

Board of Education considers new college admission proposal

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Idaho education officials want to flip the traditional college admission process around in order to boost the state's dismal college attendance rates.

The State Board of Education listened to a new proposal Thursday that recommended alerting qualified high school seniors that they have been accepted to all eight of Idaho's colleges and universities rather than wait for application results.

Board spokesman Blake Youde says students would still need to fill out paperwork and pay a fee to secure a spot at their school of choice, but the money would eventually be credited back on their tuition bill.

Pre-qualification for acceptance would be based on grade point average, total school credits and SAT scores. However, officials are still working with college provosts to determine the minimum standards as well as how to avoid capacity issues in the event too many students select primarily just one university.

Students who don't qualify would receive a different notification that would admit them into Idaho State University and Lewis-Clark State College as well as Idaho's community colleges, said Carson Howell, an analyst with the board.

"Now we're potentially looking at hitting all students," Howell said. "We know what the pool is."

The board will vote on adopting the proposal in August during its next meeting. If approved, the board would be ready to send letters to students and parents by this fall.

"We're not getting to where we want to be with the practices we've been practicing," said Mike Rush, the board's outgoing executive director. "I'm excited about the possibility. I'm a little worried at how it will work. But the point is you have to take a risk to get results."

Roughly 50 percent of Idaho's 21,000 graduating students don't go on to college. The national average rate of college attendance is 62 percent, with the highest rate being in Georgia at 80 percent.

In Idaho, multiple campaigns have been launched to bolster the number, including an \$11 million scholarship initiative launched by Boise's J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation in 2009. At the time, Idaho ranked 43rd in the nation in students who went on to postsecondary education. The state is now 46th.

Earlier this year, state lawmakers cast doubt that the state could reach its goal — set by Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter and the education board in 2010 — of having 60 percent of Idaho's young adults completing a post-secondary degree or certificate by 2020. The state currently stands at about 42 percent.

Multiple economic and education officials have warned that Idaho needs a better-educated workforce to meet future job demands throughout the state.

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