

Public Education

Utah Citizens' Counsel Education Committee

Article 3. *All Utahns have the right to a public education that ensures literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, character development, and the capability for responsible citizenship to help secure a promising future for Utah in a complex, interdependent, and competitive world.*

Introduction

Two years ago, UCC described the long-term decline in funding for public education as a percentage of the state budget and personal income. We also noted the concomitant disappointing achievement scores when disaggregated by ethnicity and compared to peer states. Last year we identified the research establishing the long-term benefits of high quality preschool programs, particularly for at-risk four-year-olds from low income families. Although the Utah Legislature has increased funding for public education in recent years and made modest initial investments in high quality preschool programming, the overall funding patterns lag well behind other states and do not demonstrate long-term commitment or investment in the education of Utah's children. For these reasons, we continue to focus on overall funding and preschool needs. We also address the newly trenchant issue of teacher shortage.

Funding for K-12 Public Education

Despite increases in the weighted pupil unit (the basic funding unit), Utah has been losing about 1 billion dollars a year in education funding over the past decade, due to earlier cuts in state income tax rates and property tax levies for schools, along with legislative shifts to higher education from public education.¹ We are not alone in recommending that this **funding shortfall must stop**. Governor Gary Herbert has encouraged greater investment,² although his statements fall short of what is needed. Education First and the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce's Prosperity 20/20, both advocacy groups with well-respected backers, have been urging an increase in the personal income tax for several years.

Tired of inaction at the Legislature, Education First, with broad support, is pursuing an **initiative petition to place a 7/8 of 1% increase in the personal income tax rate on the 2018 ballot**. These tax rates have not increased since 1975. The flat tax rate of 5%, imposed in 2008, has resulted in a decline in overall effort.³ The initiative is variously estimated to produce between \$600-740 million/year in new revenues.⁴ Although an important step, it would not return Utah to the level of effort that was present 20 years ago. The growing Utah economy is among the best in the country. Polls show support for a tax increase for public education.⁵ Closing tax loopholes also would help close the gap between the funds raised by the initiative and the more than \$1 billion in lost annual revenue. Increased revenue should be targeted to areas likely to produce the most favorable outcomes: namely, high quality preschool programs, K-3 reading and numeracy improvements, all-day kindergarten, professional development, and teacher salary increases.

Teacher Shortage

News reports and information from the state's teacher colleges indicate a growing teacher shortage. Enrollment in teacher colleges is down significantly.⁶ The potential problem was

identified nearly a decade ago⁷ but has gained traction again only recently. When trained teachers are not available, students are harmed. Quality suffers. The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) recognizes the problem. Alternative routes to licensure have existed for a number of years, but more research needs to determine effectiveness and retention rates compared to teacher-college graduates. As a new stopgap, USBE is allowing local education agencies (LEAs) to hire noncertified teachers with a bachelor's degree in a subject area--an emergency response but hardly a long-term solution. Among other things, teaching expertise also depends on behavior management techniques and skill in selecting teaching methods. The Legislature's Education Interim Committee, in July 2016, asked the University of Utah Education Policy Center for current, in-depth research on the extent of the shortage, covering both recruitment and retention problems. Also an issue is whether retirements are a larger than expected problem. The Center's initial results are due by the end of 2016. Enough is known already, however, to begin to address the problem now.

Immediate steps include redressing the poor teacher retention rate. Data show that 40% of Utah teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching.⁸ Although we cannot prevent some from leaving for personal and family reasons, we can certainly decrease the turnover by improving the support for new teachers. Restoring professional development funds and targeting one-on-one mentoring of new teachers by a skilled, experienced teacher would be effective, as would assignments to less troubled schools. Sending new teachers into the most difficult school settings, without enough support, is a recipe for burnout. Peer collaboration, where teachers share tips as equals and collectively plan to solve behavior and instructional problems, is another recognized tool to improve teacher morale and effectiveness, reduce isolation and stress, and provide important support to all teachers, including new ones. Workload demands remain burdensome; incremental reductions in class sizes and testing requirements, and more auxiliary staff like social workers, school psychologists, and school nurses would all help.

