

STATE SCHOLARS INITIATIVE



STATE SCHOLARS INITIATIVE 2007 YEAR IN REVIEW

State Scholars Initiative 2007 Year in Review

“Connecticut State Scholars is a model program for changing expectations and results in our schools. It’s a win-win situation – students who take on this challenge will graduate from high school with the tools and knowledge they need to be winners.”

– Shelly Saczynski
Director, Economic and
Community Development
The United Illuminating
Company



“Excellence characterizes a school or college that sets high expectations and goals for all learners, then tries in every way possible to help students reach them. Excellence characterizes a society that has adopted these policies, for it will then be prepared through the education and skill of its people to respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing world.”

– *A Nation at Risk*, April 1983

Twenty-five years ago this April, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, which was created by the United States Department of Education, issued a historic report on the quality of education in the United States. The report, *A Nation at Risk*, produced by some of our nation’s top education thinkers and practitioners, put forth a sobering warning that, even a quarter century later, continues to ring true: our nation faces increasing competition from better-educated, highly skilled workers in other countries around the world, and signs point to large numbers of U.S. students being unprepared to succeed in college, and the workplace.

The importance of properly preparing today’s students is perhaps greater now than ever before. In fact, data show that 70 percent of the 30 fastest-growing jobs will require an education beyond high school and that 40 percent of all new jobs will require at least an associate’s degree.¹ At the same time, however, U.S. students continue to fall short when measured against their international peers. When it comes to high school math proficiency, for example, the U.S. ranked 24th out of 29 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries studied in 2005;

THE SSI CORE COURSE OF STUDY

| Courses | Years in High School |
|---|----------------------|
| <i>English</i> English I, English II, English III, English IV | 4 |
| <i>Math</i> Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II | 3 |
| <i>Science</i> Biology, Chemistry, Physics | 3 |
| <i>Social Studies</i> Chosen from U.S. History World History World Geography Economics Government | 3.5 |
| <i>Languages</i> Language other than English | 2 |

and while the U.S. boasts the highest average number of years of educational attainment (almost 14), it also has one of the lowest rates for high school graduation, according to a 2007 OECD report.²

How did the authors of *A Nation at Risk* recommend these problems be addressed? For starters, they called for state and local high school graduation requirements to be strengthened so that all students take four years of English and three years each of math, science, and social studies; those planning to do postsecondary work should also take two years of a foreign language.³ “Whatever the student’s educational or work objectives,” the authors stated, this course of study “is the foundation of success for the after-school years and, therefore, forms the core of the modern curriculum.”⁴

The State Scholars Initiative (SSI), administered by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), has a similar vision. That is why SSI has made it a central part of its mission to ensure that today’s students can meet the demands of the modern global economy. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), SSI brings successful businesspeople into classrooms across member states to act as role models for students and to talk directly and frankly about the types of skills needed to be successful adults. In particular, businesspeople working through SSI encourage students to complete the State Scholars Core Course of Study (shown in the box on p. 2). This course of study, patterned after the one outlined in *A Nation at Risk*, creates a standard for what a rigorous high school education should look like.

Over the past several years, SSI has made tremendous strides in bringing the message to students about the importance of taking the SSI Core Course of Study. Member states have made significant progress in embedding these expectations into state, district, and school-level policies and practices.

This year-in-review publication highlights some of SSI’s key achievements in 2007, including:

1. SSI success in new member states.
2. Continuing success in SSI veteran states.
3. The latest data on SSI’s impact on business community participants and integration with state and national education policy initiatives.
4. A look ahead to SSI’s National Summit on Academic Rigor and Relevance and student data collection efforts.



“The [Missouri] Show-Me Scholars Initiative focuses on coursework, which studies show is a more accurate predictor of student success than grades, test scores, or class rank, especially among minority students.”

