

Enhanced Program Promotes Early Awareness of Higher Education Options

Middle school students often don't have a clear view of their futures. In many households in which no one has previously gone to college, students also may not understand the importance of education or training beyond high school for their future success.

To help address these issues, USA Funds® has released an enhanced version of its USA Funds Unlock the Future® early awareness program. USA Funds Unlock the Future advises families of the importance of postsecondary education and encourages them to prepare academically and financially for the future.

The centerpiece of the enhanced program is a video, "16 Summers," that tells the story of 15-year-old Dominique Taylor, who learns the importance of planning for the future by dealing with several issues commonly faced by teens.

In "16 Summers," Dominique's world revolves around her plans for an extravagant "Sweet 16" party — and then her family loses their home to foreclosure. They move in with Dominique's grandparents, and her mother and father work additional hours to cover expenses. Meanwhile, Dominique, who has to move to a new school, begins to rebel by spending time with questionable friends. Only with the help of her family and others in her school and community does Dominique learn that family and friends, and the future she'll have with them, are more important than glamorous parties.

The video also features actor/entertainer Nick Cannon.

The family's experiences provide a springboard for discussion and activities designed to help students along the pathway to postsecondary education. USA Funds Unlocks the Future includes an event planning guide, facilitator guide, activities and information resources to help families take the next steps in planning for their children's futures.

"USA Funds Unlock the Future encourages middle school students, especially those from families with no previous college experience, to dream big and make higher education or training part of their dreams,"



Top: USA Funds Unlock the Future encourages middle school students to make higher education part of their dreams.

Bottom: The video "16 Summers" focuses on issues commonly faced by teens to teach the importance of planning for the future.

Selected Grants Awarded by USA Funds Oct. 1–Dec. 31, 2008

USA Funds awards grants to advance its nonprofit mission to enhance postsecondary education preparedness, access and success.

American Indian College Fund

Denver

Project Scholarships

Geographic Scope National

Amount \$100,000

The mission of the American Indian College Fund is to raise scholarship funds for American-Indian students at qualified tribal colleges and universities and to generate awareness of those institutions. USA Funds supports this effort through its annual donation to the organization's scholarship fund.

Hispanic Scholarship Fund

San Francisco

Project Scholarships

Geographic Scope National

Amount \$100,000

USA Funds' annual donation to HSF provides financial assistance to college students. HSF strives to double the rate of Hispanic students earning college degrees by providing scholarships and education outreach support to the Latino community.

United Negro College Fund

Fairfax, Va.

Project Scholarships

Geographic Scope National

Amount \$100,000

This annual grant to UNCF's general scholarship fund provides financial aid to deserving students. UNCF provides operating funds and technology enhancement services for 39 member Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and scholarships and internships for students at nearly 1,000 institutions.

Indiana Dollars for Scholars

Indianapolis

Project 2009 Hoosier Heroes

Geographic Scope Indiana

Amount \$70,000

Hoosier Heroes provides Indiana students an opportunity to identify Indiana citizens who have made significant contributions to society. Junior and senior high school students may nominate their own Hoosier Heroes. USA Funds' grant includes funding for 20 scholarships to be awarded to select students who write nomination essays.

Indiana Student Financial Aid Association

Bloomington, Ind.

Project College Goal Sunday

Indiana

Geographic Scope Indiana

Amount \$40,000

USA Funds sponsors Indiana's College Goal Sunday 2009. The free event provides parents and students with volunteer assistance in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, required for federal aid as well as for many state and institutional student aid programs.

National Council for Community and Education Partnerships

Washington, D.C.

Project College Goal Sunday

Florida

Geographic Scope Florida

Amount \$40,000

USA Funds supports College Goal Sunday 2009 in Florida, which provides free assistance with the FAFSA.

Kansas Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators

Wichita, Kan.

Project College Goal Sunday

Kansas

Geographic Scope Kansas

Amount \$38,700

This funding supports College Goal Sunday 2009 in Kansas.

Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education

Phoenix

Project College Goal Sunday

Arizona

Geographic Scope Arizona

Amount \$35,000

This funding supports College Goal Sunday 2009 in Arizona.

Mid-Eastern Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel

Philadelphia

Project College Goal Sunday

Geographic Scope Maryland

and Delaware

Amount \$34,050

USA Funds' grant covers expenses associated with College Goal Sunday 2009 in Maryland and Delaware.

Indiana Latino Institute

Indianapolis

Project Carreras Para El Futuro

Geographic Scope Indiana

Amount \$30,000

USA Funds supports this community partnership, which provides program services for Hispanic/Latino high school students, their families and other community members interested in increasing these students' participation in higher education programs.

Pacific Financial Aid Association

Honolulu

Project College Goal Sunday

Hawaii

Geographic Scope Hawaii

Amount \$20,000

USA Funds supports College Goal Sunday 2009 in Hawaii.

Pacific Financial Aid Association

Honolulu

Project PacFAA Financial Aid

Nights

Geographic Scope Hawaii

Amount \$9,915

Through its Financial Aid Nights, PacFAA informs students about postsecondary education opportunities and the availability of financial assistance. This grant expands the events to locations throughout the state.

Friendly House Inc.

Phoenix

Project Recognition of Excellence

Scholarship Awards Dinner

Geographic Scope Arizona

Amount \$7,500

This USA Funds-sponsored event recognizes high-performing Hispanic high school seniors who receive \$1,000 scholarships to pursue postsecondary education.

Community Service Longtime Priority for New Access and Outreach Leader

Bob Ballard has a long history of service to his country and his community. Growing up, his parents set the example of community service, and after college he spent 20 years as an officer in the U.S. Navy — first on active duty and then in the reserves.

After Ballard opted to pursue a civilian career, the idea of service to others stayed with him. For 26 years, he has helped young people achieve their dream of a college education through his work in the student loan program.

Currently Ballard serves as USA Funds' senior vice president of program and corporate development, a role he assumed in fall 2008. In this capacity, Ballard directs USA Funds' postsecondary education access and outreach programs and coordinates USA Funds' strategic planning efforts.

Leading an access and outreach division is a new adventure for Ballard, but philanthropy is something that has been important to him throughout his career.

Ballard was one of the early board members of Indiana Dollars for Scholars, joining shortly after it formed in 2002. Indiana Dollars for Scholars serves 109 chapters throughout Indiana and works with groups to form Dollars for Scholars chapters in their communities. The organization aims to help local students achieve their educational goals by raising scholarship funds, establishing endowments, providing assistance with the college planning and financial aid process, and distributing scholarships.

Ballard is completing his first year as Indiana Dollars for Scholars board chair. In this role, he assists the Dollars for Scholars staff with strategic planning and pursuing fund-raising initiatives to support the regional office.

"Bob has served us as a board member and now as our board chair," says Don Setterlof, executive director, Indiana Dollars for Scholars. "He brings his years of experience and knowledge to us, and is a true leader. He's very hands-on and is a true asset to our organization."

While Ballard has spent his career in the student loan community, he also has always had an interest in health care. He completed a minor in health care administration while attending Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y., where he received a bachelor's degree in management. He also holds a master's degree from the University of Rochester in New York.

Ballard considered health care administration as a career path.

When an opportunity to become a part of the Riverview Hospital Memorial Foundation Board presented itself, he jumped at the opportunity. Ballard joined the board in fall 2001 and currently is serving as its chair. The foundation exists to support the Noblesville, Ind., hospital through education, advocacy and fund raising — and its donors are partners in changing lives in the community.

"I truly believe in the work Riverview does, so it is easy for me to be an advocate for the hospital and its services," says Ballard. "It's very fulfilling to be a part of the foundation team, as we raise funds and see the money we raise not only benefit the hospital, but ultimately, the community it serves."