Utah also must begin to **address teacher salaries**. The average starting salary for Utah teachers in 2012-2013 was \$33,081, about 8.5% below the national average.⁹ Over the past 20 years, the gap has widened between national teacher salaries and salaries of other college graduates. Utah's public school teachers are paid only 70.31% of what the state's other college graduates are paid--the 9th worst ratio in the country.¹⁰ In short, Utah's teacher salaries are less than satisfactory for a profession with the greatest influence on the growth and development of our children. Moreover, retirement benefits for new teachers were reduced as a result of 2010 legislation, decreasing the motivation of some to enter the teaching profession. Many young people, both female and male, choose to enter other professions or trades that allow them to better support themselves and their families. Salaries must be improved.

Expanding High Quality Preschools

In 2016, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 101, which appropriated \$11.5 million to expand high quality preschool programs across the state. Nine million dollars of that money utilized available federal funds (TANF, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), which had built up a reserve over the years. The TANF funds, supplemented by a modest \$2 million of state funds, will be renewed each year for three years, with another \$500,000 allocated on a one-time basis for training 300 additional preschool teachers. Administration of SB 101 is divided between the USBE and the Division of Workforce Services (DWS). USBE administers the allocation of \$7

million to LEAs and charter schools, and \$2 million to a home-based online technology program (UPSTART). DWS administers the other \$2.5 million--\$1 million for scholarships to enable four-year-olds from the Intergenerational Poverty population to attend high quality public or private preschools, \$1 million for grant expansion of high quality private preschool programs, and \$500,000 for the preschool training noted above.

Under SB 101, USBE and DWS have joint responsibility to determine that program recipients are offering high quality preschool programs. Both agencies used lengthy applications, interviews, and observations using the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales (ECERS) as the basis for determining which applicants met the requirements.¹¹ The following LEAs were selected for grants: Davis, Granite, Iron, Jordan, Murray, Salt Lake City, Sevier, Washington, and Weber. Participating schools in those districts range from one to fourteen. Five private preschools were also selected for expansion money. Together, more than 1400 preschoolers are being newly served in school-based public and private programs and approximately 2700 through UPSTART (but for far shorter times each day).¹² The pilot programs underway under SB 101 and 2014's House Bill 96 (Pay for Success and preschool grant programs) are a beginning but are far from reaching most of the preschool children from low income families.¹³

Although there is impressive research on the short- and long-term benefits of high quality preschool education,¹⁴ Utah has yet to develop and **implement a common, statewide assessment** that compares the learning curves of preschool students in high quality and less-than-high quality programs as the students move through the school system. If the political will to significantly expand Utah's publicly supported preschool education is to scale up and garner significantly more state funding, Utah needs its own strong research-based rationale for doing so.

SB 101 requires USBE and DWS to select an independent evaluator to measure both short- and longer-term (through 3rd grade) outcomes of four-year-olds in their preschool programs. Together, USBE and DWS selected Jon Hobbs from California-based Education and Training Institute to analyze standardized assessment scores from preschoolers in SB 101 programs and those in programs not yet deemed high quality.¹⁵ At the same time, the Utah School Superintendents Association has developed a kindergarten readiness assessment, using teacher administered performance measures. The assessment is being piloted this year in hopes of refining it and using it statewide next year. Selecting uniform, reliable assessment measures of preschool programs is critical to evaluating student outcomes. The best research supports assessments that measure student cognitive and social-emotional growth and that include teacher-directed instruction in literacy and numeracy.¹⁶ Many school districts across the country, for example, Los Angeles and Seattle, have or are adopting multi-faceted assessment strategies.¹⁷ Utah must follow suit soon and obtain consensus among all LEAs about what constitutes valid, reliable assessment of outcomes.¹⁸ Both short-term and long-term outcomes are needed.

Expanding optional enhanced kindergarten for Utah students at risk is also important. HB 42, providing for such expansion, failed to pass the 2016 Legislature. The bill is expected to be reintroduced in the 2017 session. Like the research on the benefits of high quality preschools for at-risk children, the research on the value of full-day kindergarten for these same children is compelling.¹⁹ Together, high quality preschool and full-day kindergarten hold much promise for significantly narrowing the opportunity gap for at-risk children in school and into adulthood.

As preschool programs accelerate in the future, one unmet need is **attracting, preparing, and retaining well trained preschool teachers**. Most of them are paid poorly compared to K-12 teachers, many at wages that keep them near the poverty level. Unless preschool teachers are paid more, the incentive to teach for those with better paying career choices will be virtually nonexistent.

