

May 7, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Regents
FROM: David L. Buhler
SUBJECT: Utah Scholars Coaches Pilot

Background

Utah Scholars Initiative (USI), launched as a pilot in 2006, is a program of the Outreach and Access department within the Utah System of Higher Education. USI partners school districts with local community and business leaders in an effort to increase the number of Utah students accessing and completing post-secondary education. USI particularly targets low-income, first-generation, and minority students, and is one of USHE's many strategies to encourage and prepare students for college. USI volunteers encourage students in our partner schools to prepare for their futures by taking the Utah Scholars Core Course of Study—a defined college preparatory curriculum—throughout all four years of high school. Students who complete the Utah Scholars Core Course of study receive a certificate and medallion at high school graduation. In 2008, the Utah Scholars Core Course of Study was adopted as the course criteria for the Regents' Scholarship.

Issue

In 2014, Utah Scholars piloted a new program, Utah Scholars Coaches, which places college students in 10th grade classrooms for weekly lessons written by the Utah Scholars staff. The goal of the program is to increase college readiness and awareness for under-represented (first-generation, low-income, and minority) students who could achieve the Regents' Scholarship Base Award but who are not likely to apply for the scholarship and may need additional help applying to college and for financial aid. Students who already participate in other access and support programs such as TRIO, GEAR UP, AVID, etc. are not eligible to participate in the program.

The Utah Scholars program spent the fall 2013 semester writing the curriculum and recruiting college students to serve as Coaches, with the assistance of an AmeriCorps VISTA member, Shannon Farber. Nine volunteer Coaches were selected, trained, and placed in the schools. Whenever possible, Coaches are placed in pairs at the school sites.

Building on existing relationships with school districts, the pilot began in five schools in Granite and Ogden School Districts. The Granite schools are Granger High School, Hunter High School, and Kearns High School, and were chosen by the District. All are schools with historically low college attendance and

Regents' Scholarship achievement (between them, there were 13 Regents' Scholarship applications in 2013).

Ogden School District has only two high schools, Ogden High School, and Ben Lomond High School, both of which have low college attendance and Regents' Scholarship achievement (a total of six Regents' Scholarship applications from the District in 2013). The pilot was suspended at Ogden High School due to low school participation.

10th grade students participating in the program had to meet the following requirements:

- A cumulative GPA of at least 2.8.
- No core course grade lower than a C (*this was not followed*).
- Not participating in other college ready programs.
- Want to go to college.

The target population is under-represented (first-generation, low income, and minority) students.

Utah Scholars launched the pilot program in February, and more than 50 eligible students enrolled (which required a parental signature). Participants committed to:

- Take the Utah Scholars Curriculum in grades 9-12.
- Engage in college and career support activities.
- Attend weekly classes with their Coaches.

The number of first-generation college students varied across the schools:

- Granger High School: 63%
- Hunter High School: 82%
- Kearns High School: 71%
- Ben Lomond High School: 57%

Their average GPA varied from 3.4 to 3.7, but few if any of the students had heard of the Regents' Scholarship.

The Coaches pilot program will continue through May, at which time students will be given a post-test and counselors will be invited to provide feedback on the program. We are currently recruiting and selecting Coaches for the next academic year. The program will culminate in a recognition event at each school, with students receiving a certificate of completion.

Next Steps

The Coaches program needs improved school/counselor buy-in, which will be facilitated by better communication and timing. We do not anticipate adding any schools next year, but hope to run a full-year pilot in all five schools. Ideally, Coaches will teach two sessions in each school: one starting in September and the second starting in late January. This will enable the Coaches to reach significantly more students, and recruitment will benefit from word of mouth.

We are already working with Ogden High School to find a better time to schedule the Coaches' lessons and looking at better options to identify potential students. At all of the schools, we will need to more

intentionally identify students and invite them to participate. We have, however, had significant difficulty in recruiting students from Weber State University to serve as Coaches. We will be extending our recruitment period into the summer, targeting classes with Community Engaged Learning emphases.

We are also in talks with Iron County School District about permitting them to use the Coaches curriculum in their schools, where teachers would deliver it.

Next year, Coaches will receive a \$1,000 educational award to recognize the significant time and effort they put into teaching the curriculum. We will expand their training and spread it out throughout the school year, which will give them additional support and provide a more robust community of Coaches.

Once we have worked with the students in their 10th grade year, we will need an additional follow up with them to ensure that they are on track in 11th grade and engaging in college-readiness activities. As we have their contact information, we can use this to send them materials and invite them to StepUP and other college events. At the beginning of their senior year, we will also send them follow up information about the Regents' Scholarship.

Commissioner's Recommendation

This is an information item only, no formal action by the Board is required. However, the Board is encouraged to read and take note of the information memorandum, and note that further follow-up will be handled by the Commissioner's Office as part of the Board's Participation strategic objective.

David L. Buhler
Commissioner of Higher Education

DLB/CF