

UEA Issue Brief

FY2016 Public Education Funding



Background:

Utah per-student public education funding has declined significantly since the beginning of the Great Recession. Per-student state funding for K-12 education remains **down 5.6%** from its 2008 pre-recession level (before inflation).^{*} Over this period, school districts have increased class sizes, eliminated teacher training opportunities, cut student instructional days and reduced school employee take-home pay in order to balance budgets.

In December 2014, Gov. Gary Herbert recommended a FY2016 Utah state budget that increases state public education spending by \$342.7 million, the largest increase in a quarter century. His budget calls for \$58 million to cover anticipated enrollment increases and another \$161 million to add 6.25% to the WPU. The Legislative Fiscal Analyst's Office has announced that the state can expect an overall \$638 million increase in state tax revenue for next fiscal year.

UEA's Position:

- The UEA supports the Governor's proposed 6.25% increase in the WPU.
- The UEA strongly supports the Governor's proposed investments in student enrollment growth and providing educators with classroom supply money.
- The UEA also supports an investment of \$24 million (or an additional 1% on the WPU) in educator professional development funding. This represents partial restoration of the \$78 million cut from teacher professional development during the recession.
- Investing in the WPU allows local school boards the flexibility to address priorities specific to their individual schools' needs, whether that be providing classes small enough for one-on-one attention, purchasing new technology, restoring teacher training opportunities or offering competitive compensation to attract and retain quality school employees.
- The UEA encourages local school boards to consider the following priorities for restored WPU funding:
 - Reduce class sizes to pre-2007 levels, allowing for more one-on-one classroom attention
 - Provide cost-of-living salary adjustments for school employees
 - Restore school non-attendance, furlough and professional development days
 - Restore cuts made to school programs such as arts, music, PE, etc.
 - Restore school employee wage and benefit reductions and deferrals
 - Begin the process of increasing teacher salaries to the national average over a five-year period

- The Governor's proposed budget reflects his and the legislature's long-standing stated belief that the primary way to increase funding for public education is to grow the economy and invest the resulting tax proceeds in education.
- School employee retirement and Social Security should be funded as a separate item "above the line."
- The UEA encourages the Utah Legislature to consider the following in relation to the public education budget:
 - Reject the siphoning off of precious education dollars through earmarks to unproven and unaccountable education experiments and pilot programs.
 - Direct investments in urgent school needs through an additional WPU increase to allow school districts flexibility and local control in determining budget priorities.
 - Develop a long-term plan to fund public education and ensure a quality public school for every child.
- Even with the proposed increase, Utah's education system remains compromised by lack of adequate funding. Utah remains last in the nation in per-student public education investment. While Utah taxpayers once spent a high amount on public education relative to incomes, that is no longer true when compared to other states.