



STATE SCHOLARS INITIATIVE



STATE SCHOLARS INITIATIVE
2006 YEAR IN REVIEW

a scholar today ... a success tomorrow!

“We are dedicated to the program to help provide education and workforce development. If we are successful, everyone wins: the students get well-paying jobs, the employers hire the skilled workers they need, and the economy as a whole benefits.”

– Roger Joyce, Vice President of Engineering at The Bilco Company, and a Connecticut State Scholars business partner



State Scholars Initiative 2006 Year in Review

It’s no secret that our children receive mixed messages about what it takes to succeed in the world, thanks to the complexity and turbulence of modern culture. That’s why it’s more important than ever for children to have good role models, individuals who will help them make the best possible choices for themselves and their future. This idea is the core of the State Scholars Initiative (SSI), which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) and administered by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE).

SSI brings successful businesspeople into member States’ classrooms to act as role models for students and to talk directly and frankly about the types of skills that are needed to compete effectively in the modern workplace. What is the central advice that these role models deliver to students? That in today’s world, it is critical for students to take a rigorous high school curriculum to properly prepare for work, college, and life.

There is good reason for encouraging students to take a rigorous curriculum. Studies by the U.S. Department of Education and others show a strong link between the academic intensity of students’ high school courses of study and postsecondary degree completion. In fact, academic intensity is a better predictor than students’ high school class rank when it comes to success in college, no matter where they start college or how many institutions they attend.

With the State Scholars Core Course of Study, SSI has identified what a rigorous high school curriculum should look like. When businesspeople visit classrooms, they talk to students about the importance of taking this curriculum. And when they discuss how a rigorous education benefits their employees in the workplace every day, these

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/1.0, World History/1.0, World Geography/1.0, Economics/0.5, Government/0.5	3.5
<i>Languages</i> Language other than English	2

businesspeople also emphasize for students the value of a strong education in a real-world, bottom-line way.

This year-in-review publication highlights some of SSI's key achievements in 2005-06, including:

1. SSI's growth into new States.
2. Success in spreading the message about the importance of a rigorous curriculum.
3. The impact of SSI efforts on individual students and State policies.

A Year of Growth

In March and November of 2006, WICHE brought new States into the SSI network, totaling 10 in all; this brings the number of SSI States to 24. To help implement the initiative, each State receives up to \$300,000 over a two-year period. This money, which is funded through OVAE, is administered by WICHE to provide seed money to create permanent, statewide initiatives and policies that encourage all students to take a rigorous high school curriculum.

The new SSI States include: Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Work in these States is already underway. Utah, for instance, has identified four school districts – Park City, Granite, Jordan, and Provo – that will participate in the Utah Scholars program, which promotes a curriculum that mirrors the SSI Core. Students who complete the curriculum will receive recognition when they graduate from high school, and the achievement will be indicated on their transcripts.

Spreading the Message

Over the past year, SSI's veteran member States – including Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Washington – continued working to connect students and schools with the business community and to spread the message about the importance of a rigorous course of study in high school for every student's future success.

Why is it so important to spread this message? Because many students find out too late that just making it through high school is not enough to get them started on a successful career. These students need to consistently hear – from parents, peers, teachers, counselors, and business-community role models – that just graduating is not enough.

SSI STATE PARTNERS

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

* State joined SSI in 2006.

“Besides preparing students to be competitive in a global society, the [Utah Scholars] program rounds them out, it broadens their perspective, it deepens and enhances their world view.”

– Utah Governor Jon Huntsman



“It still comes as a shock to many parents that high school grades are not automatic keys to college stardom and workforce success. For years we have relied on the notion that a ‘straight A’ student held the only ticket needed for a successful journey through college and career. Not so today. ‘Rigor’ and ‘relevance’ may seem like lofty terms to those outside education circles, but they are likely to be household words soon.”

– Polly Marquette, State Director of the Kentucky Scholars Initiative

To accomplish this goal, SSI member States reach out to a wide audience:

- ★ **Businesses:** SSI member States work through local organizations like chambers of commerce and business roundtables to connect with local business leaders and get them talking to students about the importance of a rigorous high school education. In just 10 SSI States, more than 800 businesses were involved in the program in 2006.
- ★ **Students and parents:** States organize parent forums and presentations to students by members of the business community about the importance of a rigorous high school curriculum.
- ★ **Teachers and guidance counselors:** States use a variety of training sessions, workshops, and presentations to inform teachers, administrators, and counselors about the SSI program and its benefits.

