

SkillsUSA Utah State Directors Message, 1/11/21

(Please note: Most of this message was copied from a message sent earlier by Chelle Travis, our national SkillsUSA Executive Director. I changed some of the wording to make it apply to our state conference event.)

Upcoming deadlines

Utah Leadership and Skills Conference

Registration Opens: January 25th, 2021

State and National Membership Deadline: February 15th, 2021

Registration Deadline: February 19th, 2021

To All SkillsUSA Utah students, advisors, administrators, and industry partners,

I know that you've all been anticipating an official announcement on the status of our 2021 SkillsUSA Utah Leadership and Skills Conference. I'm writing not just to share that decision, but also the reasoning behind it. In addition, I hope to provide you with as clear a picture as I can of what to expect from the 2021 SkillsUSA Utah Leadership and Skills Conference, with the understanding that more specific details -- still being finalized -- will be announced in the days ahead.

With that in mind, the **SkillsUSA Utah Leadership and Skills Conference will be held virtually in the spring of 2021.**

While I know the first reaction to this news will be disappointment, I want to assure all of you that we WILL be holding an engaging and inspiring event you can all be proud of, including most of our traditional SkillsUSA Championships competitions. Although the medals and prizes our competitors receive may not be presented in person this year, those bronze, silver and gold medallions will be just as valuable and just as respected by industry as they've always been. They'll also be just as likely to lead students to life-changing educational and career opportunities.

Before I offer more details on the 2021 event, however, I'd like to go through some of the factors that led to our decision.

Number one on that list, as always, is the health and safety of our members and stakeholders. With so much still unclear as to when large face-to-face gatherings will be deemed safe and when the effects of the virus will finally subside, we could not in good conscience move forward with the planning of an in-person event bringing thousands of our members and stakeholders together from across the state.

Travel restrictions have also had a large effect on our decision. Most school districts and college institutions have eliminated day trip and overnight travel for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. If school delegations are unable to travel, they cannot participate in a state level in-person event, and our state conference cannot function without that participation.

The lack of our ability to adequately prepare for the event as a state staff has also been a crucial issue. Most of our traditional competition venues are not allowed to have large in-person events, and the current Utah Health Department restrictions would make it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to host in-person competitive events.

Since the national SkillsUSA leadership made the decision to move forward with a totally virtual event during the summer of 2021, it makes sense that we would do the same to give our students the opportunity to compete in a similar virtual environment and better prepare them for the virtual National Leadership and Skills Conference.

Finally, our business and industry partners are facing similar issues with travel restrictions and budgetary obstacles, and many have expressed concern that they will be unable to travel and participate in an in-person event in 2021. Most, however, remain committed to supporting and participating in the virtual events we're currently planning.

As this hopefully makes clear, an in-person state conference in 2021, as much as we all want it, is simply not a realistic option for SkillsUSA Utah. Making our decision now will enable all of us to focus on what IS possible, and to make those events as empowering, engaging and inspiring as we can.

We've learned much over the last few months, and we are working hard to create the best possible competitive experience for our students.

As for the SkillsUSA Utah competitions, we will be following the national SkillsUSA Championship Technical Standards. These guidelines have been revised for each competition to reflect the virtual nature of the event. All competitions will be judged -- and many will be conducted -- virtually. However, some will require localized areas where hands-on skills will be performed by competitors and overseen by an instructor and a proctor to ensure safety, quality and integrity in all competitions. These hands-on elements will also be documented, and that documentation will be shared with national judges as part of the virtual judging process. Details are still being finalized but rest assured: the skills of our competitors WILL be put to the test once again this year as they're judged against tough national standards. We WILL name state bronze, silver and gold medalists, and our partners -- as they have always done -- will be eager to meet and hire the best career and technical education students in the nation.

Our state staff and sector chairs are working hard to determine the official contest list and to determine exactly which competitions will be offered this year. There is significant effort required to set up virtual contest schedules and logistics. Look for more specific details in the days ahead.

On behalf of all of us on the state staff, thank you so much for all you've done and continue to do throughout this crisis to keep SkillsUSA vital and relevant in your schools. Thank you for showing the nation that not even a pandemic can stop us from accomplishing SkillsUSA's important mission in the lives of our students.

More information is coming soon. Stay safe and healthy.

Richard Wittwer
SkillsUSA Utah State Director