

May 5, 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Regents

FROM: David L. Buhler

SUBJECT: College Access Challenge Grant Annual Report

Background

The Board of Regents was originally designated in 2008 by Governor Huntsman and then again in 2010 by Governor Herbert, as the state agency to apply and receive the College Access Challenge Grant Program (CACG) from the U.S. Department of Education. The CACG is a formula grant created and funded as part of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007, and was extended in 2009 through the Healthcare and Education Affordability Reconciliation Act with the purpose of helping low-income students and families learn about, prepare for, and finance postsecondary education. The program at the federal level received an appropriation of \$150 million for fiscal years (FY) 2010-2014. The Office of the Commissioner reports and applies annually and their proposal was approved in August 2014 for fiscal year 2015, thus Utah received \$1.39 million dollars of these federal funds. The grant is under the direction of Melissa Miller Kincart, Assistant Commissioner for Outreach and Access, with management support from Maria Martinez, CACG Grant Manager, and Stephen Rogers, Outreach Manager for UHEAA.

As outlined in the grant proposal, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, UHEAA, and our college, university, and K-12 partners are pursuing the following three objectives:

1. Awareness: to provide information to students and families on postsecondary education benefits, opportunities, planning, financing options (including activities associated with financial literacy), FAFSA completion, and outreach activities for students who may be at risk of not enrolling in or completing college.
2. Professional Development: to develop and deliver professional development events and resources for school counselors at secondary schools, as well as financial aid administrators, college admissions, recruitment staff, and access and outreach personnel at institutions of higher education to improve knowledge and capacity to better assist them in their roles in working and increasing students and parents understanding of:
 - 1) Admission requirements and application deadlines and processes;
 - 2) Financial aid and scholarship opportunities and procedures;
 - 3) Academic and financial preparation to improve postsecondary success;
 - 4) Activities such as tutoring/mentoring, and support instruments and models to assist students in preparing for and succeeding in college.

3. Infrastructure: to expand and enhance the statewide infrastructure in Utah which will foster partnerships among federal, state, local agencies, community based organizations, businesses and public and higher education to significantly increase the number of low-income and underrepresented students who are prepared to enter and be successful in postsecondary education.

Issue

The College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) has assisted the Utah State Board of Regents, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, and the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) in moving forward on 19 coordinated initiatives aimed at increasing the number of low-income and underrepresented students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Substantial progress has been made in implementing the goals and activities outlined in the grant proposal. The CACG has been instrumental in helping maintain capacity and momentum toward increasing academic and financial preparation so more Utah citizens might more fully participate in postsecondary education. As a result of the centralized programming services and those provided by subgrantees, **64,355 Utah students and families, 1,724 school counselors, and 229 college admissions and access staff** were reached throughout the 2014-2015 reporting period.

CACG 2014-2015 Program Highlights

Awareness

- **Monte and the World of possibilities**
As a part of the statewide, Step Up to Higher Education social marketing campaign and specifically the Encourage the Dream campaign for youth 12 years of age and under, a children's book was written and illustrated titled, Monte and the World of Possibilities. The book was launched fall 2014 at Beehive Elementary in Kearns during a school assembly where Lt. Governor Spencer Cox read the book to the entire school. KSL-TV's Nadine Wimmer talked to the students about the Monte story and the importance of going to college. Every child in the school received a copy of the book. The Read Today Program, a program of KSL-TV and Nadine Wimmer which helps bring students to grade level, also gave their 4,550 volunteers a copy of the book to share with their students. Additionally, a partnership was formed with the State Libraries. All libraries received two copies of the book along with activities to do with children during story time. A coordinated effort was made with all libraries to read the book on the same day. On this day, Lt. Governor Spencer Cox visited the Salt Lake City Public Library to read to students. Local media was in attendance and the book received excellent PR coverage.

Moving forward, Monte and the World of Possibilities will continue to be distributed to various outreach programs across the state. In fact Granite School District will be placing this book in all 60 of its elementary libraries. Additionally, this month, StepUP will partner with the Read Today Book Festival where there will be a live reading of the book and visitors will be engaged in activities encouraging them to think about college and what they want to be when they grow up.

- **Adult College Completion**

In 2014, the Complete College Utah focus expanded to include adult students. The Adult College Completion group gathered members from two groups, the College Access Network of Utah and Complete College Utah, to target the population of Utahans with “some college, no degree.” The group worked to understand the landscape and opportunities for adult/returning students at USHE institutions. When the opportunity arose to partner with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and their learning portfolio assessment tool, LearningCounts, the Adult College Completion group shifted to implement a pilot at three institutions: Weber State University, Utah Valley University, and Dixie State University. During a convening in January, institutions selected teams, targeted departments for prior learning, and set LearningCounts enrollment goals. USHE convenes a conference call each month for institutional representatives and CAEL leadership. Students at these pilot institutions will be able to enroll in LearningCounts and complete a portfolio this summer. Further, institutions are scheduling faculty and advisor trainings to take place this summer and fall.

