

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

As WICHE embarks on its third year overseeing the State Scholars Initiative, we're in the planning stages of a major event. On April 29-30, 2008, SSI will host the National Summit on Academic Rigor and Relevance in Boston. In the run-up to the summit (which is invitational) and following it, SSI will be publishing a number of reports and summit briefs on the importance of rigor and relevance in general and on the value of rigor and relevance in specific subject areas.

This fall two new SSI states will have kickoff events: Wyoming Scholars will launch its program on September 27 in Cheyenne, while Nebraska Scholars will get the initiative rolling statewide on September 28 in Lincoln.

Lastly, SSI is proud to welcome two new members to our advisory board: Roger Sampson, president of the Education Commission of the States, and Steve Wing, director of government programs for CVS Pharmacy. Wing, who is featured in this newsletter, has worked to help young people gain access to education and good jobs for decades. See his profile on page 4.



Terese Rainwater

Policy Update: The Value of Rigor

Nearly 25 years ago, the National Commission for Excellence in Education released its recommendations, upon which the State Scholars Initiative is based, in the seminal *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*.¹ Central to the commission's recommendations was the urgent need to improve state and local high school graduation requirements via a rigorous course of study. The core course of study in high school, then and now, should prepare students in those subjects that are essential to later success.

Recent research by ACT has demonstrated that whether students seek to go to college or directly into the workforce, they need the same rigorous preparation in high school.² As the United States approaches the 25th anniversary of the commission's recommendations, the question remains: How well are students prepared for college, work, and life after high school?

In its recent report, *Rigor at Risk: Reaffirming Quality in the High School Core Curriculum*, ACT asserts that while many states and local communities have sought to strengthen their graduation requirements, too many students still perform at distressingly low levels: "Three out of four 2006 high school graduates who take a core curriculum are not prepared to take credit-bearing entry-level college courses with a reasonable chance of succeeding in those courses."³ This, in turn, means that these students are less likely to enroll in college, more likely to need to do remedial college coursework should they enroll, and less likely to complete a college degree.⁴

Simply adding more courses is not the answer. ACT looked at data from 400 high schools, and their findings underline the need for a rigorous core course of study in high school – one that, like the State Scholars Core Course of Study, is focused not only on which courses students take but also on the quality and intensity of those courses.

Despite the fact that it's been 25 years since the National Commission for Excellence in Education put out its call for a more rigorous high school curriculum, there remain big gaps between what high schools prepare students to do and what colleges and the workplace expect them to do. The ACT report demonstrates that a rigorous core course of study aligned with college and work expectations can be effectively taught and learned.⁵ The study also shows that when a core curriculum included rigorous courses, students were much better prepared to thrive after high school.

SSI Core Course of Study	
Courses	Years
ENGLISH I,II,III,IV	4
MATHEMATICS Algebra I, Geometry Algebra II	3
SCIENCE Biology, Chemistry Physics	3
SOCIAL STUDIES Chosen from U.S. History, World History, World Geography, Economics, Government	3.5
LANGUAGES 2 years of a language other than English	2

FOCUS ON

★ VIRGINIA SCHOLARS

Virginia Governor Timothy M. Kaine officially launched Virginia Scholars last September, but he's a long-time supporter of educational rigor: "By encouraging students to take a more rigorous high school curriculum," he says, "we are fostering greater economic choice and individual responsibility." He and members of his cabinet continue to set the pace for the Commonwealth Scholars by advancing the program in tandem with other initiatives that support one of the governor's primary goals: to require every public school student to have an individualized high school plan by 2010, so that course selection decisions are aligned with their postsecondary education, career, and other goals.

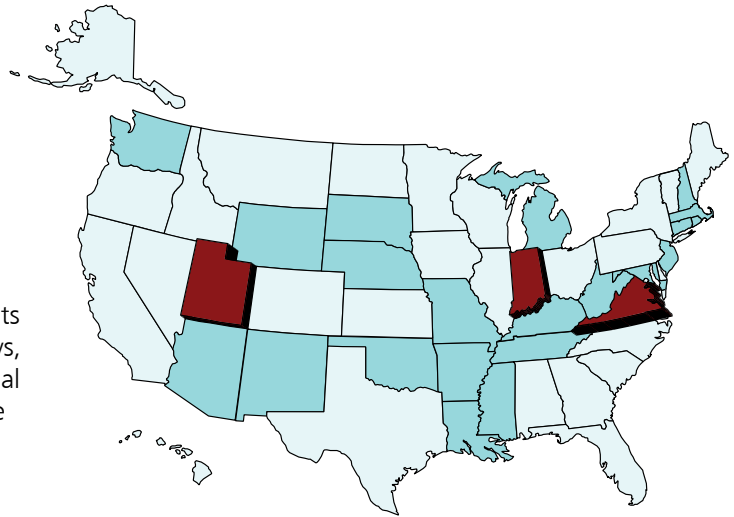
"Unless we change the picture, the best-educated generation in America's history is about to be replaced with a generation that's less educated – at a time when employers are looking for increasingly skilled employees. We have to fix our intellectual highways."

