



UTAH SYSTEM OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

February 17, 2023

2023 Legislative Budget Priorities: Student Mental Health and Student Wellness Resource Navigators

Student Mental Health: \$2,025,000 ongoing

The request will go towards two priorities: \$1,950,000 to provide virtual mental health counseling for all non-high school, matriculated students in the USHE system (about 160,000 students); and \$75,000 for a shared FTE with the Huntsman Mental Health Institute to facilitate better coordination between SafeUT and USHE institutions.

Background

Utah college students are experiencing a generational mental health crisis. In spring 2019, [degree-granting USHE institutions administered the American College Health Association–National College Health Assessment survey \(ACHA-NCHA\). Over 5,200 USHE students responded to the survey,](#) reporting that during the prior 12 months, they experienced the following:

- 63% felt overwhelming anxiety
- 45.6% felt so depressed it was difficult to function
- 42.7% felt overwhelming anger
- 57.8% felt things were hopeless
- 66.1% felt very lonely
- 71.1% felt very sad
- 9.3% intentionally cut, burned, bruised, or otherwise injured themselves
- 14.9% seriously considered suicide
- 1.9% attempted suicide

While this survey has not been repeated systemwide since the new USHE system was merged or since the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health concerns have only grown since 2019.

Student Wellness Resource Navigators: \$975,000 ongoing

The request will create 11 full-time, regional Student Wellness Resource Navigators to service USHE campuses. These positions will be housed at an institution and shared regionally, as appropriate. Student Wellness Resource Navigators will be responsible for conducting outreach and case management to help students secure the campus-based, community-based, state, and federal resources they need to achieve wellness and succeed in their education, including food security resources such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), public housing assistance, mental health services, affordable childcare, etc.

Background

Throughout the year, the Commissioner and his staff have purposefully and meaningfully engaged campus, student, staff, and community stakeholders who may be affected by this potential course of action by reviewing literature, visiting campus basic needs centers, seeking input on student wellness from the Campus Safety and Equity and Advisory Council, and facilitating multiple discussions with institutional Presidents and Senior Student Affairs Officers. These efforts revealed that students face significant barriers that limit their knowledge of and access to existing basic needs, resources, and public benefits. For example:

- [52%](#) of students facing basic needs insecurity do not apply for supports because they don't know how
- [89%](#) of SNAP-eligible Utah students do not apply for the program, leaving approximately \$61.5 million in SNAP benefits on the table each year

Research also reveals that basic needs insecurity affects underrepresented students at [higher rates](#) and leads to adverse educational outcomes such as [declines](#) in GPA and [decreased likelihood](#) of timely degree completion. Therefore, this request intervenes in existing educational disparities and works to close attainment gaps by providing students with the resources they need to secure their basic needs and focus on their education.

Commissioner's Recommendation

This is an information item only; no action is required.