



# STATE SCHOLARS INITIATIVE

*A scholar  
today ...  
a success  
tomorrow!*



The **STATE SCHOLARS INITIATIVE** brings business leaders into the nation's classrooms, where they work with educators to motivate students to complete a rigorous course of study in high school – one that will give them a boost in college and/or in their careers.

In a knowledge-based economy, education beyond high school – whether that means college or a work-related training program – is essential. Students need a rigorous high school education if they're going to succeed after graduation, in school or in the workplace. Today, the State Scholars Initiative is helping thousands of students to strive for excellence and achieve it.

And now it's reaching out to help even more students – including those in your community.

## A high school diploma is no longer enough.

Businesses know it. Educators know it. And today, thanks to the State Scholars Initiative, students are finding out.

The State Scholars Initiative (SSI) is a national program that uses business leaders to encourage students to complete a rigorous course of study in high school, one that's patterned after the recommendations of the National Commission on Excellence in Education and other groups (see Table 1).

The partnering of business and education is critical. When businesspeople visit classrooms to talk to students directly about the importance of taking a rigorous course of study and how it will benefit them in work and life every day, they bring home for students the value of a strong education in a real-world, bottom-line way. That's a message all students need to hear, but one that's especially important for low-income students.



*"By encouraging students to take a more rigorous high school curriculum, we are fostering greater economic choice and individual responsibility."*

– Virginia Governor  
Timothy M. Kaine

*"The Scholars program inspires high school students to develop plans for their lives after graduation.... We were able to visualize the difference an education can make in the average salary of a person with a higher education."*

– Anna Hodges  
Mississippi Scholar and student at South Pike High

*"At Intel, we strongly believe that education is the key to a knowledge-based economy, innovation, and the future. The State Scholars Initiative is providing the venue for getting critical messages such as this out to tens of thousands of Arizona students, their parents, and teachers."*

– Shelly Esque  
Director of Public Affairs, Intel

**Table 1. SSI Core Course of Study**

COURSES	YEARS
English (English I, English II, English III, English IV)	4
Mathematics (Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II)	3
Science (Biology, Chemistry, Physics)	3
Social Studies (U.S. History, World History, World Geography, Economics, or Government)	3.5
Languages other than English (2 years of the same language)	2
<b>TOTAL CREDITS</b>	<b>15.5</b>

## Win/Win or Lose/Lose?

The State Scholars Initiative was created to address a particular reality: Our businesses and our economy are demanding more of workers – more skills, a more flexible knowledge base and, above all, a greater capacity to learn – than at any time in history. Our companies will require this, and the quick-changing global economy will demand it.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employees will need some education after high school – a bachelor's or associate's degree, generally – to qualify for most of the 20 fastest-growing occupations.<sup>1</sup> Even those individuals who don't go on to college will benefit from a strong academic background, as the training in many fields – from computer technology and auto mechanics – becomes increasingly complex.

The problem is: We're not preparing enough students to satisfy this demand. Shortages of workers with postsecondary training could range as high as 12 million by 2020.<sup>2</sup> A study published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2007 outlines why: while a high percentage of our population has had some postsecondary education (39 percent, compared to the OECD average of 26 percent), our high school graduation rate is one of the lowest. The U.S. ranks below the average for the 29 OECD and 19 European Union countries studied, with a 76 percent graduation rate, compared to 82 percent (OECD) and 87 percent (EU). It falls far behind global competitors like Japan and Korea (both 93 percent) and also doesn't measure up to countries like Slovenia (83 percent) and Hungary (84 percent).<sup>3</sup> The anticipated shortage of well-educated workers will only worsen in the next decades with the big wave of baby boomer retirements – unless we act now. If we don't act, everyone loses. But if we do act, students will win, and business and communities will win, too. SSI is working to make sure we all win.



## The Scholars Edge: Recent Research

There are real-world payoffs for students who take the Scholars Core Course of Study – and for the businesses encouraging them to do so. A long-term study by the U.S. Department of Education showed that students who succeeded in challenging courses were more likely to go on to college and earn degrees.<sup>4</sup> In addition, it found that the courses students took were a more accurate predictor of their success than grades, test scores, or class rank, particularly for minority students.

