

Fiscal Highlights

Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind Utah County Modular Classrooms - Jill L. Curry

In an effort to better understand budget issues regarding Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (USDB), Ben Leishman, Jonathan Ball, and Jill Curry from the Office of the Legislative Fiscal Analyst visited USDB facilities at Scera Park, Orem, and Westmore Elementary Schools in Utah County in June 2016. They were accompanied by USDB Superintendent Joel Coleman, Associate Superintendents Michelle Tanner and Carolyn Lasater, and Finance Director Letty Debenham. USDB operates a number of modular classrooms and these portable units have been discussed in the Public Education Appropriations Subcommittee for at least the last two general sessions.

One of the issues USDB faces is the condition of the modular units at these schools. The unit located at Scera Park Elementary was built in 1981. The steps and ramp leading into the modular unit are rusted in parts, and they have an open pattern (i.e. not completely solid) which poses a problem for students who use assistive devices such as walking canes. Although the USDB modular classrooms at Orem and Westmore Elementary Schools are in better condition than the one at Scera Park Elementary, storage space at all three locations is inadequate to contain all of the equipment and educational materials needed for USDB's students.

Another issue USDB faces related to portable classrooms is a lack of adequate classroom space. USDB has experienced growth in its student population. The school districts in Utah County have also seen an increase in enrollment. As a result, during the school year USDB was asked to vacate a modular unit owned by Alpine School District (next to the USDB-owned modular) that USDB had been using which left USDB having to relocate those students for the remainder of the school year. Scera Park Elementary was also the location USDB had planned to build an additional modular unit in FY 2016 with a \$347,000 one-time appropriation it received from the Legislature during the 2015 General Session. However, there is not space available for USDB to do so due to enrollment growth in the school district.

As a result of these issues, USDB is in the process of acquiring land and developing plans with the Division of Facilities Construction and Management (DFCM) for a small elementary school building in Utah County. During the 2016 General Session, the Legislature appropriated \$700,000 one-time which will be combined with the \$347,000 one-time appropriated for a modular classroom for FY 2016 to fund this effort. The new building will help alleviate the lack of adequate classroom space and storage currently experienced by USDB in Utah County. Changes are also happening to affect short-term improvements. Through follow-up initiated by Jonathan, DFCM has examined the ramp and stairs at the Scera Park Elementary modular unit and decided to replace them with capital improvement money which is money used to make critical repairs to state facilities.