Gov. Brad Little announces the opening of Idaho LAUNCH applications for graduating high school seniors to apply to receive up to $8,000 grants for in-demand career training at eligible Idaho institutions. David Pace Photo

Gov. Brad Little declared October as “Idaho LAUNCH Month” during a press conference Wednesday at Teton Toyota.

The new program provides up to $8,000 grants to graduating high school seniors or GED recipients who pursue an in-demand career at the community college, university, career technical program, trade school or workforce training provider that they choose.

“To me, it’s about offering all kids in Idaho the best possible opportunity to be masters of their own destiny,” Little said.
Currently, only about 38% of kids in Idaho go on to higher education.

“LAUNCH is going to be a radical change to that and open it up to a whole new class or kids, and it’s going to be helpful to businesses,” Little said.

Little was joined by state Sens. Dave Lent, Kevin Cook, Van Burtenshaw and Reps. Josh Wheeler, Marco Erickson, Jon Weber and Jerald Raymond who supported the legislation establishing the $80 million program.

Gov. Brad Little was joined by legislators, education officials and business leaders from across eastern Idaho to promote the opening of Idaho LAUNCH applications for graduating high school seniors on Wednesday at Teton Toyota. David Pace

“What a pleasure it is to work with a governor who truly understands the value of education and the importance education plays,” said Lent, the Senate Education Committee chairman. “It is truly one of the surest routes to self-reliance for our citizens.”

Eligible students should turn in their applications for Idaho LAUNCH grants now so they can begin their job training, apprenticeships or higher education in 2024.
“This is the first time anything of this immensity has occurred in the state of Idaho,” College of Eastern Idaho President Rick Aman said. “... There’s 6,600 graduating seniors in our region, so we know that they are all eligible. It is really important that they sign up (for LAUNCH) between now and Nov. 30. There’s no commitment, but they need to be on the list as being interested in LAUNCH.”

Applications for high school seniors to apply opened Tuesday, and the priority deadline for initial applications is Nov. 30. Contingent award letters will be sent by Dec. 31, March 31 and May 31, and applications close April 15, according to the Idaho LAUNCH website.

“Every student right now that is slated to graduate in May needs to go to the portal which is nextsteps.idaho.gov/launch. Then they can see what jobs there are and what opportunities there are,” Little said.

The program covers up to 80% of tuition and fees at eligible Idaho institutions, meaning that students will also have some skin in the game and be responsible for 20% of costs. Currently Idaho has about 23,000 students graduating in spring 2024 who are eligible for the program, Aman said. LAUNCH has enough funding for 9,000 to 10,000 students.

The Workforce Development Council has approved a list of 242 in-demand careers that qualify for the program — including nurses, electricians, teachers, welders, HVAC, lawyers, auto mechanics, dental assistants, other health care professionals and many more.

Students can explore the complete list on the Next Steps website.
Students applying for the grants can choose from more than 240 in-demand career possibilities. Leaders on the Workforce Development will update the list to reflect changes or needs in Idaho's economy.

Courtesy Idaho LAUNCH
To participate in the program, students must "graduate from an Idaho high school, be an Idaho resident, be enrolled in an in-demand career program at an eligible Idaho institution, begin enrollment the fall semester after graduation and complete a career pathway plan," the Idaho Launch website states.

While students must choose an in-demand career path, they can change their mind and select a different in-demand occupation at a later date, Gov. Little’s Communications Director Emily Callihan said.

The idea for the program was sparked by business leaders who identified and articulated the need for more skilled workers in a variety of industries including health care, cybersecurity, automotive tech, construction and more.

“Many of them have led out and come to us in the Legislature and in our state government and said, ‘We need some changes. We need to make a better connection between our education system and our business and industry,’” Lent said. “What a great privilege it has been to work with those businesses in our communities who stepped forward and willingly support that effort.”