Some notable examples of member State efforts to spread the message about the SSI Core Course of Study include the following:

- ★ **Arkansas** used 210 businessperson presentations to reach 11,500 students. Since January 2003, approximately 36,000 students have seen the Arkansas Scholars presentation, presented by hundreds of local businesspeople in individual communities.
- ★ **Mississippi** organized 668 businessperson presentations, reaching close to 21,500 students.
- ★ **Kentucky** organized parent- and family-oriented presentations for more than 3,000 parents.
- ★ **Tennessee** recruited more than 300 businesses to work on SSI activities and presented numerous training sessions for counselors and teachers.

Sustainability and Success: SSI’s Impact on Students

By reaching out to students and spreading the message about the importance of a rigorous high school curriculum, the initiative has influenced individual choices made by thousands of students across the country. This impact will help sustain program efforts in the future, as participating students become role models for their peers. The following are just a few of the many successes that SSI States have achieved over the past 12 months.

Arizona

SSI's Arizona partner is the Arizona Business and Education Coalition (ABEC). Over the past year, ABEC spent considerable effort to reach as many students and staff as possible with information about the State's Arizona Academic Scholars program. To graduate as Arizona Academic Scholars, students must complete requirements that match the SSI Core Course of Study.

In 2006, more than 500 teachers, counselors, and administrators received presentations about the Arizona Academic Scholars program. Businesspeople also made presentations to more than 4,000 students – doubling the previous year's numbers. In addition, Arizona produced an Arizona Academic Scholar's DVD for a packet that presenters can take into schools. Scholar posters were designed, printed, and hung in school hallways to promote student interest. Also, students were encouraged to sign "Scholar contracts" and commit themselves to taking classes to meet Arizona Academic Scholar requirements.

Some results of ABEC's efforts include:

- ★ Significant increases in the number of students committing to the program or signing Scholar contracts.
- ★ Over 1,500 high school seniors were recognized at graduation as Arizona Academic Scholars in 2006 – a 50 percent increase over the previous year.
- ★ Districts have seen anywhere from a 20 to 38 percent increase in the number of seniors scheduled to be recognized as Arizona Academic Scholars.
- ★ Districts are proactively changing policies to encourage more students to become Scholars. One district, for instance, implemented a seven-hour school day so students would have more time to take Scholars courses, as well as electives.
- ★ ABEC used Scholars data and research to request that the Arizona State Board of Education make the Scholars Core Course of Study a permanent statewide diploma option and commit to revisiting the minimum requirements for graduation, in order to have them reflect a college- and career-preparatory course of study.

"Students who complete a rigorous course of study above the minimum graduation requirements will find great opportunities in the 21st century job market."

– Susan Carlson,
ABEC Executive Director



“We must create a legacy of wealth, something of value for future generations, and that means giving our kids the kind of education that can help them get a good job and have a good life.”

– Former Maryland Lieutenant Governor Michael Steele



Maryland

In partnership with State Superintendent of Schools Nancy Grasmick and Governor Robert Ehrlich, the Maryland Business Roundtable for Education (MBRT) administers the SSI-supported Maryland Scholars program. In 2003, Frederick County and Harford County were the first to pilot the Maryland Scholars program, and these districts can now provide solid data regarding the program’s overall impact. These data show impressive gains in the number of students graduating as Maryland Scholars and in the number completing algebra II and classes in chemistry, physics, and a foreign language – particularly among low-income and minority students. In fact, between 2003 and 2005:

- ★ 600 more students completed algebra II (100 percent more Hispanic students in Frederick County).
- ★ 400 more students completed chemistry (74 percent more low-income students in Harford County).
- ★ 220 more students completed physics (42 percent more low-income students in Frederick County).
- ★ 1,200 more students completed a fourth science credit (262 percent more African-American students in Harford County).
- ★ Frederick County became the first school district in Maryland to recognize its Maryland Scholars graduates. Close to 2,000 students (two-thirds of the 2006 graduating class) received a Maryland Scholars certificate.

“This presentation woke me up.”

