

NEWSLETTER

September 2008

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

It's back-to-school time, and across the country, SSI states are seeing a new crop of Scholars start high school, and are preparing to introduce thousands of 8th graders to the value of a rigorous education. In the last several months, SSI has learned more about the value of that education from two equally important sources: the real world and research.



Terese Rainwater

In late April SSI hosted the National Summit on Academic Rigor and Relevance in Boston, with the goal of examining the role and effectiveness of the business community in driving national education reform conversations and discussing policy efforts to increase academic rigor and to improve academic relevance in high school. In attendance were teams from 36 states and territories (including Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Guam, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virgin Islands, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming). "Teams" is not a euphemism. State participants didn't come to Boston to listen passively to keynote speakers but to work together. And they worked hard, convening each day to discuss the real-world challenges in their states and possible solutions. Thanks to such discussions, they're making SSI and the principles behind it a working reality in their states – an impressive accomplishment.

Equally impressive were the presentations by plenary speakers, including Leon Lederman, Nobel laureate in physics and resident scholar at the Illinois Math and Science Academy; Charles Kolb, president of the Committee for Economic Development; and Roy Romer, former governor of Colorado and superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, now head of the Strong American Schools initiative. Lorena Riffo Jenson, chair of the Utah Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, headed up a panel on rigor and relevance that included Belle Wheelan, president of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; Mark Milliron, CEO of Catalyze Learning International; and Phyllis Hudecki, executive director of the Oklahoma Business and Education Coalition. To hear what the plenary speakers said and to read about the summit, visit our website, where we've posted the proceedings, along with video clips of the summit presentations.

The main take-away from the summit: SSI's work is essential. And that finding was underlined by recent research by SSI evaluator Karen Paulson, a senior associate at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. Paulson found that SSI positively influences student plans to take a rigorous curriculum in high school, as well as positively influencing adult stakeholders (counselors, parents, teachers, business participants) regarding their perspective on the importance of the SSI core course of study – more evidence that as we head back to school, SSI is the right path to choose.

And as we show on the following pages – which report on SSI state partnership news from the last several months, as well as their plans for the future – it's a path being chosen by more and more students. As kids head back to school, SSI states are expanding their programs to more schools and districts and providing more students with the information and opportunity to become State Scholars. We look forward to an exciting year.

One bit of sad news for us at SSI: our coworker Christian Martinez, who has been the State Scholars program coordinator since its inception at WICHE, is leaving to take a job at McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning), where he'll be senior consultant for development. We'll greatly miss his professionalism, his creativity and his fantastic sense of humor. We wish him the very best.

What's Coming Up**Publications:**

SSI Summit proceedings;
Why Foreign Language brief.

Events/Presentations:

Sept. 12, ACT;
Sept. 29, Wyoming School Improvement Conference;
Oct. 17-18, Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media;
Oct. 22-25, Future Farmers of America;
Nov. 14, The Education Trust.

State News Round-up

This year, SSI state partnerships have been highly active, implementing programs in new schools and districts as well as graduating a slew of Scholars. Here's the latest news from nine SSI states.

★ ARIZONA

Arizona recently did an SSI headcount (a school and district count, too), and the results were impressive. The total number of participating SSI districts is now 16, with eight of them new to the program this year. The number of 8th and 9th grade Scholar presentations given was 745 – with a whopping 21,543 students receiving information. But perhaps most impressive was the number of Scholar graduates: 530, making up 30 percent of the students in Scholars districts.

★ ARKANSAS

The state has a strong and long-standing Scholars program. This year, at one high school alone – El Dorado – 69 graduating seniors were recognized as Arkansas Scholars. At a May 22 reception and awards ceremony at the South Arkansas Arts Center, each student was presented with a certificate of achievement and a red honor cord to wear at commencement. The reception was sponsored by the Union County Community Foundation, the El Dorado Education Foundation, and the El Dorado Chamber of Commerce. Earlier in the year, a reception was held to recognize the next two generations of scholars: 225 El Dorado High School sophomores and juniors were honored.

★ KENTUCKY

There's good news for Kentucky Scholars: the initiative has entered into a partnership with the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS), which will focus on engaging community college leaders alongside district school officials and influential employers to implement the Kentucky Scholars Initiative in regions served by the 16 KCTCS colleges. For KCTCS a broadened opportunity to reach students with messages about college-going, rigorous course work, and job preparation is a sizeable benefit. In turn, KCTCS is exploring how it might provide some form of scholarship support to students who graduate as Kentucky Scholars. Additionally, school districts that have not been able to participate in Kentucky Scholars due to a shortage of teachers in key subjects will now be able to tap the teaching resources of their local community colleges. The Kentucky Department of Education will continue to be a Kentucky Scholars partner, matching the KCTCS grant with \$100,000 in support.