– Daniel P. Mehan
President
Missouri Chamber
of Commerce and Industry

SSI STATE PARTNERS, 2007

| | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| Arizona | Nebraska* |
| Arkansas | New Hampshire** |
| Connecticut | New Jersey |
| Indiana | Oklahoma |
| Kentucky | Rhode Island |
| Louisiana* | South Dakota** |
| Maryland | Tennessee |
| Massachusetts* | Utah* |
| Michigan | Virginia* |
| Mississippi | West Virginia* |
| Missouri* | Wyoming** |

In 2007, 22 states participated in SSI, in that they received funds and operated SSI projects in their states, or they completed their SSI projects and remained within the SSI network: Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming. WICHE is responsible for providing technical assistance, monitoring, oversight, and cost reimbursement to the SSI projects in these states. Two additional states previously were funded and operated and concluded SSI projects: New Mexico and Washington.

** State joined SSI in March 2006*

*** State joined SSI in November 2006*



New States Bring New Energy to SSI

In 2006 WICHE welcomed 10 new states – Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming – into the SSI network, bringing the number of active SSI states to 22 (see the box at left for a complete list of active SSI states). Each state received up to \$300,000 over a two-year period to begin implementing the initiative. This money, funded through OVAE, is administered by WICHE to help establish permanent, statewide initiatives that involve businesspeople and other community leaders and are designed to encourage all students to take the SSI Core Course of Study.

Throughout 2007, each of these new SSI state members were busy ramping up their initiatives, reaching out to students, parents, businesses, teachers, counselors, and other education leaders, and spreading the word about the importance of taking a rigorous course of study in high school. Here, we report on just a few of the major strides members made over the past year.

Massachusetts

Conducted through a partnership of the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, the Massachusetts Department of Education, and the Massachusetts Secondary School Administrators' Association, the Massachusetts State Scholars Initiative incorporates the SSI Core Course of Study into its requirements for students who wish to become Massachusetts State Scholars. Scholars must earn a cumulative 3.0 grade point average over their high school career, maintain a 3.0 GPA as a senior, participate in a work-based or service-learning experience, and meet school disciplinary and attendance standards.

The work-based/service-learning experience represents an innovative addition to the SSI program and demonstrates how individual SSI states can tailor their programs to meet the priorities of their citizens. It is designed to build applied skills that complement the academic knowledge gained in the classroom. It is also designed to help students understand the relevance of these skills in the workplace and community. Work-based experiences can include internships or jobs in various industries, while service learning involves students applying their academic studies to engage and help address problems in their schools and communities.

Throughout 2007 Massachusetts Scholars worked hard to spread the message about the importance of completing

these rigorous academic and other requirements. Among other accomplishments, the initiative:

- ★ Made presentations regarding SSI to more than 2,500 students.
- ★ Trained more than 80 volunteers to conduct SSI presentations.
- ★ Began recognizing graduating seniors with medallions and certificates if they completed the State Scholars requirements.
- ★ Contacted more than 1,200 companies and 700 community leaders to inform them about SSI activities.
- ★ Created the *School Implementation Manual* for new SSI schools and the *Program Management Manual* for regional partners.
- ★ Developed a process to form local business-education roundtables.

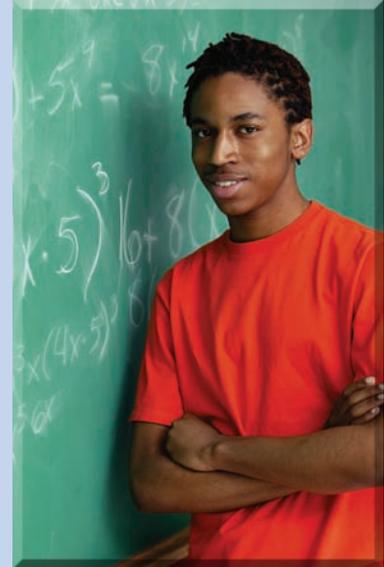
For more information, visit: www.mastatescholars.org.

