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Utah's Growing Opportunity Gap

Introduction

Demographic projections produced by University of Utah's Kem C. Gardner Institute show that the state will experience a significant demographic shift over the next 30 years. Without targeted intervention, projections show this could have a negative impact on educational attainment levels of Utah's population and workforce.

Currently, race and ethnic minorities comprise 18% of the state's population. By 2050, that percentage is expected to increase to 30%. Over the last five years, white students at USHE institutions completed programs at a rate of 32.1%, while minority students' completion rate was 25.7%. Without significant changes in higher education outcomes, the shift will result in declining educational attainment in the state. USHE researchers estimate a potential forgone benefit of roughly 290,000 degrees and awards between 2020 and 2065. The impact will reach beyond the state's postsecondary education system, as a diminution of education within the workforce will affect Utah's socioeconomic status and overall capacity to meet the demands of an evolving labor market.

Addressing the Challenge

The Board of Regents is uniquely positioned to lead out on future-oriented strategies to address the growing opportunity gap. Data available to USHE can be used to analyze which aspect(s) of the education system presents the most significant challenges to educating the minority population in the state.

Commissioner's Recommendations

The Board of Regents should direct the Commissioner's office to review demographically stratified data and identify barriers for the state's minority population to access and complete postsecondary educational opportunities. The Commissioner's office will work over the next fiscal year, and beyond, to identify statewide strategies to address those barriers.