

# TREASURE VALLEY EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

## *A Strategy for Coming Together*

to Increase the Treasure Valley's Educational Attainment Rates  
by Helping All Our Students Graduate From High School Ready for the  
Worlds of Career, College & Citizenship

**Education • Jobs • Prosperity**

Convener - United Way of Treasure Valley

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## **Crisis in Our Own Backyard**

Higher education attendance and graduation rates continue to fall short of where research suggests they should be in order to meet local workforce and global competitiveness demands. According to their report, *“Coming to Our Senses: Education and The American Future,”* (December 2008), the College Board Commission notes:

“Recent international comparisons contain alarming news for Americans: The United States, which led the world in high school completion rates through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ranked just 21<sup>st</sup> out of 27 advanced economies by 2005. And our college completion rates have dropped dramatically—from number two in the world for younger workers (25-34) to number eleven. The United States is on the verge of losing the greatest global educational competitive edge it has long enjoyed.”

In fact, the problem presents such devastating social and economic consequences that the United Way of America has launched a national effort to cut America’s high school drop out rate in half by 2018. Sadly, Idaho’s version of story looks quite the same, and according to the Education Commission of the States:

- Idaho has a high school graduation rate of 78.7 (2006), above the national average of 68.6, although anecdotal evidence suggests this is slipping in some of Idaho’s increasingly multi-cultural, urbanized school districts in the Treasure Valley.
- Idaho’s college-going rate of high school graduates directly from high school (2006) is 45.7% or 49<sup>th</sup> nationally (Arizona is last with 44.8%). The national average is 61.6%. This is defined as the number of first-time freshmen who graduated from high school in the past year from Idaho enrolled anywhere in the U.S.
- The percentage of students who successfully transition from 9<sup>th</sup> grade through college is 14.4% (2006) or 43<sup>rd</sup> nationally. The national average is 19.7%. This student pipeline – the transition and completion rates from 9<sup>th</sup> grade to college – for every 100 9<sup>th</sup> graders, is the number who graduate from high school within 4 years (based on the public HS graduation rates above), the number who go directly to college (based on the college going rates of recent HS graduates above), the number who return for their second year of college (based on the first-year retention rates above), and the number who graduate from college within 150% of program time (based on the graduation rates above).

While the benefits of educational attainment are undeniable, why do we find ourselves in this predicament?

Many students and families confront significant barriers to postsecondary education, including a lack of clear understanding of admissions requirements and postsecondary affordability. Underrepresented students, such as first-generation, socioeconomically disadvantaged, and racial minorities are particularly vulnerable to this problem. Research demonstrates that these students are less academically prepared for postsecondary

education and lack adequate college knowledge, including an understanding of the requirements, application process or the utilization of financial aid.

In response, communities around the country have mobilized to confront this problem. They have created “postsecondary opportunity programs,” or POPs, a general term used to describe government, business, education, and community programs and partnerships that aim to increase educational attainment and community development by confronting the barriers to postsecondary access, persistence, and success. Some programs choose to focus on high school education, seeing increased gains in secondary education as a direct way to impact postsecondary enrollment. Some of these programs provide full or partial financial assistance, guaranteed enrollment, academic preparation, or a combination thereof (among other benefits) to students who fulfill certain eligibility requirements. They exist under many names, including promise programs, compacts, covenants, and commitments.

In the communities that have launched these POPs, all acknowledge that education is central to the success of their economic and community development strategies. Educational attainment correlates positively with home ownership, a greater tax base, less reliance on the social service system, voter participation, decreased crime and teen pregnancy rates, business attraction, and more.

One truth stands tall: Education = Jobs.

### **Jobs 2016: Will Our Students Be Prepared?**

The Idaho Department of Labor has identified the “hot jobs” projected for southwest Idaho in the year 2016 – just seven years away. These are the jobs that on average rank high in three major criteria – the abundance of jobs in the economy, jobs that are growing the fastest, and jobs with the highest pay. In short, the report indicates that of the 161,718 “hot jobs” that will be available in the year 2016, nearly 40% or 61,297 of them will require some form of post-secondary education.

More importantly, of the 61,297 projected jobs, nearly 60% -- or 35,202 deemed as the fastest growing – will require less than a bachelor’s degree, giving ample opportunity for our students to enter into well-paying occupations within 2 years out of high school.