South Dakota

The South Dakota State Scholars Initiative is administered by the South Dakota Chamber of Commerce and Industry in coordination with the South Dakota Department of Education. The initiative builds state-level partnerships between the business and education communities to encourage middle and high school students to excel academically and to take the SSI Course of Study. In addition, South Dakota Scholars are required to take two additional credits within their “career cluster interest.” These added credits are intended to get students thinking about their careers, to broaden or further inform their vocational interests, and to give them a significant head start on planning the types of preparation and coursework they need to be successful in college.

To date, the South Dakota program has:

- ★ Identified four high schools that have agreed to be initial SSI sites and support the effort to have every graduating student complete the most rigorous set of coursework possible.
- ★ Planned to add six to eight new school districts in early 2008.
- ★ Recruited 11 businesses that are providing presentations to students and schools.
- ★ Delivered presentations and SSI materials to more than 1,300 students.



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The *Wyoming State Scholars Initiative* is asking guidance counselors to put together a “wish list” of items that businesses could provide. It’s also asking the counselors to find out what students want in a potential mentor.



**SSI
INNOVATIONS**



The Nebraska Scholars Program used 8th grader focus groups to identify key student perceptions that, in turn, were used to shape a communication strategy.

“Data show that a rigorous program of study is the best indicator that a student will enroll in college and successfully graduate on time.”

– David Doty
Assistant Commissioner and
Director of Policy Studies
Utah System of Higher Education

- ★ Completed significant design work toward creating a comprehensive, integrated four-year career plan, based on student-selected career clusters.

For more information, visit: www.doe.sd.gov/statescholars.

Utah

Since joining the SSI network in March 2006, the Utah Scholars program has implemented the SSI initiative in nine districts. By recruiting support from more than 20 businesses throughout the state, the program has been able to generate additional financial support and to deliver presentations about the SSI Core Course of Study to almost 2,400 students. In February 2007, thanks to key support from the Salt Lake City Chamber of Commerce and individual businesses, the Utah State Legislature appropriated \$500,000 in one-time funds for fiscal year 2007-08 to sustain and expand the program beyond the period of the OVAE federal grant.

The Utah Legislature continued its strong support for the program. Last year, senators began work on SB180, which will give a \$1,000 scholarship to every high school graduate who completes a rigorous core course of study with a minimum grade point average (the bill was recently passed and is awaiting the governor’s signature). The SB180 course requirements match those of the Utah Scholar’s Initiative. Students will be able to use the scholarship at any Utah public institution of higher education. Furthermore, students completing the prescribed course of study with a 3.5 grade point average and scoring at least a 26 on the ACT test will qualify for a merit scholarship equal to 75 percent of tuition for two years of college at any Utah public higher education institution.

In addition to garnering legislative support for a rigorous education, Utah Scholars has also helped influence state education policy by supporting a proposal to increase core high school graduation requirements from 15 to 18 units by adding an additional unit of English, math, and science. The new requirements, which take effect for the graduating class of 2011, were adopted by the Utah State Board of Education.

Over the past year, Utah Scholars also worked aggressively to inform key stakeholders about the program and to recognize those students who met SSI goals. Some key accomplishments include:

- ★ Delivering SSI training to more than 620 school and district faculty and staff.
- ★ Reaching out to more than 200 business leaders and 120 higher education officials to spread the word about the initiative.
- ★ Holding the program's first recognition banquet in May 2007, bringing together parents, business leaders, and other guests to honor the 160 students who successfully completed the SSI Core Course of Study.

For more information, visit: www.utahscholars.org.

Virginia

Some 36 schools in 13 districts participate in Commonwealth Scholars of Virginia, which joined the SSI network in March 2006. Over the past year, more than 2,700 students viewed SSI presentations, and more than 60 new business presenters and facilitators were trained. These presentations and trainings are now having an impact on students in participating schools. In fact, over the past year alone, five separate awards ceremonies were held to recognize those graduating seniors who completed a rigorous course of study. In total, 870 of 2,763 graduating seniors were awarded medallions recognizing their scholarship and achievement.

