

Speaking Points

Hon. Greg Weadick
Minister of Advanced Education and Technology

Student Aid Alberta
News Conference

Robbins Health Learning Centre
MacEwan University
Corner of 109 Street and 104 Avenue
Edmonton, AB

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Introduction

- Thank you, Jed [*Johns, President, MacEwan University Students' Association*] and good morning, everyone.
- I love days like today...because I love delivering good news.
- And today the good news is about students.
- It's all about encouraging students to participate in post-secondary education in Alberta.
- It's all about making sure that finances are never a barrier to students being able to get an education.
- It's all about improving the way our government provides financial aid to students in Alberta.
- This morning, I have the pleasure of announcing to you significant changes to our student loan program.
- As many students will attest, the application for an Alberta student loan has been incredibly complicated and...in fact...turns some people off of pursuing their education at all.
- We fixed that.
- Starting August 1, we will no longer consider...

...student earnings,

...RRSPs,

...or parent income...

...when calculating a student's eligibility for a loan under the Student Aid Alberta program.

- Instead...we are introducing a flat rate for student contribution.
- Instead of complicated calculations about how much you make, you much your parents make...

...you will know exactly how much you need to contribute and how much the government will provide.

- Any student applying for a loan will be expected to have \$1,500 that they can put toward their education.
- And if you're a single parent applying for a loan, you won't have to contribute anything at all.
- This is going to make the loan application process a lot more predictable and transparent.
- But that's just the first change.

- We're also going to help you out during that uncertain period between graduation and when you land a job.
- There's already a grace period of six months after you graduate before you have to start repaying your loan. But in the past, interest would still accumulate on your debt.
- Not anymore. Now for that six month grace period, there will be no interest charges.
- And for students who move from full-time studies to part-time studies, it's also getting easier.
- You used to have to start repaying your loans as soon as you went from full time to part time.
- Not anymore. Now you'll only have to start paying them back once you graduate.
- This is particularly important to grad students who often move from full-time students to part-time studies. They'll no longer have to be worried about early repayment requirements.
- We're also going to remove restrictions for Alberta students studying internationally...

...and streamline the application and appeal processes.

- And we're going to do all of this under one banner...which we're calling Student Aid Alberta.
- That means no more getting communications from a variety of provincial aid programs that don't seem to talk to one another.
- Starting this fall, students will talk to...and hear back from...one single organization...Student Aid Alberta.
- This will go a long way to making your communications with us a lot more clear and transparent.

Completion Grants

- But I think the biggest news today is that we're introducing Completion Grants to encourage students who start a program...to finish it.
- Yes...if you take out a loan...we're going to give you a grant for graduating.
- If you graduate from a certificate program, we're going to give you \$1,000.
- If you graduate from a diploma program, we're going to give you \$1,500.
- If you graduate with an applied or baccalaureate degree, we're going to give you \$2,000.
- And if you get a graduate degree, we'll give you another \$2,000.

- Consider it a graduation gift from the province.
- But we want you to do more than just graduate.
- We want you to stay and work in Alberta...especially those professions that we so desperately need to provide the services that Albertans want and deserve.
- That's why we're also announcing a new retention grant of \$1,000...

...for grads with loans from specific programs...

...that stay and work in Alberta for at least three years.

- While the specific criteria is still under development, we're talking about the kinds of professions represented in this room today...nurses, health professions, health care techs.
- We're also talking about teachers, doctors, social workers.
- The specific programs will be determined by economic and employment demands.
- Now, some folks might be doing the math behind all of these announcements... and wondering just how we're going to pay for them.
- Well, we did a really extensive review of student aid programs in Alberta ...and found that the Loan Remission Program really wasn't working the way we'd hoped when we first established it.

- It's complicated to run.
- It's not open and transparent to students.
- And it only helps three per cent of Alberta's post-secondary students.
- And for those who do receive it, it comes as a surprise...after the fact.
- The bottom line is that it essentially did very little for the students it was supposed to serve.
- So we're repurposing the funds so we can spread them more evenly among all student aid recipients through the programs that I've announced today.

Conclusion

- So that's the news for students considering provincial loans...
 - ...no more looking into your finances or that of your family when you apply for provincial student aid...just a flat contribution rate,
 - ...no more interest charges during the loan repayment grace period,
 - ...no more restrictions on students studying out of country,
 - ...no more interest if you move from full-time to part-time studies,
 - ...one-window service through Student Aid Alberta,

...a bonus when you graduate...

...and another if you stay in the province for three years.

- The days of difficult-to-understand student loan programs are over.
- That's why I'm so happy today. We're getting things done.
- We are encouraging students to participate in post-secondary education in Alberta.
- We are making sure that finances aren't a barrier to students being able to get an education.
- And we are improving the way our government provides financial aid to students in Alberta.
- Given Premier Redford's commitment to getting things done, I can't wait to see where we go from here.
- Thank you.

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