
<b>ACT/SAT (for degree or certificate)</b>	ACT 25/SAT 1210	ACT 23/SAT 1130	ACT 21/SAT 1060
<b>WorkKeys (for certificate only)</b>	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		
<b>3. Required High School Curriculum</b>	<b>Math &amp; Science</b> Science 4 Credits Math 4 Credits Social Studies 4 Credits Language Arts 4 Credits	OR	<b>Social Studies &amp; Language Arts</b> Science 3 Credits Math 3 Credits Social Studies 4 Credits Language Arts 4 Credits World Language 2 Credits

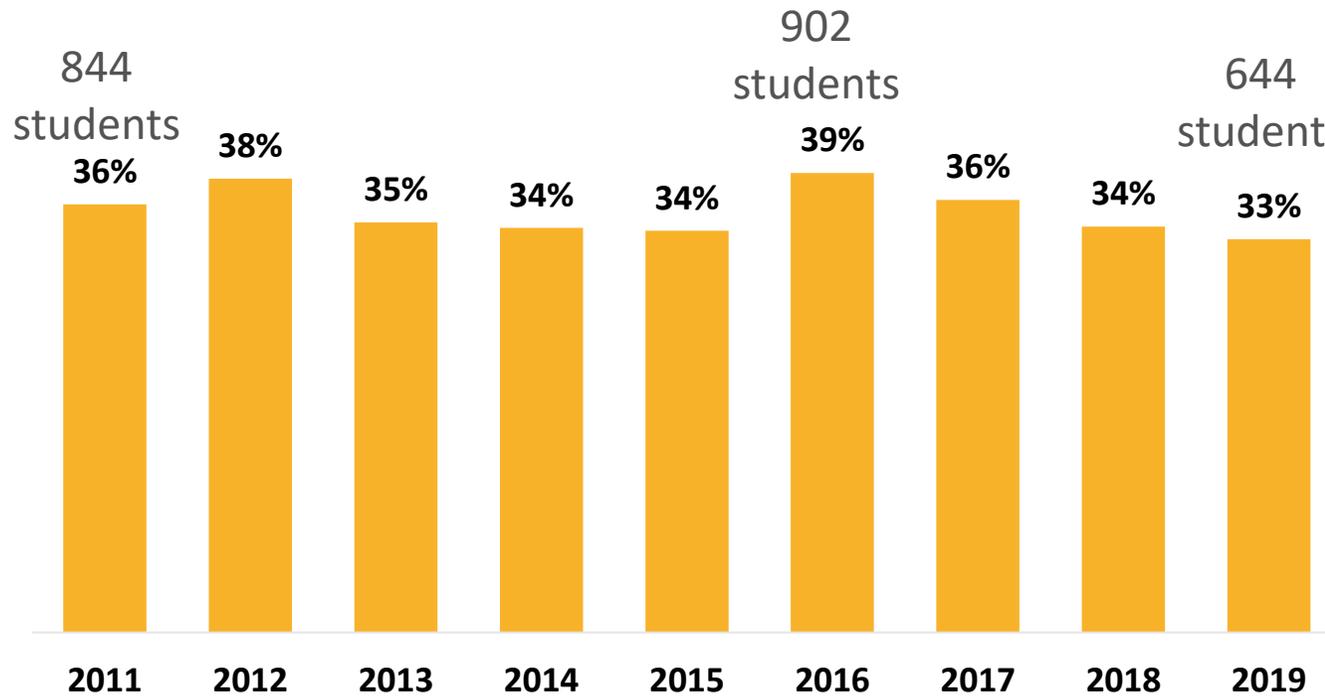
# APS ELIGIBILITY: 2011-2019

## Public High School Graduates Eligible for APS



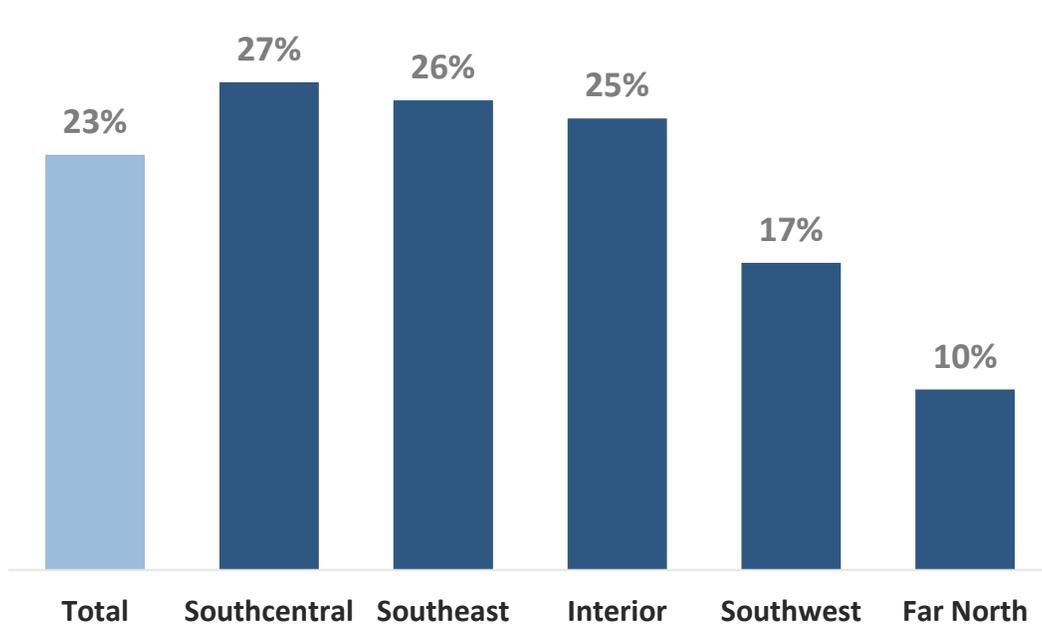
# APS USE: 2011-2019

## Eligible Students Using APS Fall Following Graduation

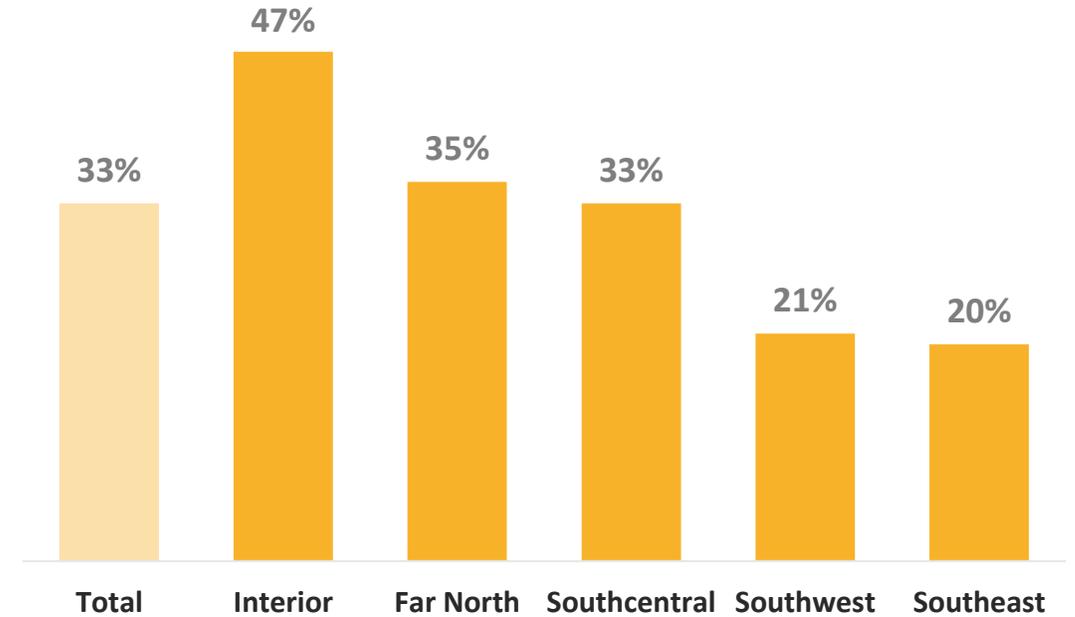


# APS ELIGIBILITY AND USE BY REGION: 2019

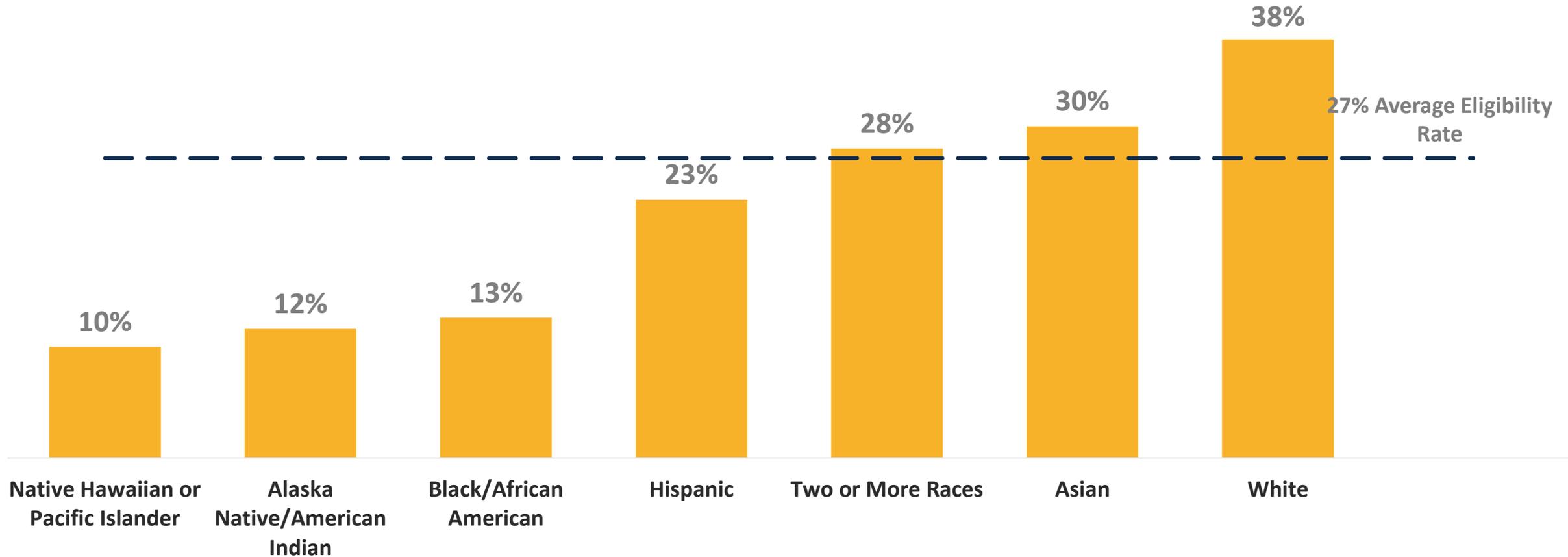
## % of Public School Students Eligible for APS