In addition, the Dickenson County School System was recently awarded an Appalachian Regional Commission Flex E Grant to implement a pilot Commonwealth Scholars Program for 8th graders. The Flex E Grant Program, designed to help rural communities jumpstart their local economies, provides grants to help address technical assistance, leadership, and civic capacity needs. In November the Dickenson County Chamber of Commerce featured Commonwealth Scholars at their annual banquet, which was attended by more than 300 business and community leaders.

For more information, visit: www.vcef.net.

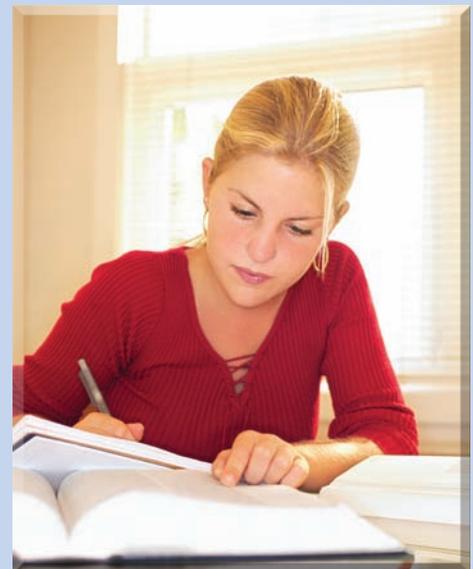
Veteran SSI States Continue to Succeed

While SSI's newest members made significant strides over the past year, its veteran states have been equally productive. The following are just a few of these states' accomplishments:

- ★ *Maryland*. Maryland was one of the first states to participate in the State Scholars Initiative, launching the Maryland Scholars program in 2003 in two school

“New Hampshire Scholars helps young people attain one of the most important skills they’ll use in work and life: the ability to tackle challenging work and to learn what they need to know to do it.”

– Lyonel B. Tracy
Commissioner
New Hampshire Department
of Education



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Arkansas Scholars is engaging four higher education institutions to provide financial incentives to students who complete rigorous coursework and graduate as Arkansas Scholars.



districts. The Maryland Business Roundtable for Education (MBRT) leads the initiative, in partnership with the governor and the state superintendent of schools. MBRT funded a statewide expansion of Maryland Scholars after the original SSI grant was exhausted in 2005. Today, the program reaches 23 of the 24 school districts in the state. About 2,500 volunteers have participated, reaching 83,000 8th and 9th graders in more than 200 schools. MBRT has also collected three years of course completion data from its pilot districts, which show significant increases in student completion of rigorous coursework – particularly among low income and minority students.

- ★ *Mississippi.* The Mississippi Scholars Initiative was launched in 2003 with two pilot districts. Today, there are Mississippi Scholars programs in 37 school districts across the state, at 59 high schools and 51 middle schools. Over 200 local businesses are involved in Mississippi Scholars, and volunteers have made presentations to more than 21,000 students. Last year, nearly 1,700 students were recognized for completing the Mississippi Scholars Course of Study.
- ★ *Tennessee.* Tennessee Scholars, implemented in 2003, requires students to take the SSI Core Course of Study, provide 20 hours of community service, and have a 95 percent school attendance rate. The program is available in 63 school districts and has set a goal of 100 percent district participation by 2012. Most recently, the Alcoa Foundation awarded a \$150,000 grant to support the work of the Tennessee Scholars Initiative.

SSI Impacts More Than Just Students

For the first time since the program was launched, SSI is gathering data to help measure its impact beyond the classroom.

“The world today is more competitive than it has ever been, and our young people need to be prepared for that. They need to be challenged, and I’m convinced the majority of them are eager to meet that challenge. Programs like Arizona Scholars can be incredibly helpful in providing added incentives and support for these students.”

