Blanding Talent Search Program Receives Funds for Another Five Years

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There are middle school and high school students across the country who have the potential to excel in higher education, if only given the opportunity. Thanks to a five-year extended federal grant, the TRIO Talent Search program at Utah State University Blanding will continue to help identify these individuals and aid them in getting the tools and support they need to succeed in middle and high school and enroll in college.

The TRIO Talent Search program is a federally funded program that identifies and assists individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential to succeed in higher education. The program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, provides academic, career, and financial counseling to its participants and encourages them to graduate from high school and continue on and complete their postsecondary education.

“This program recognizes that students whose parents do not have a college degree have more difficulties navigating the complexity of decisions that college requires for success,” said Jami Bayles, USU Blanding TRIO Talent Search director. “It bolsters students from low-income families who have not had the academic opportunities that their college peers have had and helps remove obstacles preventing students from thriving academically.”

Bayles has a special wall in her office called the “Wall of Success.” On this wall, she keeps graduation announcements and newspaper articles about her former students. At times when things seem tough, Bayles looks at this wall to remind her that the hard work is worth it, because of the lives it changes.

“It’s the first thing I see when I walk in, and it’s a constant reminder of why I do what I do,” she said. “When it’s a particularly stressful time, such as these last two years with the COVID-19 pandemic, I call it my ‘Wall of Motivation’. It truly is the most rewarding job I could ever have. When I see pictures of former students on my wall who are now doctors, teachers, senators, lawyers, counselors, engineers, pilots, and even pastry chefs that travel the world, it is such a fantastic feeling.”

Bayles and her team work with local high school and middle schools across eight schools and three districts. This includes seven schools in Utah and one in Arizona. In total, the funds for the 2021-22 school year will serve 825 students in 6-12th grade. These students are provided with academic and financial counseling, career exploration, tutoring services, help with college admission requirements, mentorship and much more. Bayles has first-hand experience with the program, being one of its first participants in the 80s.

“I am living proof that TRIO truly does work,” Bayles said. “Not only did this program help me prepare for college, but it gave me the skills to help my younger sister succeed as well. I encouraged her to take as many concurrent enrollment courses as she could while in high school, and not only did she graduate a year early, but she was also able to graduate with her associate degree at the same time.

“That’s what TRIO programs do. They help students succeed in education, but then often that student turns around and helps a sibling, a friend, and in many cases, TRIO students have encouraged their own parents to go back and complete their postsecondary education. I cannot think of a more rewarding career.”

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 80% of TRIO Talent Search participants enroll in postsecondary institutions immediately following high school graduation. The federal program began in 1965 and has been a part of the USU Blanding campus for more than 30 years.
USU Blanding TRIO Talent Search directory Jami Bayles stand in front of her "Wall of Success", a collection of graduation announcements for students who found success in the TRIO program. TRIO Talent Search is a federally funded program that identifies and assists individuals from disadvantaged background who have the potential to succeed in higher education.

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