– Glenn DuBois
Chancellor, Virginia
Community College System

During the 2006-2007 school year, 11 diverse school divisions in Virginia implemented pilot Scholars programs, and more than 120 business leaders delivered the SSI message to over 3,000 8th grade students. The majority of the pilot sites awarded medallions to graduates and used a Commonwealth Scholar seal on diplomas: nearly 900 students earned medallions this year, and one school division acknowledged 1,400 students with diploma seals.

Roanoke County's William Byrd High School posted a 100 percent increase in enrollment for physics for the 2007-08 school year.

Other developments also supported the Scholars program. In May the Virginia Career Education Foundation, the statewide business education partnership that administers and supports the Commonwealth Scholars, was awarded a \$100,000 incentive grant for the program from the governor's discretionary fund for workforce development activities. And in July counselors and staff from Commonwealth Scholars sites joined with human resource professionals, government officials, education officials, business leaders, and workforce professionals at the University of Virginia Workforce Summer Academy. Commonwealth



Scholars participants had an opportunity to share information with business leaders representing career clusters and regional workforce needs. In addition, participants worked on two case studies, related to business education partnerships and parental involvement. For more information on Commonwealth Scholars, contact Betsy McClearn at betsymcclearn@aol.com or 540.529.3921.

★ UTAH SCHOLARS

Utah kicked off its Scholars program last September with Governor Jon M. Huntsman and other notables in attendance. But even in its first year, Utah is looking ahead: in February, thanks to key support from the Salt Lake City Chamber and individual businesses, the Utah State Legislature appropriated \$500,000 in one-time funds for fiscal year 2007-08 to sustain the program beyond the period of the federal grant and to facilitate its expansion to school districts across the state.



Governor Jon Huntsman

Public response to the program has been strong. Last spring, business, higher education, and community leaders gave over 60 presentations to 8th graders in the four participating school districts – Davis, Granite, Jordan, and Park City – and 460 students signed pledges expressing their desire to complete the SSI Core Course of Study. The first Utah Scholars Senior Recognition Banquet was held in May, honoring 160 high school seniors who completed the SSI curriculum, with keynote remarks by the U.S. Department of Education's Assistant

Student Voices *Trey Critzer, 2007 graduate of Monticello High School in Albemarle County, VA, upon receiving his Commonwealth Scholars medallion. "I was really proud to wear the medallion at graduation. It's a really great feeling."*

Secretary for Vocational and Adult Education Troy R. Justesen, himself a Utah native.

Utah Scholars will be an essential element in preparing the state's students for the future – and in recognition of that fact, the program plans to more than double the number of districts participating this year. "Less than 25 percent of Utah's young adults aged 25-34 have earned a bachelor's degree, which is below the national average," says David S. Doty, Utah Scholars program director. "In order to compete for tomorrow's jobs and be competent citizens, today's high school students need to complete the challenging courses that their peers in other countries are taking, and see a college degree as a necessary accomplishment for their future." For more information on Utah Scholars, contact David Doty at ddoty@utahsbr.edu or 801.321.7111.

"These students have demonstrated the dedication and responsibility of true scholars. We hope more students will follow their lead in committing themselves to their high school studies. Students who prepare for college and the workplace by taking rigorous courses in high school are more likely to become self-sustaining adults and to improve their quality of life."

– Richard E. Kendell, Commissioner of Higher Education, at the Utah Scholars Senior Recognition Banquet

★ INDIANA SCHOLARS

Core 40 Scholars, the SSI program in Indiana, is overseen by Learn More Indiana, a partnership of four state governmental agencies that was restructured and expanded within the last year to include coordination of Core 40. In addition, Learn More Indiana is working with a number of programs that complement and support the SSI mission. It has been awarded the lead partnership for the KnowHow2GO campaign within Indiana: locally known as KnowHow2GOIndiana, the campaign targets students in 8th through 10th grades, providing them with information on the steps they need to take to prepare themselves for college and encouraging them to push themselves to take a rigorous high school curriculum. As part of the KnowHow2GOIndiana campaign, Learn More Indiana has also taken the lead on forming a network to bring various stakeholders, including members of the business community, together to focus on issues affecting college access. For more information on Core 40 Scholars or KnowHow2GOIndiana, please contact Karen Bush at KarenB@learnmore.org or 317.464.4400, ext. 39.

SSI Kicks Off in Missouri

Eighth-grade students linked up with Missouri Governor Matt Blunt, state senators, the Missouri Chamber of Commerce president, business executives, and others to help launch the Show-Me Scholars program in St. Louis in April.