– Dave Howell
Government and
Community Relations
Wells Fargo

The data, developed using a variety of surveys and interviews, are beginning to shed light on the effect the program is having not just on students but also on the businesspeople involved in the initiative, as well as the state and national policy environments in which SSI operates. Overall, the data indicate a significant impact in terms of increased business community involvement in education and the promotion of a rigorous course of study in high school.

SSI's Impact on the Business Community

In the 22 SSI member states active during 2007, an estimated 540 business organizations have been engaged at the state and local levels. Almost three quarters of these are private-sector businesses, with the remainder made up of a mix of public agencies, civic and fraternal organizations, chambers of commerce, and nonprofit entities. Evidence indicates that the longer states are members, the more businesspeople they are able to recruit to visit classrooms and speak to students regarding the importance of taking challenging coursework in high school.

Surveys of businesses that participate in SSI indicate that the initiative truly engages businesspeople in the process of educating students today. For instance, survey data indicate that:

- ★ Businesspeople are nearly unanimous in their belief in the important role business leaders can and should play in conveying workplace expectations directly to students, teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators.
- ★ Business participants almost unanimously agree that the SSI Core Course of Study properly reflects the level of rigor students need to be successful in college and in the workplace.
- ★ Businesspeople agree that every high school student should have access to a rigorous course of study that includes science, technology, and math.
- ★ Nine out of 10 business participants involved in SSI at the local level would like to continue their involvement with SSI in the future.⁵

State and National Policy Coordination

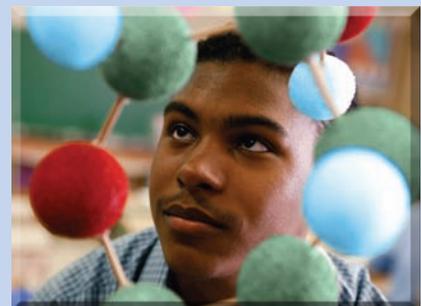
SSI state partners are making connections with other state and national education policy initiatives, strengthening the impact and extending the reach of the SSI program by

“The State Scholars Initiative, in challenging students to take more rigorous coursework, encourages students to take that critical first step that will ultimately benefit both the students and the state’s employers.”

– Deborah Herndon
President
West Virginia American Water



New Hampshire Scholars is connecting SSI with the state-wide virtual high school to offer classes that may not be available in some schools.





“Becoming a Wyoming Scholar will provide further opportunities for our young people to access higher education or get a better start on a fulfilling career. This program really throws the door open for more college aid and more career options.”

– Jim McBride
State Superintendent of
Public Instruction
Wyoming

identifying common objectives, which can be integrated into other initiatives and shared with their constituencies. For instance, at the state level, SSI partners are:

- ★ Participating in statewide efforts to develop and codify default curricula and ensuring that an appropriate level of academic rigor is included.
- ★ Linking with state policy efforts to expand career and technical education options.
- ★ Working with state economic and workforce development efforts.
- ★ Contributing to statewide P-16 or P-20 education initiatives, which attempt to ensure the development of seamless and appropriate expectations for students as they move through all phases of the education system.
- ★ Working to change high school graduation requirements, including moving from a GPA basis to a rigor basis for determining eligibility for graduation.
- ★ Working to help restructure the high school day and improve course delivery options.

SSI partners are also involved in national initiatives, including:

- ★ Achievement Counts.
- ★ Achieving the Dream.
- ★ American Diploma Project.
- ★ Gaining Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP).
- ★ National Commission on Community Service.
- ★ National Governors Association high school reform efforts.
- ★ National Math and Science Initiative.
- ★ Partnership for 21st Century Skills.
- ★ States’ Career Cluster Initiative.
- ★ Upward Bound.

Looking Ahead

SSI entered 2008 in a strong position to continue growing and strengthening its state network and to reach out to state and district policymakers as well as business and education leaders from across the country. The momentum the initiative has gained promises to help ensure that students have access to, and are encouraged to take, the SSI Core Course of Study.

