SOUTH DAKOTA · STATE AID REFERENCE

South Dakota State Aid Cheat Sheet (2027-28)

A two-page reference for counselors and families. Free to copy, print, and share.

South Dakota aid has two front doors. The **FAFSA** drives Pell, the Freedom Scholarship, and the Needs-Based Grant, none of which has its own application. The **SDBOR Scholarship Portal** runs the Opportunity Scholarship, Dakota Corps, Jump Start, and Critical Teaching Needs. Build Dakota runs through each technical college. **What changed:** starting with the Class of 2027, the Board of Regents checks Opportunity Scholarship courses by subcategory and state course code, and checks ACT subscores on the 28 path. Handouts older than November 2025 describe the old rules.

The Programs at a Glance

Program	What it pays and who qualifies
Opportunity Scholarship (merit, SDBOR)	$1,500 a year in years 1 to 3, $3,000 in year 4: $7,500 total. SD resident at high school graduation. **Path 1:** 24 ACT (1180 SAT) plus Advanced Honors Endorsement courses, no final grade below C, unweighted 3.0 GPA. **Path 2:** 28 ACT (1310 SAT) with subscores of 18 English, 21 Reading, 22 Math, 24 Science. Pays at 14 schools, including 4 private universities and all 4 technical colleges.
Freedom Scholarship (need-based)	Amount set by each university; no statewide figure. One year of SD residency, FAFSA need, first bachelor's degree at 10 participating universities. No application: the school offers it. Keep a 2.0, graduate in 5 years, then live and work in SD for 3 years (any field) or it becomes a 4% loan.
Needs-Based Grant	$500 to $2,000 a year. No application. Participating colleges award it from the FAFSA to students with the highest unmet need.
Dakota Corps (workforce)	Full tuition and generally applicable fees at a public university. SD high school graduate, 27 ACT, 2.8 GPA, entering a critical-need field (2026-27: teaching, accounting and auditing, engineering, IT, registered nursing). Work in SD one year per year funded, plus one. Not every eligible applicant is selected.
Build Dakota (technical colleges)	Tuition, fees, books, and required tools in high-need programs at Lake Area, Mitchell, Southeast, and Western Dakota. Open to out-of-state students. Pell does not reduce it. Keep a 2.5; work 3 years full time in SD in the field studied or it converts to 4% debt.
Jump Start	$1,500 for SD residents who finish a public SD high school in 3 years or less and enroll full time within one year.
Critical Teaching Needs	College juniors and seniors in an education program with a 2.8 GPA. Need-based, up to tuition and fees for 30 credits. Teach 5 years in SD.

Deadlines to Post on Your Wall

Program	Deadline	Where it's submitted
Free college application period	October 1 to November 30	Each SD public university and technical college
Dakota Corps; Critical Teaching Needs	November 1 to December 15	SDBOR Scholarship Portal
Bjugstad, Fowler/Kaden, Scarborough	December 15 to February 28	SDBOR Scholarship Portal
Build Dakota	January 1 to March 31	Each technical college, separately
Opportunity Scholarship	June 1 preferred, September 1 final (fall). November 1 and January 15 (spring).	SDBOR Scholarship Portal
Jump Start	September 1 to August 31	SDBOR Scholarship Portal
Freedom; Needs-Based Grant	No state deadline. File the FAFSA early.	FAFSA, then the college aid office

Say this out loud to every senior: December 15 is the state deadline a senior can actually miss in the fall. The Opportunity Scholarship's September 1 date lands after enrollment. College priority dates come first: USD Premier November 15 priority and December 1 final; SDSU competitive scholarships December 1.

The Rules That Trip Families Up

- **Courses by code, not by count (Class of 2027).** An Advanced Honors Endorsement on the final transcript is approved. Without it, the Board checks every subcategory by state course code. One missing half unit (speech, American Literature) ends it.
- **The 28 path needs a Science score.** Subscores of 18, 21, 22, and 24 are required, and ACT Science is optional outside the school-day state test. A student at 28 who misses a subscore can still qualify on Path 1 with the courses and a 3.0.
- **Superscores and GPA have fine print.** Only an ACT-reported superscore counts, never a hand-calculated one. Path 1 uses the unweighted GPA, so honors and AP bumps do not help.
- **Freedom has no application and no state deadline.** The university offers it from the FAFSA. Late filers can find the school's allocation already spent.
- **The Dakota Corps window is six weeks.** November 1 to December 15, in the senior fall, with the work commitment signed up front.