"The Show-Me Scholars Initiative is a low-cost, high-impact, community-based program to motivate more students in our state to succeed in a challenging course of study

in high school," said Daniel P. Mehan, Missouri Chamber president. "It engages the local community by putting business leaders with life experience in direct



"We see more and more of our high end jobs, research and development jobs, our design and engineering jobs in the global marketplace. That's why it's so important to ensure young Missourians gain the skill sets that they need in math, engineering, technology and science."

– Missouri Governor Matt Blunt

contact with the employees of tomorrow." The Missouri Chamber will work to expand the program to one-quarter of all school districts in the state by 2010 and will raise funds to sustain the program beyond the first two years.

At the initiative's kick-off, Candice Smith, a Boeing systems engineer, encouraged students to sign up for Show-Me Scholars: "My journey has been absolutely amazing," Smith said to the students. "And it all started

with the choice I made to accept the challenge – the challenge that my parents posed, the challenge that my minister posed and the challenge that I posed for myself to do the hard things that some couldn't believe, wouldn't believe that I could do."

Robert Fraley, Monsanto's chief technology officer, also addressed students. "Where's that next wave of scientists going to come from?" he asked. "How do we foster the right type of educational and training environment, so that happens? Ultimately, the answer is going to be you students, it's going to be you as supporters of the educational system that makes this happen."

Endnotes for Policy Update (p.1)

1. National Commission of Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983).
2. ACT, *Ready for College and Ready for Work: Same or Different?* (Iowa City, Iowa: ACT, 2006).
3. ACT, *Rigor at Risk: Reaffirming Quality in the High School Core Curriculum* (Iowa City, Iowa: ACT, 2007), 2.
4. *Ibid.*, 33.
5. *Ibid.*, 29.

SSI Profile: Stephen M. Wing



When Steve Wing was growing up in a small town in Minnesota, he and his six brothers and sisters learned two big life lessons: "We were taught that all people are equal and everyone should get the chance to be successful," says Wing. "And we learned the value of hard work and its rewards."

One of his major role models was his sister, who was born with cerebral palsy and yet pushed herself to learn and to connect with others, using an electronic communication board. Her perseverance in the face of a profoundly disabling condition showed Wing that, given the chance, people can rise above even extreme hardship – and throughout his career, Wing has made it his business to give them that chance.

Wing started out in education and says he "loved teaching" but that retail was in his blood. Now the director of government programs for CVS Pharmacy, he has been in the drugstore business for over 30 years, devoting the last 16 to working with government agencies, nontraditional employment organizations, and faith-based institutions in recruiting targeted groups of people, many of them low-income, for employment. "In 1996 we started our first Welfare to Work program with six people in Akron, Ohio," he says. "Today, we have hired over 60,000 former welfare recipients, with a 60 percent retention rate."

For Wing and CVS, education is critical to helping current and future employees do well. "Education is the way out of poverty for folks in the inner city and rural areas. We encourage employees not only to get their high school diploma but to go on to postsecondary education." Wing has also helped develop educational programs within CVS – which he says give the company a decided "competitive advantage."

The CVS Pathways to Pharmacy program, for instance, gives a boost to young people living in inner city or rural areas who are interested in a career in pharmacy: last summer some 2,000 participated. Another initiative, recently launched, is CVS's Pharmacies of Promise, which gives students in inner city schools an opportunity to see pharmacy as a career path. Wing has also helped to develop the nationally renowned One-Stop/CVS Regional Learning Center design in Washington, D.C., and the Cassadaga Job Corps Pharmacy Technician Program in upstate New York. All of these programs link back to his original love, teaching. "In this position I really feel that I have been able to do even more for education than I could ever have done in high school."

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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**
<http://wiche.edu/statescholars/states/brief.asp?id=7>
- ★ **MARYLAND**
www.mbrt.org/scholars
- ★ **MASSACHUSETTS**
www.mastatescholars.org
- ★ **MICHIGAN**
www.michiganscholars.org
- ★ **MISSISSIPPI**
www.mississippiicholars.org
- ★ **MISSOURI**
www.showmescholars.com
- ★ **NEBRASKA**
www.thinknebraska.org
- ★ **NEW HAMPSHIRE**
www.nhscholars.org
- ★ **NEW JERSEY**
www.wiche.edu/statescholars
- ★ **NEW MEXICO**
www.nmscholars.org
- ★ **OKLAHOMA**
www.obecinfo.com/oklahoma_scholars.html
- ★ **RHODE ISLAND**
www.edpartnership.org/?id=1074
- ★ **SOUTH DAKOTA**
www.doe.sd.gov/statescholars/index.asp
- ★ **TENNESSEE**
www.tennesseescholars.org
- ★ **UTAH**
www.utahscholars.org/
- ★ **VIRGINIA**
www.vacareereducationfoundation.org
- ★ **WASHINGTON**
www.partnership4learning.org
- ★ **WEST VIRGINIA**
www.educationalliance.org
- ★ **WYOMING**
www.wiche.edu/statescholars