The question is, if our Treasure Valley kids are expected to be workforce and college-ready to step into the 160,000+ jobs seven short years from now, what are we doing *today* to make sure the educational pipeline is primed, and all students are getting the support they need to succeed? More importantly, what are we doing to help our at-risk students who are increasingly falling behind? And, given the increasing employment need for post-secondary education, what are we doing to make sure all our students are prepared for the educational, emotional and financial demands of higher education?

## **Closing the Gap: The Road To 2016 Begins with the First Step**

By doing nothing, we accept the status quo and are willing to live with a challenging future for our kids and economic uncertainty for our community. By addressing these issues – by coming together at the same table – we are taking the first step in acknowledging that our kids deserve better, our employers deserve better, and our community deserves better. We all deserve better.

So what will it take to begin the process of filling the education pipeline to meet the Jobs of 2016? It will take ensuring that *all our students graduate from high school ready for the worlds of career, college and citizenship.*

The **Treasure Valley Education Partnership** provides a seminal first step for discussion around how we can come together to solve the problem of increasing our Valley's educational attainment rates. Doing this will take the active involvement of all our stakeholders. Here's why.....

Let's start with what **The Partnership** *is about*:

- it is about understanding what our data looks like and agreeing that we are going to work together to solve the problem
- it is about recognizing the barriers our students and families face
- it is about taking a community inventory of what is in place and what is working to overcome these barriers, and incorporating them into the business plan; these community "assets" will include such things as mentor and afterschool programs, community-based organizations, service learning efforts, pre-K and K-16 school support, college awareness programs, parent involvement efforts, job shadow and internship opportunities, grant and scholarship aid, and more
- it is about designing a targeted strategy to incentivize at-risk kids (who are disproportionately represented in the statistics) and help them succeed
- it is about coordinating the efforts of everyone who cares about this issue to make sure we are all marching in the same direction toward the same goals; many times coordination and collaboration requires no additional funding, just working together with a shared purpose
- it is about a collaboratively-designed, phased strategy that helps *all kids* succeed, and helps meet our Jobs 2016 workforce development goals

Let's also note what **The Partnership** *is not about*:

- it is not about new programs, bureaucracy or organizations, unless the business planning group deems it absolutely necessary for success
- it is not about duplicating or supplanting what's working in our community
- it is not about focusing efforts on special segments of the population to the exclusion of all others

## **Where Do We Go From Here?**

We are seeking a \$30,000 planning grant to adequately and thoroughly address the problem. Starting with the core ideas addressed in this document, the outcome of the planning process is a business plan that will articulate the regional strategy for significantly increasing our rate of educational attainment, helping meet the Jobs 2016 goals, and securing our economic future.

Along the way, we will most certainly change lives for the better. And, perhaps that is the most important outcome of all.

## **Where Are We Now?**

The United Way Board of Directors took action by appropriating \$15,000 in seed money for a “discovery process” (Phase I) to gather and analyze data from school districts valley-wide, and draw informed, unbiased conclusions. Those in education know that numbers are often reported based on the agency requesting the data or the particular funding source. Because we do not have uniform data measurement or the local data compiled to thoroughly understand the problem, we are unable to go about addressing it in a coordinated fashion.

This project aims to change that fact. As part of this process, a third-party, independent researcher will be hired to work with school district personnel to gather and assess data. The purpose is to arrive at a data set that can be used in the districts to better understand and address conditions for at-risk students, as well as align and coordinate existing efforts valley-wide to more effectively help all students reach their full educational potential.

As we embark on this research agenda, we realize there are many organizations and effective programs in place addressing issues ranging from mentoring to service learning and from high school drop-out prevention to college awareness, and more. Consequently, a critical part of this “discovery process,” will include a community inventory to compile these assets, and learn what’s working and what can be leveraged or expanded to help the broadest number of students achieve educational success.

Although convened by the United Way, this process will be carried out by the Treasure Valley Education Partnership (TVEP), a group of people interested in and/or working with these issues on a daily basis. The culmination of TVEP’s work will be a report that articulates findings from the research effort and the community inventory. This report will be made available to all interested parties, further inform United Way’s work, and guide strategic funding decisions in its education focus area. It is possible that this report will serve as a catalyst for future collaborative efforts, but for now TVEP’s work is focused on the research mission.

The following activities are included in the ***Phase I: Discovery Process***, although the actual timeline may expand beyond two months.