Commendations

- **Education First and Prosperity 20/20** for taking the lead to increase tax revenues for public education and restore badly needed funding to improve public education
- **Legislators Ann Millner and Lowry Snow** for promoting better preschool and kindergarten opportunities for children at risk
- **Professional USBE and DWS staff** for working well together to implement SB 101
- **Envision Utah and the United Way** for their visible community roles in furthering long-term investment in public education and high quality preschools for at-risk children
- **The University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Salt Lake County, Salt Lake Valley LEAs, and the United Way** for holding a joint early childhood symposium in September 2016
- **Representative Jack Draxler's (R) and Senator Jim Dabakis's (D) efforts** in the 2016 Legislature to increase the income tax rate for public education

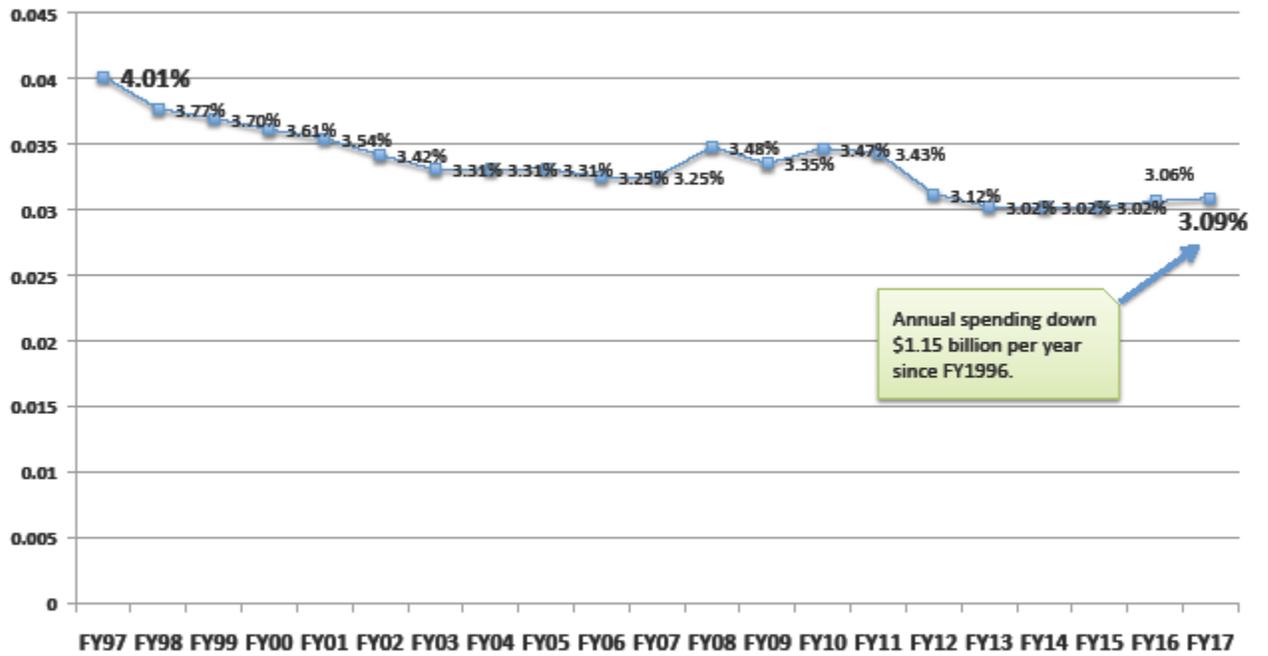
Recommendations

- **Public support of the upcoming ballot initiative** (labelled "Our Schools Now") to increase revenues for public education, and a **major marketing campaign by the sponsors** to demonstrate the fairness of the increase. **It is time for major investment in the intellectual and social infrastructure of our public schools, just as we have already done for our physical infrastructure in highways.**
- **Legislative expansion of state and federal funding** under SB 101 and HB 96 for high quality preschools and preschool teacher preparation
- **Legislative funding for increased teacher salaries and solutions to recruitment and retention problems, including restoration of lost funding for professional development**, utilizing proven methods to increase teacher skills
- **Legislative passage of an optional extended-day kindergarten bill**
- **USBE development, during 2017, in collaboration with the Utah School Superintendents, of a uniform statewide assessment** of short- and long-term preschool outcomes comparing various kinds of preschool programs
- **USBE reconsideration of its new Level 1 Licensure for noncertified teachers**

Appendix 1

The two tables on the following pages were prepared by Douglas Macdonald, former chief economist for the Utah State Tax Commission, 1979-2006

Utah Public Education (K-12) Operating Expenditures as a Percent of Utah Personal Income (Spending Effort)



Doug Macdonald, Econowest Associates, Inc. from: Division of Finance, 2014 CAFR, A-4;
Office of the Legislative Fiscal Analyst, Budget of the State of Utah, FY 2017, p 44, 272.