## % of Eligible Students Using APS Fall Following Graduation

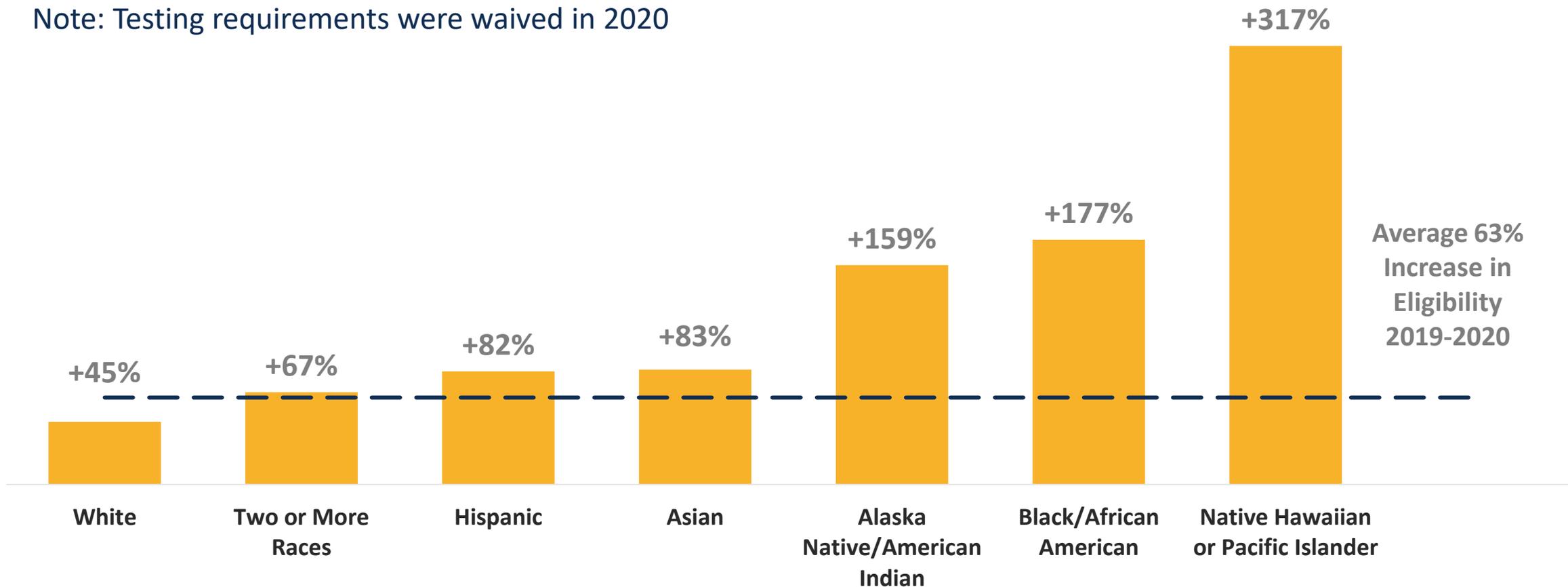


# APS ELIGIBILITY BY RACE/ETHNICITY: AVERAGE 2015-2019



# 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.”

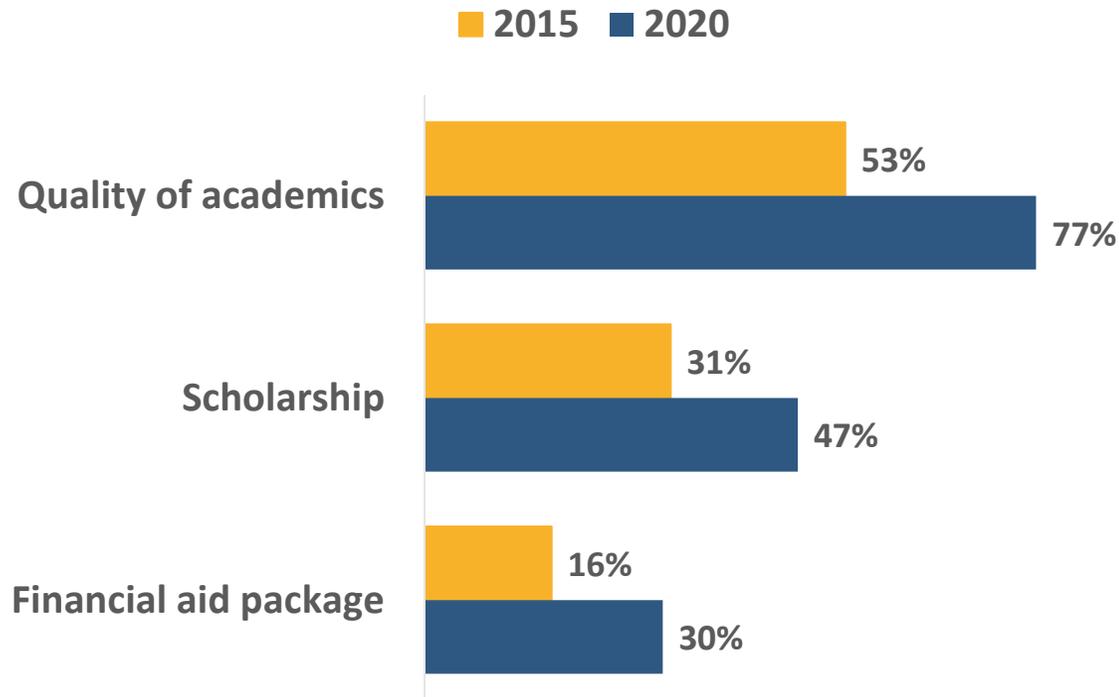
“APS requirements are just different enough from [our] graduation requirements and state requirements that **many students miss it by just a semester of one or the other.**”