#### Month 1

- kick off meeting: goals agreement, timeline refinement and agreement
- research begins on key objectives: graduation rate, drop out rate, college going rate, assessment of pipeline; begin consensus building needed to get data and arrive at common data set and methodology
- small work groups begin asset inventory

#### Month 2

- all-team touch base/progress report meeting
- asset mapping/formal inventory, gap analysis
- report on data findings, get working group agreement
- best practices inventory/report out

### **Treasure Valley Education Partnership Leadership**

Treasure Valley Education Partnership Co-Chairs,  
*A group of the United Way Board of Directors*

Dr. Stan Olson, Superintendent, Boise School District  
Dr. Jim Girvan, Dean, College of Health Sciences, Boise State University  
Theresa McLeod, Assistant to the Mayor, Boise Mayor Dave Bieter  
Lynn Sander, VP, Community Relations, Home Federal Bank

### **Contact Information**

Please contact Sally Zive, CEO at United Way ([szive@unitedwaytv.org](mailto:szive@unitedwaytv.org), 336-1070, ext 107) or Alicia Ritter, project consultant ([ritterconsulting@mac.com](mailto:ritterconsulting@mac.com), 433-9610) if you'd like to hear more, would like a presentation to an organization you are involved with, or if you'd like to participate on one of our work groups. There are plenty of opportunities to get involved and be in on the ground floor of an exciting effort that we expect will result in helping all our kids reach their educational potential.

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## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the money being used for and what is the outcome?**

A planning grant is necessary to conduct a thorough planning process that will take a look at and refine the need, identify the existing community assets that can be brought to bear on the problem, and pinpoint the “gaps” in our ability to ensure that *every child graduates from high school equally prepared for the worlds of career, college and citizenship*. Starting with the core ideas addressed in this document, the outcome of the planning process is a business plan that will articulate the regional strategy for significantly increasing our rate of educational attainment, helping meet the Jobs 2016 goals, and securing our economic future.

The funds will support the services of a contracted project manager/consultant (who will manage all facets of business plan development and serve as principal author of the business plan) and a researcher. (See Appendix: Budget) We have looked at like projects around the country and all had similar people involved either through dedicated staff commitments or contracted consultants.

### **How will the planning process work?**

A small work group of stakeholders from education, nonprofit, business and community/parent groups will come together to draw up a game plan for developing the business plan. Individual work groups will be formed to carry out task functions associated with the business plan (i.e. program inventory, scholarship/financial aid inventory, business partnerships, best practices, endowment planning, operating plan, etc). The group will work together to identify what is already working and what needs to be done to meet the goals and objectives. The concept of the financial incentive behind the Treasure Valley Education Promise will be addressed as a part of this process. We envision this initial planning process taking 4-5 months (See Timeline, page 9).

### **What are the kinds of issues that will be addressed in the business planning process?**

We have attached the proposed sections for the final business plan (see page 11). However, these are some of the key questions that will be addressed as part of the planning grant:

- What are the exact graduation and drop out rates of the Treasure Valley students, and how are they being measured? What are they key barriers, and what kinds of programs or strategies are available or can be implemented to address this concern, particularly for at-risk students who are disproportionately represented in the data?
- What is the exact college-going rate of Treasure Valley high school graduates, and how is it being measured? What kinds of programs are available to families with young children, and middle school and high school kids to educate them on the benefits of college, its availability/possibility, and what kinds of educational attainment will be needed for different career paths? In particular, what kinds of barriers exist and what

kinds of programs target low income or first-generation college-going families? Finally, what is the rate of “outbound migration” of our high school graduates?

- What kinds of mentoring, afterschool, service learning and peer-to-peer support programs are available to students, particularly at-risk students?
- What kinds of career exploration programs are available to students? What is the alignment between career exploration, class coursework, advanced placement testing, and a plan for post-secondary education? Do students have the necessary guidance to develop an adequate vision of and road map for their future?
- Given the expected employer needs of the region by 2016, is the education and training available to meet the demand? And, are the necessary support mechanisms in place to adequately fill the student pipeline?
- What is the communication between employers and school districts in terms of helping each other understand the kinds of education needed for the current/projected jobs?
- What kinds of programs and financial incentives are available to parents and families to help afford post-secondary education? What are the awareness levels and barriers?
- Are state, local, non-profit and education-based outreach programs sharing ideas and leveraging resources toward a common end goal?
- What are other communities in Idaho and around the country doing to address similar challenges?