Endnotes for Article 3 (Public Education)

¹ See tables prepared by Douglas MacDonald in Appendix 1. The Utah Foundation has come up with similar figures. See Benjamin Wood, "Tax Policies Shortchange Utah Schools \$1.2B a Year," *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 29, 2016, A1. As noted in the article, the Utah Foundation reported that Utah's funding effort "was ranked seventh in the nation in the mid-1990s. It has since dropped to 37th." Ibid, A4. The full Utah Foundation report is available at <http://www.utahfoundation.org/reports/getting-less-two-decades-k-12-education-revenue-spending/>. See also "Easing the Burden: Utah Tax Burden Taking Lowest Share of Income in 20 Years," *Utah Foundation*, January 14, 2015, accessed June 10, 2016, http://www.utahfoundation.org/report_category/taxes/.

² "Governor's Position on Education," accessed September 22, 2016, [education.html](http://www.utah.gov/governor/priorities/)
<http://www.utah.gov/governor/priorities/>.

³ "Individual Income Tax FY 1931-2015," *Utah State Tax Commission*, accessed September 22, 2016, <http://tax.utah.gov/econstats/history>.

⁴ Estimates supplied by Juliette Tennert, Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute; and Richard Kendell, Education First.

⁵ Utahpolicy.com, accessed September 2016, <http://utahpolicy.com/index.php/features/today-at-utah-policy/10242-utahns-overwhelmingly-support-income-tax-increase-to-fund-public-education>. See also Envision Utah's pamphlet, *Utahns' Vision for 2050, Education (2016)*, 27. As we know, the construction of poll questions can influence the outcome of a poll. A recent online poll by Envision Utah revealed how the public misunderstands school spending and believes that the percent of funds spent on school administration is far higher than it actually is. This particular poll found that only a bare majority supported a tax increase. Benjamin Wood, "Survey on Funding Shows Utahns Mistrust Schools, Administrators," *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 9, 2016, B1. It is likely that any proposed tax increase would need an extensive, accurate, and effective marketing campaign.

⁶ Annie Knox, "Utah Needs Teachers, but College Students Don't Want to Major in Education," *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 7, 2016, accessed September 2016, <http://www.sltrib.com/home/utah-needs-teachers-but-college-students...>

⁷ David J. Sperry, "An Educational Initiative for the State of Utah," a report submitted to the Utah K-16 Alliance from its special task force on teacher shortages (March 2007). A second Sperry report entitled "Report on Teacher Education Supply-Demand Needs of K-12 Education in the State of Utah" was submitted Fall 2007. These reports were preceded by a 2006 survey, from the same task force, of Utah teacher colleges and school districts. The reports identified looming teacher shortages and made recommendations to address them. University of Utah Professor Sperry, who headed the task force, was a scholar in residence at the Utah State Board of Regents at the time this work was done.

⁸ "At First Glance: Teachers in Utah," *Utah Education Policy Center, University of Utah 2* (2016), accessed September 21, 2016, www.uepc.utah.edu/documents/uepc_teacher_shortages.pdf.

⁹ "2012-2013 Average Starting Salaries by State," *National Education Association*, accessed September 24, 2016, <http://www.nea.org/home/2012-2013-average-starting-teacher-salary.html>. Compared to other western states, Utah's starting salary was a little higher than that of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, and Montana, but lower than Nevada's (\$35,000 plus) and far lower than Wyoming's (\$43,000 plus).

The average salary (not starting salary) for all Utah teachers was \$49,393 in 2012-13, about 7% below the national average of \$53,648. "Teaching Salary by State," *Teacher Portal*, accessed September 24, 2016, <http://www.teacherportal.com/teacher-salaries-by-state>. The percentage below the national average was calculated by Bonneville Research. The national average for all states combined was calculated by Dixie Huefner.