The future looks brighter for Scholars, as well. Scholars programs have been shown to motivate students to take more math and science courses. In addition, students who complete a rigorous curriculum like the Scholars Core Course of Study perform better on standardized tests. On the ACT, a rigorous curriculum gave students a boost of 2.2 points (out of a

possible total of 36), on average (see Figure 1). On the SAT, students who'd taken four years of English scored an average of 44 points higher on both the critical reading and writing tests than those who'd taken only three.<sup>5</sup>



Today, more students need to develop the Scholar's Edge. The ACT's "2007 National Report Score" found that just over half of the 1.3 million students in its most recent report (51 percent) took a rigorous "core" course of study; that's down from 57 percent in 2004.<sup>6</sup> In addition, only 23 percent were "college ready" – earning ACT scores indicating they were prepared for college-level work in four areas: English composition, algebra, biology, and social science.<sup>7</sup>

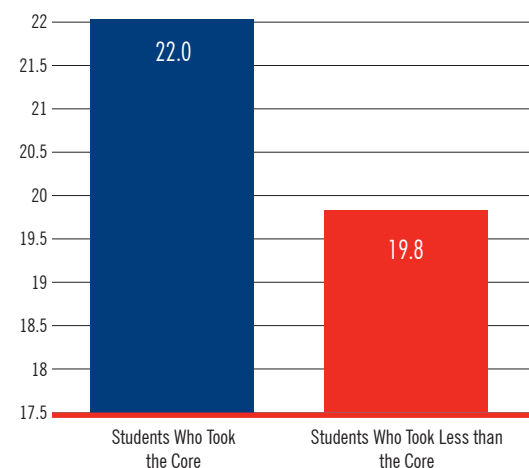
For students who make the effort, the rewards are substantial. According to "The Big Payoff," published by the U.S. Census Bureau, a solid education literally "pays off" – and its value is rising.<sup>8</sup> In 1975 college-degree holders had annual earnings 1.5 times those who had only high school diplomas; that number had risen to 1.8 by 1999. Those who had an associate's degree also had higher earnings. Meanwhile, those who'd never finished high school saw their relative earnings decline. Over the course of a lifetime, those who've earned a bachelor's degree make an average of \$900,000 more than those who stopped their education with high school; those with an associate's degree earn \$400,000 more. Other research has shown that even students who don't go to college do better if they've taken academically rigorous courses in high school.<sup>9</sup> One study indicates that for high school seniors, an improvement in math performance equals a significant boost in annual earnings.<sup>10</sup>

For the business community, and the community at large, the value of the State Scholars Initiative is clear. SSI helps young people attain one of the most important skills they'll use in work and life: the ability to tackle challenging work and learn what they need to know to do it. It creates stronger students, who are ready to master new information; more flexible employees, who are equipped to adapt to the evolving economy; and engaged citizens, who are more likely to be thoughtful and informed.

The link between academic achievement and prosperity – or lack of it – is a powerful one. A study of international variations in math and science education since the 1960s, reported in the International Monetary Fund's quarterly, found a clear correlation between increases in average test scores and national economic growth: in country after country, a boost in test performance was linked to a distinct rise in annual per capita GDP growth.<sup>11</sup> Another study forecasts a decline in U.S. per capita personal income if we don't move to educate all of our students well (Figure 2 shows the projected disparities in per capita income for three courses of action: sticking to the status quo; creating educational parity within states; and creating parity nationwide).<sup>12</sup>

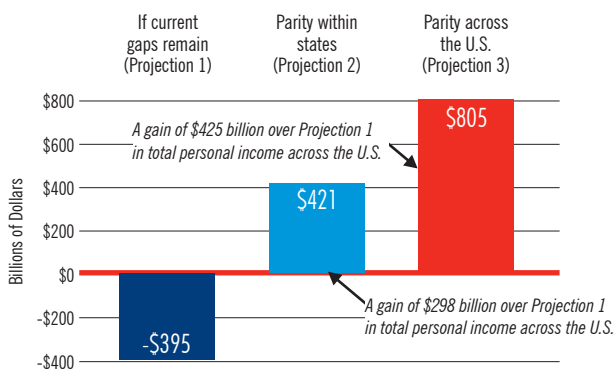
In short, for students who want to do well in life, and for businesses and communities that want to prosper, a rigorous course of study in high school isn't an option; it's a necessity.

