

Local Control in Education Funding

"Above the Line"
vs.
"Below the Line"



The Basic School Program, often referred to as “above-the-line” funding, is Utah’s foundation funding formula for public education. Its funding levels are determined by the **weighted pupil unit (WPU)**, which is paid to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) according to enrollment.

WPU Facts:

- **Local need** determines how LEAs (elected district school boards and charter schools) use WPU funding, with little legislative restriction.
- The main purpose of the WPU is to **distribute funding equally**, and to some degree equitably, across the state.
- Largely because of the WPU formula for funding distribution, Utah ranks third in the nation for **fairness of its funding distribution** ([National Report Card](#), Education Law Center, 2014).
- The WPU value is set annually by the Legislature.
- The WPU accounts for less than half of all Utah public education expenditures.

Why not just move all funding into the WPU?

Many have questioned why items in the Related to Basic Program, or “below the line”, are not simply moved into the WPU to allow for equalized distribution and greater local control.

In fact, there are several reasons the Legislature has elected to fund items “below the line”:

- To target funding to a particular educational need or a student sub-group (e.g., Early Intervention, Youth-in-Custody).
- Funding levels not determined by WPU but by legislative appropriation.
- Funding restricted to a certain use.
- Qualification and distribution formulas determined in statute or State Board of Education rule (e.g., School Land Trust Program, School Pupil Transportation).
- To specifically fund a legislative priority.

The UEA’s Position

Above the line: In general, any budget line items that are distributed equally to LEAs based on enrollment should be placed in the Basic School Program and funded through the WPU.

Below the line: Budget line items appropriate for the Related to Basic Program include:

- Items distributed according to the different needs of LEAs.
- Items funded by programs/formulas outside of the WPU allocation.
- Items that statutorily require matches for LEAs to receive funding.

Any below-the-line item should be evaluated using the above criteria when thinking about moving it to the WPU.

BEWARE artificial inflation of the WPU: Moving money from below the line to the Basic School Program increases the value of the WPU, but **does not increase school funding**. Increased funding would only be realized if the designated program or service is eliminated. If an LEA is required or will likely continue the program or service, it would be false to claim that shifting funding to the WPU constitutes an increase.