**Will this effort result in a duplication of existing programs?**

Absolutely not. In fact, the planning process is purposely designed to avoid this. The objective will be to identify what is in place and working, and incorporate that into the broader strategy. Our hypothesis is that a large part of what needs to be done to solve the problem *is already in place*. What’s missing is a coordinated, strategic effort based on targeted data to help move the needle and realize collective results.

We envision this as bringing everyone “to the table” to agree on a definition of the problem, identify the “assets” we have at our disposal, identify what is missing or what’s needed, and articulate a strategy for how we will work together to change conditions to the benefit of individual students and our community. (See Appendix: The Tree)

**This seems like a new concept, how does this fit with the Treasure Valley Education Promise?**

The **Treasure Valley Education Partnership** is a broad-based planning effort that seeks to scope the problem more fully, understand the underlying causes of the problem, identify barriers and opportunities, and arrive at a regional solution for addressing our educational attainment and workforce development needs.

The targeted incentive concept articulated in the **Treasure Valley Education Promise** paper will be considered during the business planning process as a possible approach to addressing the problem.

**Are other communities around the country doing this?**

Yes, lots of them. The recent stories in the *Idaho Statesman* attracted the attention of the Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education (WISCAPE). WISCAPE addresses the challenges confronting postsecondary education while bringing together key stakeholders to discuss issues and solutions. They have worked with several communities around the country to develop what they call “Postsecondary Opportunity Programs or (POPs), and have studied the best practices of dozens several more. They use key learnings, data and research methodologies from this work to help other communities develop and refine their POPs. The Kalamazoo Promise is but one of the communities they have worked with, and which served as the core idea for the Treasure Valley Education Promise.

WISCAPE has volunteered to work with the Treasure Valley on the development of our POP, and we have readily taken them up on our offer to join our planning team – at no charge to us! A complete list of 50 POPs taking place around the county is included in their Clearinghouse at <http://www.wiscapewisc.edu/resources/promiseprograms/>.

**Who has expressed interest thus far?**

In addition to WISCAPE, we have received initial interest in being involved from the University of Idaho, Boise State University and Northwest Nazarene University.

We have been in contact with the Idaho Department of Education and Superintendent Tom Luna’s office has invited us to brief him when we are prepared, and the Idaho Department of Labor has offered its support.

**Where are you looking for funding?**

We are initially looking to the United Way and will be meeting with their Impact Council, and having a second meeting with their Board of Directors. We felt it was most appropriate to begin with this group given the type of grant funding that is needed (short term, high impact), and because it was consistent with the United Way of America’s focus on cutting the national drop out rate in half by 2018.

We know further that the United Way of America will be parceling out \$14 million in Gates Foundation grant moneys to their affiliates nationwide who have a plan for addressing this issue in their own communities. We will soon forward our case statement to them for initial input and reaction.

We have heard from the Idaho Department of Education that in July states will be eligible to apply for funding through the \$5 billion in stimulus money dedicated to their “Race to the Top” initiative. They have assured us they will support our efforts if our work aligns with the criteria.

Our urgency centers on wanting to get a business plan developed now to better position us to compete for the larger pools of money identified above. And, we feel another day shouldn't pass before we address these important issues in our community.

### **What's the expected timeline?**

We'd like to begin the planning process as soon as possible and have a completed business plan to deliver within 4-5 months. We envision key milestones, however these may be altered by the planning group or refined as new information becomes available.

#### **Month 1**

- kick off meeting: goals agreement, timeline refinement and agreement
- research begins on key objectives: graduation rate, drop out rate, college going rate, assessment of pipeline; begin consensus building needed to get data and arrive at common data set and methodology
- small work groups begin asset inventory

#### **Month 2**

- all-team touch base/progress report meeting
- asset mapping/formal inventory, gap analysis
- report on data findings, get working group agreement
- best practices inventory/report out

#### **Month 3**

- all-team touch base/progress report meeting
- goals and objectives identification/metrics established
- developing the road map for getting there
- identification of cost projections, possible endowment models, etc.
- begin identifying funding sources/mechanisms to support strategies
- draft document circulated to key stakeholders for feedback/input

#### **Month 4**

- all-team touch base/progress report meeting
- get community input/feedback, acknowledgement of roles and what they can do to support

#### **Month 5**

- all-team final meeting/assess community input, approve and bless final plan
- key stakeholder endorsements incorporated and final plan delivery