Ballard also serves on the board of directors of United Way of Central Indiana. He joined the organization's board shortly after United Way formed the Ready to Learn, Ready to Earn initiative. He currently is a member of the committee that oversees and guides the program.

A multi-stage initiative, Ready to Learn, Ready to Earn aims to significantly improve the high school graduation rate in central Indiana.

With his new role at USA Funds and his board activities, Ballard is relishing the new opportunities in his life, and doesn't see the need to slow down any time soon, which is good news to those with whom he works.

"I've known Bob for years through the foundation as a board member, but more importantly I consider him a friend," says Trish Oman, executive director, Riverview Hospital Foundation. "No matter how busy he is, he is always willing to lend a hand to help out. His dedication and commitment speak to the type of outstanding person he is."



Photo by Brent Smith

Bob Ballard, center, of USA Funds works in the community and at USA Funds to promote higher education access. Here he meets with Alicia Roberts, left, and Lori True of USA Funds.



USA Funds provides USA Funds Unlock the Future to schools, community agencies and faith-based organizations.

Program Promotes Early Awareness

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says Bob Ballard, USA Funds senior vice president, program and corporate development. “The redesigned materials and new video appeal to students and encourage parents — especially those with no previous college experience — to ensure their children prepare academically, and families are prepared financially, for education beyond high school.”

Encouraging discussion

Deandra Thompson, scholar specialist for the Starfish Initiative in Indianapolis, has presented USA Funds Unlock the Future to two different groups in which she is involved. She presented the program through the Indiana Black Expo Youth Summits and to students through her work at the Starfish Initiative.

Starfish aims to make college-preparatory education a viable choice for more inner-city students in Indianapolis by connecting talented and academically capable, low-income students with the social and financial resources needed to ensure their success through college. Indiana Black Expo Youth Summits train and organize youth to assume leadership positions in their communities.

“I have found that open discussion and dialogue is one of the best ways to get students involved,” says Thompson. “The new USA Funds Unlock the Future video can serve as a platform for discussion among the

students who see it. Additionally, the video can give parents an idea of what students face at school, and in turn, students can see the types of challenges parents face, and this can open up discussion between students and their families.”

The program contains a “train the trainer” manual and is fully customizable to reach a variety of audiences. USA Funds Unlock the Future can be delivered to groups of students and their families or to audiences of just parents or just students. The program is geared toward middle school students, but the new video contains messages relevant to both younger and older students, as well.

“Even if students don’t see themselves in the video, they might see someone they know, or they can discuss what they might do in that situation,” says Thompson. “Creating an environment where students feel safe to talk about the issues they face in school or the educational dreams they have can make all the difference in the world to a student’s success.”

For more information

USA Funds provides USA Funds Unlock the Future without charge to schools, community agencies and faith-based organizations, with priority consideration given to those located in the eight states where USA Funds serves as the designated guarantor of federal education loans. Those states are Arizona, Hawaii, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada and Wyoming.

For more information and to order online, visit www.usafunds.org/16summers on the USA Funds Web site.

Middle Grades: *The Critical Step to College Success*



By

Mary Henton

Director of Integrated Media Initiatives
National Middle School Association



and

Betty Edwards

Executive Director
National Middle School Association

In a time when a college education is more important than ever, 25 percent of U.S. high school graduates do not meet the benchmarks for college and career readiness. In other words, one in four of our high school graduates lacks the knowledge and skills necessary to matriculate into college or to obtain a job that pays a salary above the poverty line for a family of four.

And these students are the lucky ones. These are the students who stay in school and graduate. Their peers who drop out at the alarming rate of 7,000 each day leave school for a future framed by poverty, unemployment, poor health, decreased access to health insurance, and an increased chance of involvement in the justice system. This crisis has laid siege to our nation, in general, and to our poorest communities, in particular.