Opportunity Scholarship: Check These Three Things Early

1. Which path is your student on?

- Path 1: 24 to 27 ACT (or 1180 SAT), Advanced Honors Endorsement courses with no final grade below C, unweighted 3.0 GPA.
- Path 2: 28 or higher (or 1310 SAT) with subscores of 18 English, 21 Reading, 22 Math, 24 Science. No course or GPA check.

2. Is the endorsement on the transcript? If not, check the subcategories by course code. The Board names American Literature codes 01054 or 01055 and World History codes 04051 or 04057. Missing pieces can often still go on the senior spring schedule.

3. Is there an ACT Science score? No Science score means no Path 2. Have juniors add Science on any weekend ACT.

Year	Award	Paid	Earned credits needed before that year's payments
Year 1	$1,500	$750 fall, $750 spring	None
Year 2	$1,500	$750 fall, $750 spring	30 (dual credit, AP, CLEP, and online credits count)
Year 3	$1,500	$750 fall, $750 spring	60
Year 4	$3,000	$1,500 fall, $1,500 spring	90

Up to eight consecutive fall and spring terms. Recipients also keep a 3.0 cumulative college GPA; falling below it is recoverable once by filing the reinstatement form.

Counselor Calendar: What to Tell Students When

When	What has to happen
9th and 10th grade	Map courses to the Advanced Honors Endorsement. Confirm American Literature and World History course codes. Plan dual enrollment: it counts toward the college credit checkpoints later.
Junior year	Take the ACT with Science. Target 24 for Path 1, or 28 with subscores for Path 2. Lock the senior schedule against the endorsement.
Senior fall	File the 2027-28 FAFSA (open since September 23, 2026). Apply free to SD publics by November 30. USD Premier November 15 / December 1; SDSU December 1. Dakota Corps November 1 to December 15.
January to March	Build Dakota window January 1 to March 31. Bjugstad and Fowler/Kaden close February 28. Finish any missing endorsement course in spring.
April to June	USD April 1 for full scholarship consideration. Sign Freedom paperwork by each university's date. Opportunity application by June 1 preferred; release the final transcript to SDBOR.
August to September	SDSU takes new scores until August 1. Opportunity final date September 1. At orientation: 30 earned credits before the third semester.

Three Mistakes That Cost South Dakota Students Money

- **Assuming state money only works at public colleges.** The Opportunity Scholarship pays at Augustana, Dakota Wesleyan, Mount Marty, the University of Sioux Falls, and all four technical colleges. Freedom pays at 10 universities, four of them private.
- **Stopping out without an exemption.** A semester off ends the Opportunity Scholarship unless the Board approved an exemption first. Medical hardship, military service, and approved internships have qualified.
- **Signing a work commitment without reading it.** Freedom, Build Dakota, Dakota Corps, and Critical Teaching Needs all convert to loans if the student leaves South Dakota early. Keep a copy of the agreement.

The 24-credit freshman year

Two 12-credit semesters is full time and leaves a freshman at 24 earned credits, six short of the 30 the Opportunity Scholarship requires before the third semester of funding. Missing a checkpoint (30, 60, 90) ends the scholarship permanently, including the $3,000 fourth year, and there is no catch-up rule. A GPA dip below 3.0 is recoverable once; the credit checkpoint is not. Tell every recipient to plan 15 credits a term or bring dual credit with them.

Free Resources: No Account, No Cost, No Data Collection

Resource	Where
SDBOR Scholarship Portal and program rules	sdbor.edu/applyforscholarships · tdx.sdbor.edu (knowledge base)
Class of 2027 eligibility sheet and approved coursework	ourdakotadreams.com (Educators, Toolkits)
Freedom Scholarship and Build Dakota	freedomscholarshipsd.com · builddakotascholarships.com
Our South Dakota state aid guide	collegereadyparent.org/south-dakota
Scholarships at 400+ colleges, all 50 states	collegereadyparent.org/college-scholarships

Produced by CollegeReadyParent.org, an independent, parent-built resource. No paywall, no accounts, no lead forms, no student data collection. Counselors and educators: you may freely copy, print, and distribute this sheet. Questions or corrections: leo@collegereadyparent.org. Verified against the South Dakota Board of Regents, the Freedom Scholarship, and Build Dakota in October 2026. Rules change; confirm current details at sdbor.edu and with each college's financial aid office before making financial decisions. College figures come from the CRP scholarship database.