

September 7, 2016

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Regents
FROM: David L. Buhler
SUBJECT: Utah Scholars Initiative 2016

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.

Issue

In the 2015-2016 school year, USI partnered with 97 middle/junior high schools and 64 high schools. At the end of the school year Box Elder, Weber, Murray and South Sanpete School Districts became partners, bringing the total number of Utah Scholars districts to 20:

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

Nearly 200 volunteers gave 876 presentations to more than 29,000 students. In 2016, 3,550 students received the Utah Scholars medallion, up from 2,896 last year. At the end of each presentation students are asked to fill out a survey, 91% of students responded positively saying they want to go to college. When asked the reasons that they want to attend, 68% said "to get a good job and make more money," 48% said "to feel successful in life".

One significant change that happened this past year was a change in personnel. In November, Dr. Christie Fox left the Commissioner's Office and Erika Norton took on the new role as Utah Scholars Program

Manager. Her goals include making more meaningful contact with students; making Utah Scholars a recognizable household name, and making the program more accessible to students across the state.

The following are highlights of a few programmatic changes: In an effort to be more accessible to students, Utah Scholars expanded the summer texting pilot to a year-long program. Over the course of the year weekly text messages were sent to over 1,200 high school seniors, and nearly 50% were engaged with the program. These texts prompted students to do various college preparation tasks such as filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or meeting with their school counselor to see if they were on track for college.

The students' text questions included:

- "Do I need to schedule a tour of campus or do you just show up?"
- "I am planning on taking the ACT next month and was wondering what things I can do to prepare for it?"

The Utah Scholars 10th Grade program expanded this year to include 9th-12th graders. That program is now called the Utah Scholars Club. Students at Hunter and Granger High Schools were able to participate in weekly after school club meetings, where they participated in activities that helped them be more prepared for college. The Club uses a "near peer" model with college students acting as mentors to high school students. This year, the students participated in a campus visit to Utah Valley University.

It is important to note that monies provided to the State Board of Regents from the U. S. Department of Education's College Access Challenge Grant made the USI program sustainable from 2008-2014. Since 2014, USI operations have been funded by the ongoing College Readiness funding 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.

The program will expand this year beyond just emphasizing a strong college preparatory curriculum in high school. The new program will include a grade-by-grade checklist, with items students can complete for points that will help them earn a Utah Scholars medallion to wear during their high school graduation.

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 annual report distributed at the meeting, 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/EN/JHM