There is plenty of evidence revealing the forces behind these statistics. Further, there are laudable efforts to alter the conditions that create and contribute to the crisis. Over the last decade, research from the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University has focused on the dropout crisis in an attempt to uncover root causes and propose solutions. With a focus on urban settings and communities with high poverty — schools and communities where students disproportionately drop out of school — Robert Balfanz, director of the center, has identified some startling and encouraging facts:

- ♦ Students begin to fall off the graduation track at the start of adolescence.
- ♦ Educators can identify future dropouts as early as sixth grade. In fact, in high-poverty schools, 75 percent of eventual dropouts can be identified between the sixth and ninth grades.

The evidence is clear. We lose our students in the middle grades. We can reclaim them in the middle grades as well. More importantly, we can reclaim their futures.

ACT's recent report *The Forgotten Middle: Ensuring That All Students Are on Target for College and Career Readiness Before High School* confirms the middle grades are critical to assuring that students remain in school and graduate college- and career-ready.

In fact, this report identifies eighth grade academic achievement as "the best predictor of college and career readiness," outweighing other indicators including background (gender, race/ethnicity, parent education level and family income), standard course work, advanced/honors course work, and high school grade point average.

Additionally, however, the ACT data show that fewer than two in 10 eighth-graders are on target to be ready for college-level work by the time they graduate from high school. Again, those are the students who do graduate. What about those who do not?

Educators, policy-makers and community leaders generally are in agreement that there is a dropout crisis. Each group can point to important efforts to address the crisis. High-needs schools squeeze every breath out of shrinking resources for wide-ranging needs. Policy-makers define expectations and vision. Community and faith-based organizations leverage their resources on behalf of young people.

These same community leaders, educators and policy-makers, however, are likely uninformed about the research and about the research-based solutions that can overturn the dire situation. They lack a shared, solid knowledge base that can inform consistent, coordinated, scalable and effective practices in the middle grades.

We cannot afford to waste time ensuring that the middle grades education our students experience is anything less than stellar. We must effect the changes that we know, through research and practice, make a difference in the education of our middle grades students — especially for those students in communities most in need and most at risk. We must apply the knowledge to intervene and reset the course for academic achievement and career and college readiness.

Middle grade interventions make the most significant and lasting impact on a student's prospects for high school success and college- and career-readiness. We must not only ensure that every middle level student has access to programs that expand their learning, but we also must ensure that the adults in the school monitor their growth and move them along the paths to success.

For more information

- ♦ ***The Forgotten Middle: Ensuring That All Students Are on Target for College and Career Readiness Before High School***
ACT
www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/ForgottenMiddleSummary.pdf
- ♦ ***"The Graduation Rate Crisis and What We Can Do About It — The Federal Role in Secondary School Reform"***
April 24, 2007, testimony from Robert Balfanz of the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University for the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pension
http://help.senate.gov/Hearings/2007_04_24/Balfanz.pdf
- ♦ ***Healthier and Wealthier: Decreasing Health Care Costs by Increasing Educational Attainment***
Alliance for Excellent Education
www.all4ed.org/files/HandW.pdf?wwparam=1234889740
- ♦ **National Middle School Association**
www.nmsa.org
- ♦ ***Ready for College and Ready for Work: Same or Different?***
ACT
www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/ReadinessBrief.pdf
- ♦ ***Whatever It Takes: How Twelve Communities Are Reconnecting Out-of-School Youth***
American Youth Policy Forum
www.aypf.org/publications/WhateverItTakes/WITfull.pdf

In This Issue of USA Funds Education Partnerships

Enhanced Program Promotes Early Awareness of Higher Education Options

Learn how the newly updated USA Funds Unlock the Future program is advising families of the importance of postsecondary education and encouraging them to prepare for the future.

Community Service Longtime Priority for New Access and Outreach Leader

Meet USA Funds' new senior vice president of program and corporate development, who brings a strong background of service to country and community to his position.

Middle Grades: The Critical Step to College Success

Read why officials of the National Middle School Association say middle school achievement is key to student success in the future.



USA Funds Unlock the Future

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P.O. Box 6028
Indianapolis, IN 46206-6028