¹⁰ "In No State Are Teachers Paid More Than Other College Graduates," *Economic Policy Institute*, Figure G, August 9, 2016, accessed September 17, 2016, www.epi.org/publication/the-teacher-pay-gap-is-wider-than-ever-teachers-pay-continues-to-fall-further-behind-pay-of-comparable-workers/.

¹¹ Jennifer Throndsen (USBE Elementary Literacy Coordinator), Interview with Dixie Huefner et al., August 16, 2016, and September 21, 2016; Tracy Gruber (Director, DWS Office of Child Care), Interview with Huefner et al., August 22, 2016 (notes in Huefner possession)

¹² Ibid. The Intergenerational Welfare Reform Commission's 2016 Annual Report provides somewhat higher estimates.

¹³ Ibid. Precise data are not available. Although several thousand preschoolers are being served through HB 96, SB 101, Head Start, and Title I, all administrators of these programs agree that there is a long way to go before all at-risk preschoolers are served.

¹⁴ Gregory Camilli et al., "Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Early Education Interventions on Cognitive and Social Development," *Teachers College Record* 112 (No.3) (2010), 579-620. (The article examines 123 comparative studies on early childhood interventions.) The authors concluded that positive effects were produced for cognitive outcomes, social skills, and school progress. The authors also stated that "specific aspects of the treatment that positively correlated with gains included teacher-directed instruction and small group instruction." See also Bruce Bradbury, et al., *Too Many Children Left Behind* (New York: Russell Sage Fd., 2015); Bette Chambers, et al., "Literacy and Language Outcomes of Comprehensive and Developmental-Constructivist Approaches to Early Childhood Education: A Systematic Review," *The Best Evidence Encyclopedia*, accessed September 25, 2016, www.bestevidence.org; "The Research in Pre-K," *Center for Public Education*, accessed September 25, 2016, <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Pre-kindergarten/Pre-Kindergarten>.

¹⁵ Throndsen, e-mail message to Huefner, September 6, 2016.

¹⁶ Camilli et al., "Meta-Analysis."

¹⁷ There is no common assessment of kindergarten readiness across the country, or of performance outcomes for pre-K. Many different assessments are in use across the country, some that can be used beyond kindergarten, and some directed at 3 to 5-year-olds. California developed the DRDP-K (2015) for use with transition-K and kindergarten students; it is aligned with Common Core State Standards for kindergarten. Among other assessments in use across the country are the Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment System, which is designed for children from birth through kindergarten; the Early Learning Scales (ELS) for 3 to 5-year-olds, and the Work Sampling System (WSS) for 3-year-olds to 6th graders. Portfolios of student work and observations of developmental progress in specific areas are key components of these approaches, but some of these assessments measure more domains than others. Material describing these assessments was provided by Celia Ayala, retired CEO, Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP), Summer 2016. Seattle Public Schools (SPS) is currently developing its assessment system. Seattle voters in 2014 approved an initiative to fund high quality preschool throughout the city. SPS is collaborating with the city's Department of Education and Early Learning to manage eight public preschool classrooms. See <http://www.seattleschools.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=627&pageId=9084716>, accessed September 25, 2016. SPS is developing a 4-stage approach to evaluation: 1) quality standards, 2) processes that support quality improvements, 3) child outcomes, and 4) administrative oversight and implementation. Material on "2015 Evaluation Strategy" was provided by Erica Johnson, Senior Early Learning Policy Adviser, Seattle Public Schools, Summer 2016.

¹⁸ The University of Utah co-sponsored an Early Childhood Education Symposium on September 26, 2016. Other sponsors were Salt Lake County, Salt Lake City, Granite School District, Salt Lake City School District, Head Start, and United Way. Discussion of effective practices, financing options, and program evaluation were all included in the day-long event.

¹⁹ See, e.g., "Starting Out Right: Pre-K and Kindergarten at a Glance," *Center for Public Education*, February 2012, accessed September 25, 2016, www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Organizing-a-school/Starting-Out-Right-Pre-K-and-Kindergarten. This study found even higher gains for those who attended pre-K and half-day kindergarten than for those who attended only full-day kindergarten. The study did not measure outcomes for those who attended pre-K and full-day kindergarten.