

September 9, 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Regents

FROM: David L. Buhler

SUBJECT: Utah Scholars Initiative Annual Report

Background

The Utah Scholars Initiative (USI) was launched in the 2006-2007 school year with a \$300,000 grant from the United States Department of Education and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). This business and education partnership sends volunteers into 8th grade classrooms to share a presentation that encourages students to prepare for their future by taking the Utah Scholars Curriculum throughout all four years of high school.

Utah Scholars works with partner districts and schools around the state that serve a large percentage of underserved populations. This 8th grade outreach shows students the steps they can take in high school to graduate ready for college. The presentation discusses why go to college, how to prepare for it, and how to pay for it. The key take-away is that college is achievable for everyone.

In 2008 the Regents' Scholarship adopted the Utah Scholars Curriculum as the course criteria for the Regents' Scholarship. The Regents' Scholarship is currently the financial incentive linked to this program, although the scholarship is available to all Utah students who qualify.

Issue

In the 2014-2015 school year, USI partnered with 97 middle/junior high schools and 65 high schools, up from 84 middle schools and 53 high schools the year before. Nebo, Cache, and Garfield School Districts partnered with us, bringing the total number of Utah Scholars districts to 16:

Alpine	Garfield	Kane	Provo
Canyons	Granite	Nebo	Salt Lake City
Cache	Iron	Ogden	Tooele
Davis	Jordan	Park City	Washington

In all, more than 32,000 students heard the Utah Scholars presentation, which represents 76% of all public school 8th graders in the state.

The focus in the 2014-2015 school year was expanding Utah Scholars to more rural districts, in an effort to grow USI statewide. To that end, Utah Scholars briefly partnered with Snow College to deliver Utah

Scholars presentations in their service district through a StepUP READY Grant, but that partnership could not be sustained. USI has maintained a relationship with a few of those districts and staff will be working with district personnel in the 2015-2016 school year to ensure that the students in those districts hear the presentation.

USI leadership continues to ask schools to take the lead in recruiting volunteers. This messaging to existing partnership schools started at the end of the 2014-2015 school year. Volunteers are recruited via business contacts and higher education institutions, but the expansion of USI and the hope to become a statewide program necessitate a change in recruitment practices, with schools now taking a more active role. Each school receives a guide to best practices, including materials for identifying and communicating to volunteers. USI staff maintains quality control by delivering all training and by tracking the volunteer hours through an online volunteer management program.

As a result, volunteer numbers climbed significantly this year, with 221 volunteers giving 939 presentations. This is up from 129 volunteers giving 831 presentations in 2013-2014. A complete summary of the year's activities is in the attached 2014-2015 USI Annual Report.

The following are highlights of a few programmatic efforts:

Timely, meaningful, age-appropriate messages continue to be sent to students who have signed up to be Utah Scholars. Each month the students receive tips for being college ready as well as a scholarship they can apply for, regardless of grade level. Parents may sign up for the same messages, and counselors also receive them to keep the Utah Scholars Initiative prominent in their minds as they advise students and parents on course selection and future plans.

In an effort to more effectively reach students when they need the assistance the most, the USI joined the National College Access Network in a summer texting pilot to decrease summer "melt," or the phenomenon of students who have been accepted to college but who are not attending because they are unable to complete the necessary tasks to enroll. The summer texting pilot put Utah Scholars personnel in the role of mentor to help students understand how to complete these tasks and where to go for help. In all, USI texted 239 seniors, and 51 of them were "highly engaged." Their comments included:

"I'm having problems with financial aid Do you know where else I can get help?"

"I need so much help!! I was going to go to Weber but due to a lack of a place to live, I stayed at home and signed up for USU-Tooele campus. I was all set. Then my dad said it would be cheaper to go to SLCC. So I've been trying to get my credits transferred over and it's a big mess. I should've just stayed set up at USU. Now my credits are in limbo I have no clue about my financial aid. Idk what I'm going to do."

USI personnel responded to each text and directed students to the specific office at the institution where they could get help. The program was successful enough that it is expanding to serve all USI seniors throughout their senior year.

In 2015, 2896 students received the Utah Scholars medallion, up nearly 46% from 2014. It is expected this number will continue to grow, as larger numbers of 8th graders are reached each year.

The Utah Scholars 10th Grade or “Coaches” program continues to evolve and is present in the Granite and Ogden School Districts. This continuation of the 2013 pilot helped 9th and 10th grade students learn about college from a current college student. The program focuses on what college is “really like,” the skills needed to succeed there, and how to pay for college. One key to the success of the pilot is the real-world application of the college students who share their experiences with their mentees. This year, students participated in campus visits to the University of Utah and an optional trip to Weber State University.

Monies provided to the State Board of Regents from the U. S. Department of Education’s College Access Challenge Grant made USI program sustainability possible from 2008-2014. Since 2014, USI operations have been funded by the ongoing College Readiness money provided to the Office of Access and Outreach by the Legislature. The Utah Scholars Initiative has facilitated the Utah System of Higher Education’s outreach efforts by encouraging students at a critical point in their academic trajectory to prepare academically and financially to participate in higher 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 in this memorandum and review the attached annual report, 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

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