

Alaska State Senate

Senator Forrest Dunbar

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SPONSOR STATEMENT

SB 56: AK PERFORMANCE SCHOLARSHIP; ELIGIBILITY

Version S

SB 56: AK PERFORMANCE SCHOLARSHIP; ELIGIBILITY seeks to increase access to post-secondary education in Alaska by updating the Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS).

The APS is a merit-based scholarship for high-performing Alaskan students to use at post-secondary Alaskan institutions. Currently, students must graduate from an Alaskan high school with a minimum 2.5 grade point average (GPA), receive a minimum qualifying score on an approved college/career entrance exam, and take specific courses to qualify for the APS. Award amounts vary based on GPA and college/career entrance exam score.

In 2020, the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE) commissioned a study from the McDowell group to analyze APS use. Results showed that while APS has been instrumental in keeping young, talented Alaskans in Alaska, recent years have seen a sharp decline in usage and eligibility. This is especially concerning when Alaska continues to face a brain drain and work force shortages. SB 56 incorporates the McDowell groups recommendations and addresses this decline by implementing the following updates:

1. Allows up to one year of career technical education (CTE) courses to count towards eligibility;
2. Increases the eligibility window for use of the award from 6 years after graduation to 8;
3. Increases the award amount for the first time in 10+ years to keep up with inflation and remain competitive with scholarships offered by other institutions;
4. Allows a GPA **or** minimum college entrance exam to qualify for the award instead of requiring both;
5. Notifies students at the beginning of their junior year who have met APS requirements that they are eligible for the scholarship and will maintain eligibility if they finish their senior year courses;
6. Requires students in 9th and 10th grade to be informed of the APS;
7. Allows award recipients to qualify for a higher-level award if they meet the requirements while enrolled in postsecondary education.

It also increases flexibility for non-traditional students by extending their eligibility by one semester for each semester they are enrolled part time. Last, it directs the Department of Education and Early Development to create a GPA equivalent rating for schools that do not use the traditional 4.0/5.0 grading scale.

With these changes, we hope to see more Alaskans using the APS and choosing Alaska schools. It will keep more talent in-state and grow our workforce. Please join me in support of Senate Bill 56.

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