★ MASSACHUSETTS

Senior awards night at Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School was a big night for Massachusetts State Scholars: 51 seniors who had fulfilled their contract to graduate as Scholars were recognized. The students

had maintained at least a 3.0 GPA while taking a challenging curriculum of core courses all through their four years at Assabet Valley. The graduates were presented with plaques, a medallion on a ribbon to be worn over their gown at graduation, and a gift card. Throughout the year, several events were staged for State Scholars students only, including a miniconference with guest speakers. "We want the students who have agreed to maintain high standards to know that they are appreciated and to have additional opportunities to see how those higher-level courses will reap benefits, particularly financially, in the long run," said Principal Mary Jo Nawrocki.



51 seniors graduating as Scholars at Assabet Valley in Massachusetts, at the school's senior awards night.

★ MISSISSIPPI

As summer draws to an end, activities are picking up for Mississippi Scholars. After adding 10 new school districts during the 2007-2008 school year, the program is on track to add 10 more this year (from two districts in 2003, it has grown to over 45 school districts in 2008). Students are rising to the challenge, preparing themselves for success after high school graduation. This school year, some 3,000 high school seniors from 70 high schools earned the prestigious Mississippi Scholars medallion. In 2004 the two pilot school districts – Hattiesburg and Indianola – graduated 24 Scholars; this year those two schools saw 150 Scholars recognized.

Other districts are also hard at work. West Jones High School in Jones County had 55 percent of the senior class graduate as Scholars. Laurel and Jones County, now in its fourth year with the program, had 226 Scholars – close to half the graduating class. This year, 21 students from West Point High School graduated as Scholars: they were honored by West Point Mayor Scott Ross, with two graduates receiving \$250 scholarships from Southern Ionics. Additionally, four students from Kossuth High School received \$500 scholarships from the CARE Community Foundation. Lincoln County honored 165 Scholar graduates this year and awarded scholarships to 34 students, totaling \$38,500.

★ MISSOURI

Earlier this year Show-Me Scholars launched SSI in Kansas City, at Center Middle School. Eighth-grade students, parents, and teachers, as well as business and government leaders, joined together to initiate the program. Governor Matt Blunt said



Center High School graduate Reggie Stockman talks to Center Middle School students about the importance of taking challenging courses.



Cynthia Kramer from the SCOPE/St. Louis Science Center brought hands-on science materials to the Show-Me Scholars launch in Kansas City.

that success is down the road less traveled and praised the Show-Me Scholars program for opening up that path. "It's a great program and a great example of the Chamber of Commerce's ability to reach out and work with people all across our state to make our state a place of better prosperity and a better place to live and work and raise a family." Missouri Chamber President and CEO Dan Mehan told the

students, "You are what this is all about. You should be proud of the fact that you are leaders in a program that can greatly impact your achievement."

Other speakers honed in on SSI's real-world advantages. Greg Graves, CEO of engineering firm Burns & McDonnell, which will be working closely with the

school, providing mentors for the students, noted that the world's problems, such as poverty and global warming, "are going to be solved by the scientists, engineers, doctors, lawyers, and most importantly, by the teachers of tomorrow. Those people didn't get there by taking study hall while they were in high school. They got there by having taken the absolute toughest classes that are available."



An engineer from Burns & McDonnell talks to a Center Middle School student about his job during the Show-Me Scholars launch in Kansas City.

In other news Missouri has recently passed alternative certification for teachers and secured funding for equipping more classrooms with computers and technology advances. And Show-Me Scholars has also helped bring education issues, like the importance of Scholars and METS (Math, Engineering, Technology and Science), to the attention of those running for public office in upcoming races.

★ NEW HAMPSHIRE

The New Hampshire Scholars Initiative continues to build momentum across the state. It added four new school districts last year, bringing the state total to 10. In their first year the six pilot schools graduated 72 students as Scholars; this June, at



14 New Hampshire Scholars from Winnisquam Regional High School (shown here with some of their business partners and faculty).

those same six pilot schools, 104 seniors were recognized.

Just some examples: Winnisquam Regional High School increased its Scholars number from two to 14 – all of whom received scholarship book awards or laptops from participating business partners. Belmont High School's total rose from six to 26; and Kingswood Regional High School increased its Scholar ranks from four to 26. New Hampshire's four new SSI districts recognized 41 Scholars in their first year, bringing the state total to 145. Students were recognized at various senior award nights at the beginning of June, and many also received scholarships from local business partners.



Some of New Hampshire's 2008 Scholars from Stevens High School, after being presented with their medals at an award luncheon.