# 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.

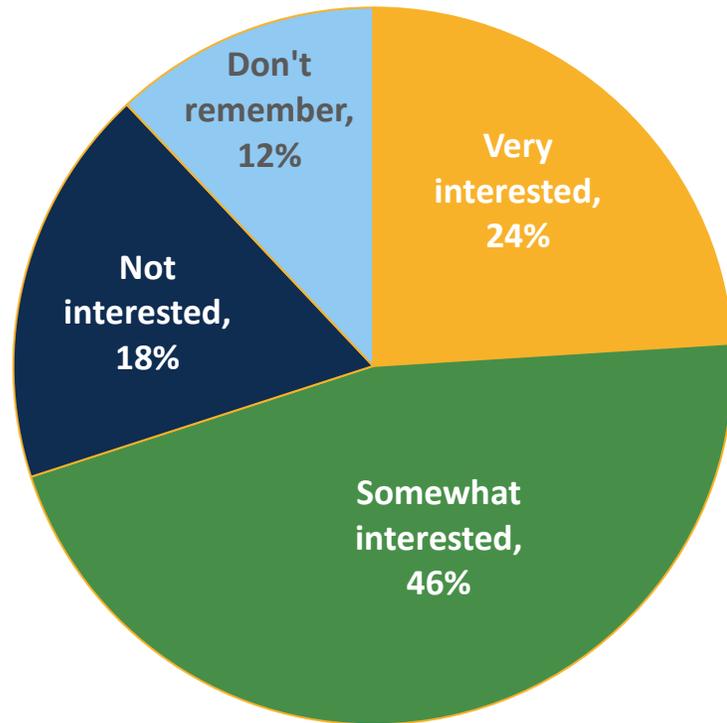
- Among graduates who enrolled out-of-state, the reasons for going out-of-state have recently shifted, reflecting a **decline in confidence in Alaska institutions** as well as **better financial options elsewhere**.



# 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.



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# Questions?

# Thank you!



*Formerly McDowell Group*