Professional Development

- **College and Career Counseling Initiative (CCCI)**

The continued partnership with the Southern Regional Education Board’s (SREB) College and Career Counseling Initiative (CCCI) has allowed Utah State University and the University of Utah to not only deepen their pre-service training programs for school counselors but also expand its in-service offerings. Delivery of the full CCTI curriculum is now a routine part of both program’s pre-service requirements.

Utah State University has offered to its partner internship districts a reduced, recording-fee-only and tuition rate of \$45 for the three-credit college course for currently practicing school counselors. Additionally, they have worked to include staff from various outreach and access programs around the state and have offered the course at a cost recovery rate for the recording fee only. The University of Utah has worked with both Canyons and Granite School Districts and has trained an additional 141 counselors and other outreach and access staff during this reporting period.

The groundwork laid by the both counselor training programs allowed for passage of House Bill 198, Strengthening College and Career Readiness, this legislative session. The bill directs the State Board of Education to work in partnership with the State Board of Regents to develop a certificate in college and career counseling for school counselors and also provide funds for grants to cover course fees. This legislation was made possible through strong collaborations between K-12 and higher education and will undoubtedly improve the college and career readiness professional development over 900 currently employed Utah school counselors.

Statewide Infrastructure

- **StepUP READY Grants**

We know that the most effective college readiness efforts come as a result of strong partnerships between higher education and public education. Collaboration between K-12 and higher education institutions continually demonstrate positive outcomes. Due to this, in June 2014 USHE developed the StepUP READY grants and invited applications from partnerships between school districts/local

education authorities (LEAs) and Utah not-for-profit higher education institutions in an effort to increase the number of Utah's public high school students who graduate college-ready and enroll in a post-secondary institution. \$600,000 in state appropriations were allocated for StepUP READY grants with \$50,000 being to each partnership proposal. In this first inaugural year an additional \$25,000 of CACG funds were available to programs that specifically targeted college and career ready interventions for underrepresented populations. All grant recipients were required to demonstrate a robust partnership between the LEAs and the not-for profit higher education institution to ensure effective and intentional efforts surrounding college preparation, enrollment, and first-year transition.

USHE received a total of 23 applications and the review committee recommended to the Commissioner that nine grants be awarded and funded. These nine grants represent collaborations between six USHE institutions and 19 school districts. Six of the grants received the additional CACG funds to support their work with underrepresented student populations for a total of \$156,531.

- **Common Application Feasibility Study**

In March 2014, the Office of the Commissioner began working with 12 other state systems in the Transformation/Co-creation Project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Gates funding was directed to state systems with the idea that a systems approach might be able to advance planning and implementation of a project to “dramatically improve access and success for underserved students” with greater effect than could occur at an individual higher education institution level. The goal of the study was to work with USHE institutions to identify ways to improve the college application process in order to encourage greater participation among students from traditionally underserved populations. It decided that the best use of this opportunity from the Gates Foundation was to study the feasibility of a USHE college application portal and ways to improve the student experience from application through enrollment.

The Office of the Commissioner's Gates Grant Leadership Team worked with local consulting firm Education Direction in understanding the history, evolution, and implementation of a college application portal in eight other states, with focus on the work in Texas and North Carolina (where common application portals have been in place over time). In addition, Education Direction engaged more than 100 participants, including USHE Chief Academic and Student Services Officers, Enrollment Managers, Admissions, Financial Aid, IT and data staff, K-12 state and district leaders, minority advocates, parents of graduating high school seniors, and non-traditional students in 15 in-depth interviews (focus groups) regarding the institutional purposes of admissions applications and obstacles Utah students, and especially students and families with little or no college attendance experience, face when applying to USHE institutions. Additionally, these focus groups discussed potential benefits and cost savings that could be achieved by leveraging a shared platform for high school transcript upload and standardized data entry/reporting.

The findings from the feasibility study identified five areas that would be the most productive to focus next on working with USHE and K12 stakeholders to improve the student experience and increase the institutional benefit beyond the admissions application: Electronic Transcript Upload, Common Residency Determination, Concurrent Enrollment, Social Security Number, and Application Fee Waiver.

In order to begin addressing the five areas identified above and to try to operationalize some of the most pressing areas where technology can streamline the application process, the University of Utah has agreed to work on a Common Application and Transfer Model Project over the next year with \$300,000 one-time federal grant monies and state appropriations from the Outreach and Access Department in the Office of the Commissioner. The University of Utah will also engage with Salt Lake Community College in identifying how the streamlining of processes can assist in student transfer. The goals of this project will be to develop and implement a technology-based solution to retrieve applicant ACT scores from a centralized ACT database (thus relieving students and parents from requesting individual scores from ACT and relieving Admissions staff from having to match scores), and a “push button” electronic high school transcript upload, based on an applicant-initiated request to be replicable to other USHE institutions. This work will coincide with collaboration among all USHE institutions to establish a common standard for determination and coding of state residency.

This federal grant is consistent with the Regents’ strategic priority of increasing affordable participation in higher education. It has been instrumental in helping the Utah System of Higher Education maintain capacity and momentum toward increasing academic and financial preparation so more Utah citizens might more fully participate in postsecondary education.

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 Affordable Participation and Timely Completion strategic objectives.

David L. Buhler
Commissioner of Higher Education

DLB/MMK