★ TENNESSEE

Sumner County graduated its first Tennessee Scholars in May of this year. Twenty-one outstanding young men and women fulfilled the requirements of the program. In an effort to encourage more Sumner County students to become Scholars, these students were offered full tuition scholarships to Volunteer State Community College. And thanks to a new program called Educate and Grow Sumner County, this incentive will be a reality for future Sumner County graduates for an indefinite number of years. To receive the scholarship, students must meet Scholars requirements, as well as maintaining a GPA of 2.5 or higher; do 40 hours of community service during high school; and maintain a 95 percent attendance rate during the last year of high school, with no out-of-school suspensions during the last two years.

On June 16, 2008, the Sumner County Commission passed a resolution to provide \$500,000 in seed money for the Educate and Grow Sumner County scholarships. COMPASS, the nonprofit organization that currently



Tennessee Scholars from Merrol Hyde Magnet School at senior awards night in May, with Len Silverman, director of Huntington Learning Center (right); and Mike Fussell, Sumner County School Board, Paul Goode, Sumner County commissioner, State Representative Debra Maggart and Kara Arnold, executive director of COMPASS (left).



administers Tennessee Scholars for Sumner County Schools, will oversee the implementation and operation of the new program. "Public education opportunities are a key component in recruiting companies and families to Middle Tennessee," said Sumner County Commissioner Paul Goode, who proposed the program. "Sumner County now has an option that encourages our high school students to set goals, stay out of trouble, and strive to do better. The economic development departments and local realtors now have a new and impressive tool, almost guaranteeing companies and families will take a second look at Sumner County. Sumner County can now boast, 'We're the only county in middle Tennessee that will educate your kids and workers K-14'."

★ UTAH

Utah Scholars who've set their sites on college got a big boost this year. In the spring of 2008, the Utah State Board of Regents was designated by Utah Governor Jon M. Huntsman, Jr., as the state agency to apply for and administer College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) funds, in response to the request for proposals issued by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education. The board – the fiscal agent for the State Scholars Initiative grant, which is being implemented by the Utah K-16 Alliance – had one overriding goal: to dramatically increase the percentage of Pell-eligible students in Utah who qualify for and receive federal Academic Competitiveness Grants (ACGs) from 12.8 percent (2006-2007) to 35 percent by 2010.

On August 14 the board was notified by the U.S. Department of Education that Utah's College Access Challenge Grant application had been approved for 2008 funding. The state can expect to receive \$866,000 in federal funds over the next two years to implement a variety of college access projects.

The board plans to use a good portion of these funds to sustain SSI activities in targeted high school feeder systems. Specifically, the board will use approximately one-third of the funds for intensive implementation of the Utah Scholars Initiative in 20 urban high schools with high populations of low-income students, in order to help students complete SSI's rigorous course of study – because doing so will make them academically eligible for ACGs. The board is thrilled to be awarded this new grant and delighted that the funds will play a critical role in sustaining SSI in Utah.

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STATE SCHOLARS: PARTICIPATING STATES AND CONTACTS

- ★ **ARIZONA**
www.azacademicscholars.org
- ★ **ARKANSAS**
www.arkansascholars.org
- ★ **CONNECTICUT**
www.ctscholars.org/intro.htm
- ★ **INDIANA**
www.indianacore40scholars.org
- ★ **KENTUCKY**
www.kyscholars.com
- ★ **LOUISIANA**
www.louisianascholars.org
- ★ **MARYLAND**
www.mbrt.org/scholars
- ★ **MASSACHUSETTS**
www.mastatescholars.org
- ★ **MICHIGAN**
www.michiganscholars.org
- ★ **MISSISSIPPI**
www.mississippischolars.org
- ★ **MISSOURI**
www.showmescholars.com
- ★ **NEBRASKA**
www.wiche.edu/statescholars
- ★ **NEW HAMPSHIRE**
www.nhscholars.org
- ★ **NEW JERSEY**
www.wiche.edu/statescholars
- ★ **NEW MEXICO**
www.wiche.edu/statescholars
- ★ **OKLAHOMA**
www.obecinfo.com/scholars.php
- ★ **RHODE ISLAND**
www.wiche.edu/statescholars
- ★ **SOUTH DAKOTA**
www.doe.sd.gov/statescholars/index.asp
- ★ **TENNESSEE**
www.tennesseescholars.org
- ★ **UTAH**
www.utahscholars.org/
- ★ **VIRGINIA**
www.vacareereducationfoundation.org
- ★ **WASHINGTON**
www.wiche.edu/statescholars
- ★ **WEST VIRGINIA**
www.educationalalliance.org/StateScholars/StateScholars.asp
- ★ **WYOMING**
www.wyomingscholars.com

Nineteen states currently participate in SSI. These states have received federal funds and have operated SSI projects in their states, or they have completed their SSI projects and remain within the SSI network. Five additional states previously were funded and operated and concluded SSI projects: Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, Rhode Island, and Washington.