



UTAH SYSTEM OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

March 21, 2024

Community College Study Task Force Update

In late 2022, the Utah System of Higher Education contracted with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to conduct a study as directed by the Utah Legislature "to analyze current community college-related educational services and identify long-term strategies that address Utahns' ability to access an affordable, accessible, and workforce aligned postsecondary education."

The resulting project had three main deliverables: a report on enrollment trends, a report on community college services delivered in Utah, and a set of recommendations to more effectively provide community college services in Utah. NCHEMS completed and released the [enrollment trends report](#) in August 2023. Their [final report](#), including recommendations, was released in October 2023 to the Board and presidents. Additionally, it was shared at the Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee meeting on October 10, 2023, and NCHEMS presented its findings to the Board on December 1, 2023.

The Board established a task force to provide recommendations on prioritization to the Board. Members of the task force include President Astrid S. Tuminez, President Deneece G. Huftalin, President James R. Taggart, President Stacey Y. McIff, Interim Commissioner Geoff Landward, Chief Economist Carrie Mayne, and Associate Commissioner Taylor Adams. The task force has met twice to discuss and prioritize NCHEMS' recommendations. While they anticipate their work will be completed in the summer of 2024, they have made progress and recommend the following:

- 1. Deprioritize a Three-tier Tuition Structure:** The task force recommends the Board not consider the NCHEMS recommendation to establish a three-tier tuition structure. The task force asserts that presidents remain committed to addressing affordability at their institutions and have held costs low compared to their peers nationwide. A change in the tuition model would most directly impact the tuition revenue at regional universities. Therefore, regional university presidents are generally unsupportive of this recommendation, given the lack of concrete details regarding the consequences of this change and the lack of a proposed plan to address potential losses in tuition revenue. Furthermore, multiple presidents acknowledged that this may indirectly impact enrollment at community colleges, which have long marketed a value proposition of the lowest tuition in the state.

- 2. Adjust Systemwide Goals and Performance Funding Policy:** The task force agrees with NCHEMS' multiple recommendations to adjust metrics to incentivize system and institutional performance in assisting students who need the most support to succeed in postsecondary education, such as first-generation students, students from low-income backgrounds, part-time learners, and adult students. All presidents have voiced support for adjusting performance funding to address access and completion for these learners. Each institution acknowledges that this effort would better align with the demographics and course-taking patterns of students at their institution.

- 3. Address Concurrent Enrollment Funding:** NCHEMS suggests that if the state of Utah wants to continue to grow Concurrent Enrollment, especially among underserved populations, it will need to ensure that institutions can afford to continue carrying out this portion of their mission without having to dip into their discretionary resources. Therefore, the task force recommends not only an in-depth analysis of the state funding model for Concurrent Enrollment but also the implications of increasing the tuition amount charged to students.

- 4. Enforce Roles & Missions:** NCHEMS provided multiple recommendations related to roles and missions. While institutions, the Commissioner's office, and the Board have engaged in regular discussions and actions related to this topic, the task force suggests that additional decision-making and enforcement is necessary. This should include topics such as clarification of service areas relative to the challenges of effectively serving rural students, delivery of noncredit training offerings, and enforcement of distinctive offerings based on institution type and service region. If left unaddressed, the task force maintains that student outcomes could be negatively impacted by competition among institutions, exclusivity in rural education providers, and unneeded duplication.

Commissioner's Recommendation

The task force recommendations provide topics of discussion for the Board. At the conclusion of the discussion, the task force will continue to work together to provide a full list of recommended actions to the Board. Final responses to the NCHEMS recommendations, developed with Board leadership, will be presented to the Education Interim Committee in 2024.