– 9th grade Maryland student

These pilot district successes have fostered a contagious desire for other districts to take part in Maryland’s SSI program. Through MBRT’s speakers’ bureau, 2,000 volunteers from over 300 businesses statewide visited high school and middle school classrooms in the 2005-06 school year to urge students to take rigorous coursework. A number of school districts in Maryland have added their own incentives to encourage students to take the Scholars Core Course of Study. Starting with the 2006-07 school year, SSI will have a presence in all 24 Maryland school districts.

Sustainability and Success: SSI’s Impact on State Policy

SSI States are working to see that the SSI Core Course of Study becomes a permanent fixture in the public policy landscape. These efforts will help ensure that program

priorities become ingrained in the education system. There are several success stories in this regard.

★ *Michigan.* In 2005-06, the Michigan Scholars Program sponsored and helped coordinate businessperson presentations to more than 2,800 8th grade students in three pilot districts. While these efforts are substantial, the Michigan Scholars Program also worked with the Michigan State Board of Education, the Michigan Department of Education, and State legislators to develop statewide graduation requirements. In December 2005 the State Board of Education unanimously approved the Michigan Merit Core, which is almost identical to the SSI Core Course of Study. The statewide move toward greater rigor in high school continued in April 2006, when Governor Jennifer Granholm signed new graduation requirements into State law. Beginning with the class of 2011, all students must complete a high school curriculum similar to the SSI Core Course of Study to graduate. In 2016, when all students will be required to complete two world-language credits, the move to an SSI-type curriculum will be complete.

★ *Oklahoma.* As one of the first six States to implement the State Scholars Initiative, Oklahoma has reached more than 15,000 students through presentations in 10 school districts across the State. Under the management of the Oklahoma Business and Education Council, the initiative also sought State legislative action to promote a rigorous high school curriculum. These efforts helped lead to the May 2005 passage by the State legislature of SB 982, a new law requiring that all high school freshmen take a college-preparatory curriculum that is closely aligned with the SSI Core Course of Study. Students must opt out if they do not wish to take this challenging new default curriculum.

★ *Indiana.* The Indiana Core 40 Scholars Initiative is managed by Indiana's Education Roundtable, working in partnership with leaders from the State's business community, including the Indiana Chamber of Commerce and the Indiana Manufacturers Association. In 2005, the Indiana General Assembly adopted Core 40 as the State's required high school curriculum. Starting in fall 2007, all students entering high school will be expected to complete Core 40 course and credit requirements, which are similar to the SSI Core Course of Study (including four years of English; algebra I, geometry, and algebra II; and courses in biology, chemistry, physics, U.S. history,

“The businesspeople I get in front of and talk to about SSI want to become involved. Their enthusiasm is tremendous.”

– Carey S. Sadowski, State Director, West Virginia State Scholars



State Law Changes

A more rigorous curriculum has now become the mandated standard for students in several SSI States, including:

- ★ Indiana
- ★ Kentucky
- ★ Michigan
- ★ Mississippi
- ★ Oklahoma

“Students who complete a solid academic course of study have currency in the 21st century job market and help Tennessee compete for employers who offer higher paying jobs.”

– Tennessee Chamber of Commerce and Industry Board
Chair Lynn Johnson



world history, economics, and government). To graduate with less than the Core 40 curriculum, a student must complete a formal opt-out process, involving parental consent. Also, starting in 2011, Indiana residents must be on track to complete a Core 40 curriculum or equivalent as a condition for admission to the State’s public universities.

Looking to the Future

The future for the SSI network and its student participants is bright. Our member States are working hard to connect the business and education communities and to spread the message about the importance of a rigorous high school curriculum. Members have also had success in helping implement State policy changes that require more students to take courses matching the SSI Core Course of Study.

The federal government has taken a promising step to further encourage students to enroll in a rigorous high school curriculum. In February 2006, President George W. Bush signed into law the new Academic Competitiveness Grants (ACG) program, which makes additional financial support available to Pell Grant-eligible students enrolling in full-time two- or four-year college degree programs. Academic Competitiveness Grants provide up to \$750 for the first year of college and up to \$1,300 for the second. The U.S. Department of Education has recognized the SSI Core Course of Study as satisfying the ACG rigor requirement.

This federal program provides a strong new incentive for more high school students to take the SSI Core Course of Study. As we expand the program into our new member States and support the growing success of our veteran members, WICHE looks forward to bringing even more students on board in the coming year.

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