

Public Education Overview

Education in Utah is the single largest budget item for government representing approximately \$3 Billion in total expenditures to educate nearly 600,000 students, yet Utah retains the lowest per pupil spending in the nation. Though funding for our children's education is an on-going concern, Utah ranks well across the nation in standardized testing and graduation. This is a testament to the engagement of our citizens in the education process and the recognition that the investment in our youth is a team effort. The education system in Utah is very efficient and productive overall. Continued focus on the "Promises to Keep" vision and mission statement produced by the Utah Board of Education, helps keep the overall system moving in partnership toward common long term objectives, while the newly adopted "Core Standards and Assessment" will provide the learning infrastructure to ensure students achieve a level of competency required to meet challenges in a global economy.

Items identified for potential improvements by the Governor's Commission to Optimize State Government include items that are being incorporated in operating plans across educational institutions. Adoption of innovative approaches are paced with proven models that ensure our children have the opportunities to learn, while not sacrificing the important teacher to student relationships that are important to shaping their futures.

3d: Expand the use of online textbooks

This recommendation is currently being carried out by the Utah System of Higher Education and the Utah State Board of Education. Some of the activities under consideration include writing Utah Standards to the Common Core, development of textbooks matching the new Utah Common Core, and increasing students' ability to access new textbooks online or using notebooks. A key requirement for achieving this objective is enabling all students with equipment needed for online access. Research has shown that achieving a 1:1 student to hardware ratio when coupled with effective curriculum and teacher interaction can significantly improve graduation and post-secondary education outcomes.

3e: Expand online high school courses

The Utah Board of Education is writing rules to allow students to take online courses at the high school level, including offering graduation and "on-line only" credits to students. In addition, seven college courses are scheduled to be available during the upcoming school year. These courses can be applied to a student's completion of an associate's or bachelor's degree, allowing students the opportunity to get a jump start on their college education. Though on-line access is an important and growing education channel, it is recognized that students respond differently to different types of education, and teacher interaction will continue be an important aspect of public education.

3g: Utilize competency based education models

The ultimate goal of education is to enable students to become productive members of society with sustainable skills. Utah is continuing to integrate competency based education models into curriculum across the public school system. Board Rule R277-705-3 enables local districts and schools to implement demonstrated competency assessments in targeted courses to achieve high school credits. Further integration of on-line courses will further this objective.

3h: Make all school days “Count”

Education aspires to ensure high-quality instruction resulting in qualified and knowledgeable students entering college and the workforce. To this end, Utah educational leadership is working with the legislature to improve several areas, including:

- Restoring 180 school day calendars for all districts
- Teaching up to the last day of school (as administered by Utah’s professional teachers and administrators
- Restoring teacher quality block grant funding

3i: Better utilize public and higher education buildings

Facilities for education are typically owned and operated at the local level to ensure optimal alignment to community requirements. Facilities are obligated by legislation to be available for political party meetings, and are used extensively for community activities. Local school boards focus significant energy in identifying how to best utilize facilities to maximize value to the community.