MEMORANDUM

UTAH SYSTEM OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

March 21, 2024

Admissions Task Force Update

To address access issues related to the admissions application process, the Commissioner's office, under the direction of the Board, formed a new Admissions Task Force in November 2023. A detailed history of prior work toward simplifying and unifying admissions in Utah can be found here.

The newly formed task force, led by Board member Cydni Tetro, includes representation from the Commissioner's office, Utah State Board of Education (USBE), and higher education institutions. The Admissions Task Force met multiple times over the past five months to address access through the admissions process. Notably, their initial recommendations informed the Board's vote to eliminate admission application fees at all Utah public institutions starting in November 2023. In subsequent meetings, the task force developed the following recommendations for the Board to consider.

The proposed budgetary requests include up to $450,000 in one-time funding and up to $215,000 for ongoing annual needs. In late 2023, prior to establishing the task force, the Board was presented with funding estimates of $4,375,000 one-time and $2,215,000 ongoing funding to address a common application solution. The task force realized significant cost savings through optimizing and simplifying efforts of unified admissions while still meeting the goal of increasing access to higher education in Utah. The task force recommendations below each include updated budgetary information:

Recommendation 1: Establish & Maintain Online Portal to Address Utah's Needs
Utah currently hosts a variety of websites and tools that are utilized to help stakeholders find out about options for higher education. This portal would centralize information about higher education in Utah and provide support to prospective students, families, and access partners. Furthermore, this portal could include enhancements utilizing Artificial Intelligence to help answer important questions about college, careers, and financial accessibility. The cost of this effort could be scaffolded to address the most needed items first. Research, design, and development for the online portal are estimated to cost $250,000 initially and $100,000 in ongoing maintenance and hosting. The AI add-on is estimated to cost $100,000 initially and $65,000 in ongoing maintenance.

Recommendation 2: Create and Deploy Guaranteed Admissions Process
The online portal recommended above would host a simple online form that would guarantee admissions for students at 14 institutions in the state. For Utah's two selective admission institutions, Utah State University and the University of Utah, and for programmatic admissions decisions at other institutions, a

second step will be required for students. This second step will be managed by institutions directly as an enrollment questionnaire. A future enhancement of this tool is the direct integration of USBE data to automatically fill the initial form and subsequent enrollment-specific information. USBE and USHE were recently awarded grant funding to support longitudinal data sharing, which will be leveraged in this process. The cost of this effort is minimal, given the initial simple form development and existing grant award. Costs related to data transfer will be addressed in future task force meetings. The Office of the Commissioner estimates the initial cost to develop this form is $100,000, with an ongoing maintenance cost estimate of $50,000.

Timeline
Q1 2024
- Finalize design concept for online portal
- Finalize requirements for guaranteed admission and data workflow
- Determine contract needs for guaranteed admission form development
- Board update (progress update and funding/timeline considerations)

Q2 2024
- Begin online portal/guaranteed admission design
- Begin AI strategy conversation and requirements for successful development
- Monthly admissions update meeting with institutions
- Board update
- Complete guaranteed form creation
- Test guaranteed admission form submission
- Finalize online portal design/guaranteed admission and prepare for launch
- Monthly admissions update meeting with institutions

Q3 2024
- Launch simplified admission online portal
- Launch guaranteed admission form
- Launch marketing campaign for online portal/guaranteed admission
- Board update
- Monthly admissions update meeting with institutions

Commissioner's Recommendation
The Commissioner recommends the Board fund this project, which would result in the development, design, and deployment of an online portal and guaranteed admissions form and process. This request is for up to $450,000 in one-time funding and up to $215,000 for annual ongoing funding. Tiered options for funding are:
- Tier 1 Cost (immediate need): $350,000 one-time and $150,000 ongoing after initial development; or
- Tier 2 Cost (including AI add-on): $450,000 one-time and $215,000 ongoing after initial development.