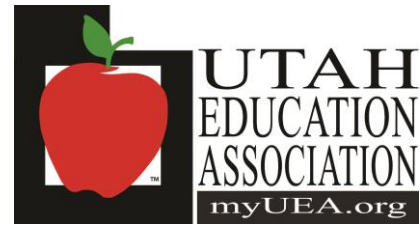


UEA Issue Brief

FY2017 Public Education Funding



Background:

Utah per-student public education funding has declined significantly since the beginning of the Great Recession. Despite recent increases, per-student state funding for K-12 education remains **down 8.3%** from its 2008 pre-recession level.* 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 2015, Gov. Gary Herbert recommended a FY2017 Utah state budget that directs \$422 million in new tax revenue to public and higher education. His budget calls for \$91 million to cover anticipated enrollment increases and another \$130 million to add 4.75% to the Weighted Pupil Unit (WPU). His budget also proposed \$9.5 million in classroom supply money, up from \$6 million this year.

UEA's Position:

- Increase the WPU by 5%. The UEA believes increases in education funding should be directed through the WPU, allowing local school boards the flexibility to address priorities specific to their individual schools' needs.
- Provide an additional 2% WPU increase annually for the next five years to bring teacher salaries up to the national average.
- The UEA strongly supports the Governor's proposed investments in student enrollment growth and increasing the allotment for classroom supply money.
- Increase the *Flexible Allocation - WPU Distribution* line item to help fund retirement, Social Security and other employee cost increases.
- 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 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.

- 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.