To capitalize on this momentum, the initiative will hold the National Summit on Academic Rigor and Relevance, which

will take place on April 29-30, 2008, in Boston. The purpose of this invitational summit is twofold:

1. To examine the role and effectiveness of the business community in driving national education reform conversations.
2. To discuss policy reform efforts to increase academic rigor and to improve academic relevance in high school.

As of mid-February, 19 of the 22 active SSI states had already committed to send a six-member team to the summit – a demonstration of the strength of the SSI network. Each team, which will be chaired by a local business leader, will include a variety of key education and policy leaders, such as: state higher education executive officers, chief state school officers, governor’s education policy advisors, state legislators, principals and superintendents, career and technical education state directors, SSI state directors, foundation leaders, and state high school curriculum directors. The summit promises to provide an exciting opportunity for these leaders to share insights and compare experiences, with an eye to strengthening SSI’s work in the coming years. For the SSI states not in attendance, a detailed follow-up report will be published this summer.

In addition to convening its national summit, SSI has positioned itself well for the future by working hard to tackle the challenging process of organizing and collecting data to determine the impact of the SSI program on student outcomes. Such data will play an important role in helping SSI partner states understand which aspects of their programs are most effective in promoting change in both student course-taking and achievement.

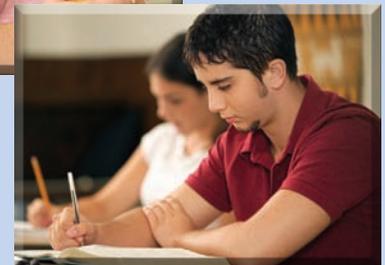
Over the past two years, WICHE has worked to build strong relationships with states, SSI state directors, and state- and district-level data personnel, with the goal of forging an extensive collection network that produces data that are:

1. Defensible.
2. Internally consistent and comparable across states and districts.
3. Understandable to experts and lay people alike.

The program appears to be well on its way to meeting these goals. In fact, the initiative has been credited with creating an environment that “allows states and districts to figure out difficult data use questions that are left unanswered by other programs” and for being “at the forefront of encouraging



The Oklahoma Scholars Project is working to pool local school district resources to support a shared physics instructor, helping to ensure students have access to physics as part of a rigorous academic experience.





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The *Missouri Show-Me Scholars* is involving chambers of commerce at the state and local levels and connecting classroom presenters to students based on their early career interests.

states to consider student data and [data] use that will be of paramount importance for informed decision making.”⁶

Thanks to these efforts, and to the support of OVAE and the hard work of its state network partners, SSI remains on solid footing. State Scholars expects to continue growing and improving itself, as well as helping to prepare more students to meet what the authors of *A Nation at Risk* correctly called “the challenges of a rapidly changing world.”

Endnotes

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook 2006-07* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor), accessed 12/19/05 from <www.bls.gov/oco/>.

² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators 2005” (Paris, France: OECD, 2005), accessed 2/26/08 at <www.oecd.org/document/34/0,3343,en_2649_39263238_35289570_1_1_1_1,00.html>; OECD, “Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators 2007” (Paris, France: OECD, 2007), accessed 2/26/08 from <www.oecd.org/document/30/0,3343,en_2649_39263238_39251550_1_1_1_1,00.html>.

³ National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, April 1983), accessed 3/4/08 from <www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>.

⁴ *Ibid.*, “Recommendations” section.

⁵ The Center for Governmental Studies at Northern Illinois University (NIU), *Goal One of the State Scholars Initiative, October 1, 2006 - September 30, 2007, Annual Report and Preliminary Findings* (DeKalb, Illinois: NIU, 2007).

⁶ National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, *Year Two Evaluation Report: State Scholars Initiative* (Boulder, CO: SSI, October 2007), 20.

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www.wiche.edu/statescholars