

Issue Brief – Deaf Interpreter Support

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION – SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND

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SUMMARY

The Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind (USDB) provides educational services to students with visual and/or hearing impairments. USDB states that its mission is to “provide high quality direct and indirect education services to children with sensory impairments from birth through 21 years of age and their families in Utah.” Providing interpreters for students with hearing impairments is an educational service of USDB.

OBJECTIVE

This brief summarizes a request by the Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind to address issues of deaf interpreter retention and recruitment.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Obtaining and retaining qualified deaf interpreters is emerging as a significant issue facing state agencies providing services to the hearing impaired community. Both the Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind and the Division of Services to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation have indicated difficulty in recruiting qualified interpreters and the inability to compete with private wages.

Deaf Interpreter Support

Each student served by the Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that governs the educational services required for the student. If the student’s IEP determines that an interpreter is needed, USDB must provide an interpreter for that student.

Title 53A, Chapter 26a of the Utah code requires that interpreters for the deaf be certified by the state. USDB indicates that last year, approximately one

half of the USDB interpreting staff were uncertified and working on permits. The USDB has indicated that interpreter salary levels and their inability to compete with salaries offered in the private sector contribute to this program.

The USDB has requests \$200,000 in ongoing Uniform School Fund revenue to increase deaf interpreter compensation.

Recommendation: The subcommittee may wish to evaluate the compensation levels of the deaf interpreters at USDB and prioritize the requested \$200,000 in ongoing Uniform School Fund revenue among the other items before the subcommittee. The Analyst has included this item in a list of “Market Comparability Adjustment” (MCA) requests submitted by state agencies. This request will be considered by the Legislature when it establishes an employee compensation package.

Further, the Analyst recommends that the subcommittee request that the Department of Human Resource Management conduct a market study of compensation among state agencies, school districts and the private sector for deaf interpreters.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

This section provides a guide of what actions might be taken if the Legislature wishes to adopt the recommendations made in this brief. The Analyst recommends the Legislature:

1. Evaluate the requested need for increasing compensation levels for deaf interpreters. The subcommittee may wish to prioritize \$200,000 in ongoing Uniform School Fund revenue to support these increases or recommend to the Executive Appropriations Committee that this item be considered along with other Market Comparability Increases in state agencies.
2. Request that the Department of Human Resource Management conduct a market study of deaf interpreter compensation in the state.