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## Superintendent Hire: Slow it down & do it right

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**By Stuart Adams**

Utah State Senator, District 22

Like my colleagues, I am also curious as to why the State Board of Education feels such urgency in filling the vacant seat of Utah's State Superintendent. It seems odd that such an important position can be filled so quickly, unless of course they have already made the decision and are simply going through the process for show.

Here is why I find it odd. When one of our state universities selects a new president they spend months in the process.

\* Utah Valley University's last search committee convened on August 16, 2008. They announced their three final candidates seven months later in March of 2009.

\* The University of Utah's search ended on Jan. 17, 2012, after an eight-month search that began May 17, 2011.

\* Weber State University began looking for a new president on April 18 of this year. They still have not selected a new president, but hope to have their final 3 candidates selected by the end of October. That would put them at a seven month search.

The University of Utah runs with an annual budget of \$451 Million. UVU's budget is \$153 million . Weber State's is \$123 million.

### **The annual Public Education budget in Utah is \$3.6 billion.**

You'd think a statewide superintendent of public education would merit at least as much consideration as the president of a university, right?

Even local school boards spend at least as much, if not more time and effort than the state does in selecting new superintendents. Provo School District spent more than four months and hired a headhunter to find their new superintendent. Park City School District's superintendent Ray Timothy has submitted his resignation, but the board has decided that it will be next year before they hire a replacement because it "does not feel it has sufficient time between now and the November election to conduct a thorough nation-wide search."

Both of these districts felt it was necessary to conduct a national search to look for the best of all possible candidates. However, the State Board of Education has fast-tracked the process. They think that \$1,200 is too much to spend on national advertising and so they have limited their search net to a few online postings and an email to about 25 agencies and organizations. **Mind you, the person who is selected to do this job will control Utah's \$3.6 billion education budget. The University of Utah spent eight months to find someone they felt was qualified to manage \$435 million.** But \$1,200 is too much to spend to try and find qualified applicants?

According to Debra Roberts, Utah State Board of Education Chairwoman, the selection process this time will happen slightly faster but be "nearly identical to the process use to hire the past two state superintendents, Patti Harrington and Larry Shumway." You can read her explanation of the process [here](#).

This speed is apparently habitual. Superintendent Patti Harrington announced her retirement on March 6, 2009. Finalists were all selected by May 18. Before that, Superintendent Steven Laing announced his retirement in March of 2004, Patti Harrington was appointed on June 1st. (Incidentally, both Superintendent Shumway and Deputy Superintendent Martell Menlove were on the final slate of candidates when she was selected.)

For every month that a selection committee spends in looking for a university president, the USOE spends about one week of searching and consideration for candidates for their key administrative position.

According to Chairwoman Roberts, the selection process will be even faster this time in order to "accommodate the Board's wishes that the new superintendent be in place soon" so that that person can be "up to speed when the Legislature begins to meet in late January."

Really? Martel Menlove and Judy Park already do a fabulous job communicating with us. If they, or someone else in the office were appointed in an interim position, what would be the harm? Surely, there is enough internal talent in the USOE to keep the ship afloat during the upcoming session without rushing to fill a position that will control a multi-billion dollar budget and affect children all over the state.

How the Board of Education hires a superintendent is clearly up to them, but this fast-tracked process seems to me to be a mistake worth correcting (something with which we in the legislature have had experience, from time to time). I hope the Board will listen to reasonable concern expressed by my colleagues, the Deseret News, Sutherland Institute and others.

The Utah State Board of Education should not follow the pattern they have in the past. They should do an extensive and exhaustive search to find the most qualified candidates for our new state superintendent. Utah's students, teachers and taxpayers deserve no less.

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