**Figure 1. Average ACT Scores by Level of Academic Preparation**



*Note:* ACT's "core curriculum" is the same as SSI's except that it has no language requirement.  
*Source:* ACT, "2007 National Score Report."

**Figure 2. Projected Changes in Personal Income per Capita, 2000 to 2020, Based on Three Assumptions**



*Source:* National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, November 2005.

## Nuts & Bolts: How SSI Works

The State Scholars Initiative is a national program with a local focus. Twenty-two states are currently involved in SSI, and each designs its own program to meet its particular needs, incorporating fundamental SSI precepts and the SSI Core Course of Study. Each SSI state has from two to four school districts participating in its first two years.

At the heart of each state program are local business-education partnerships that encourage students to take the SSI Core Course of Study and motivate them to succeed. Business leaders, along with members of civic organizations – such as chambers of commerce – work with local educators to create and implement the program in their communities.



Businesspeople visit middle school and high school classrooms and talk to students about why an academically challenging course of study is important and how it will help them down the line –

whether they go on to college or go straight to work. Students really respond to the opportunity to think about their education in relationship to their life goals.

Educators, businesspeople, and community leaders work together to motivate and support students, recognizing Scholar success at each step along the way. Local businesspeople engage Scholars with “power breakfasts,” tutoring sessions, and recognition ceremonies. In some states, colleges and universities provide incentives, offering scholarships and other financial assistance to eligible Scholars. The national SSI program administrator can help with ideas, resources, guidelines, and contacts with those in other states who’ve launched a program.

SSI is administered by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, based in Boulder, CO, and funded by the U.S. Department of Education under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 at \$6.6 million.<sup>13</sup> To find out more about what’s happening in your area, visit our Web site ([www.wiche.edu/statescholars](http://www.wiche.edu/statescholars)) or contact program director Terese Rainwater at [trainwater@wiche.edu](mailto:trainwater@wiche.edu) or (303) 541-0225.



*“We’re thrilled at the early results of the Maryland Scholars program, especially in the area of challenging those ‘mid-range’ students – the ones who might not otherwise have attempted higher level courses – to stretch themselves and tap into their potential. It’s working.”*

– Jacqueline C. Haas  
Harford County superintendent  
of schools

### Endnotes

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4. Clifford Adelman, *The Toolbox Revisited* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Education, 2006); also see Clifford Adelman, *Answers in the Tool Box* (same publisher, 1999).
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10. Sources cited by Eric A. Hanushek in “Why Quality Matters in Education,” *Finance and Development* (a quarterly journal of the International Monetary Fund) 42, no. 2 (June 2005), accessed 1/18/08 at <[www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2005/06/hanushek.htm](http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2005/06/hanushek.htm)>; sources include Casey B. Mulligan, “Galton versus the Human Capital Approach to Inheritance,” *Journal of Political Economy* 107, no. 6, part 2 (December 1999), S184-224; Richard Murnane, John B. Willett, Yves Duhaldeborde, and John H. Tyler, “How Important Are the Cognitive Skills of Teenagers in Predicting Subsequent Earnings?” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 19, no. 4 (Fall 2000), 547; Edward P. Lazear, “Teacher Incentives,” *Swedish Economic Policy Review* 10, no. 2 (2003), 179.
11. Hanushek, “Why Quality Matters in Education.”
12. National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, “Income of U.S. Workforce Projected to Decline if Education Doesn’t Improve,” Policy Alert (November 2005), accessed 1/18/2008 at <[http://www.highereducation.org/reports/pa\\_decline/index.shtml](http://www.highereducation.org/reports/pa_decline/index.shtml)>.
13. The State Scholars Initiative is currently funded at \$6.6 million. The work reported herein was supported under State Scholars Initiative, PR/Award Number (V051U050006), as administered by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education or the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

