



August 20, 2021

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion 2020-2021

Board & System Accomplishments: A Look Back

1. Reframing the [Opportunity Gap](#) narrative – A tremendous amount of strategic effort was placed on ensuring opportunity gap conversations at the Board and System-level are contextualized with the acknowledgment that structural and systemic barriers exist in policy, practice, and procedure that perpetuate gaps seen in higher education access and completion quantitative data. This shift helps focus the board levers (i.e., policy, legislative funding, data, advocacy, and collaboration) that support creating learning environments that enable each student to thrive.
2. Public Commitments towards Equity Action – The Board of Higher Education was created to include both degree-granting institutions and technical education. Board leadership supported adopting the first [resolution to advance equitable systemic change](#); two additional resolutions were created to look at the specific needs of different underrepresented communities ([Juneteenth Resolution](#), [Dreamers Resolution](#)). These resolutions help leverage the Board's public commitment and advocacy for underrepresented students, staff, and faculty. Each has a call to action with items that the Board and System office and its 16 public institutions commit to *doing*.
3. Building Infrastructure for System Equity Efforts – Creation of the [EDI Board Workgroup](#) – The workgroup members include Board executive leadership, the Commissioner and his staff, institutional Chief Diversity Officers, and community representatives. The workgroup acts as the structural arm for creating transparency and accountability on statewide equity progress. It also acts as a bridge to informing decision-makers on tactics tied to the Board Strategic Plan. The workgroup also provides an opportunity for Board and System leadership to be trained on equity-related issues by stakeholder students, staff, and faculty. A tremendous amount of focus was placed on providing presentations from institutional staff and faculty working with students facing economic barriers, first-generation students, undocumented students, LGBTQ, and BIPOC students.
4. [USHE Equity Lens Framework](#) – During the summer of 2020, institutional Chief Diversity Officers created an equity lens framework. At its core, the beliefs and definitions ensure institutions begin from a common asset-based understanding and sets the groundwork for clear accountability, allowing all efforts to be focused on closing opportunity gaps for marginalized

populations. The Board adopted the framework in its December 2020 meeting. Since then, training and building capacity for operationalizing the framework has been a top priority. The framework has received state and national attention, and ongoing efforts are being placed to tailor the framework to the specific needs of each institution.

5. [Measuring for Equity](#) & Performance Funding – The alignment between measuring for equity progress within the Board Strategic Plan and institutional performance funding measures ensures a commitment to closing statewide attainment gaps.

Takeaways: Opportunities to Expand Equity Efforts

Although a significant amount of attention has been placed in addressing structural equity at the Board and System level, several items have been identified as opportunities to enhance our equity efforts moving forward.

- Commitment to communicating with stakeholders (i.e., students, community, institutional partners, legislators, and state leaders) on equity efforts to build trust and buy-in. With specific attention and commitment to circling back and following up with stakeholders and partners.
- Leveraging existing external institutional, community, state resources, and partnerships to avoid reinventing the wheel and duplicating efforts.
- Equity is never the role of one but a shared leadership commitment. Additional attention is needed to support CDO-type roles in sharing the weight and responsibility of equitable systemic change.

Commissioner Recommendations & Future Commitments

To ensure progress is made towards the resolutions created last year, the Commissioner would like to leverage the expertise of the institutions to form two task forces (Undocumented & LGBTQ) tied to the EDI Board workgroup that helps to inform policies that will increase access, completion, and workforce alignment for these two marginalized populations.

In 2020 funding allocations were appropriated to hire a new USHE General Legal Counsel who will support conducting an equity-minded, anti-racist policy review of all existing and new USHE policies. This will be a priority of focus tied to the Board Strategic Plan over the next couple of years.

Additionally, USHE is in the process of collaborating with the University of Utah to leverage the [New Leadership Academy curriculum](#) to support efforts to build Board and System leadership capacity on equity, diversity, and inclusion.