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School Design Amendments

2026 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Kay J. Christofferson

Senate Sponsor:

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LONG TITLE

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General Description:

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This bill requires the State Board of Education (state board) to establish a library of school building designs.

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Highlighted Provisions:

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This bill:

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- ▶ establishes a school building design library maintained by the state board;
- ▶ requires the state board to develop standard designs for elementary, middle, high, and multi-level schools;

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- ▶ requires school districts to own and submit building designs developed using public funds;
- ▶ authorizes school districts and charter schools to select designs from the library;
- ▶ establishes periodic review and update requirements for the design library;
- ▶ requires competitive bidding for architectural and engineering design fees;
- ▶ mandates life-cycle cost analysis in building designs;
- ▶ establishes public cost reporting and transparency requirements for school construction projects;
- ▶ authorizes design-build as an alternative project delivery method; and
- ▶ makes technical changes.

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Money Appropriated in this Bill:

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None

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Other Special Clauses:

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This bill provides a special effective date.

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Utah Code Sections Affected:

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AMENDS:

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53E-3-702, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2024, Chapter 21

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ENACTS:

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53E-3-713, Utah Code Annotated 1953

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53E-3-714, Utah Code Annotated 1953

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32 *Be it enacted by the Legislature of the state of Utah:*

33 Section 1. Section **53E-3-702** is amended to read:

34 **53E-3-702 . State board to adopt public school construction guidelines.**

35 (1) As used in this section, "public school construction" means construction work on a new
36 public school.

37 (2)(a) The state board shall:

38 (i) adopt guidelines for public school construction; [and]

39 (ii) establish and maintain a school building design library as provided in Section
40 53E-3-713;

41 [(ii)] (iii) consult with the Division of Facilities Construction and Management
42 Administration and the state security chief appointed under Section 53-22-102 on
43 proposed guidelines before adoption[.] ;

44 (iv) establish competitive bidding requirements for architectural and engineering
45 design fees that include cost as a selection factor in addition to qualifications and
46 experience; and

47 (v) require that architectural and engineering design contracts include life-cycle cost
48 analysis for energy efficiency, operations, maintenance, and material durability.

49 (b) The state board shall ensure that guidelines adopted under Subsection (2)(a)(i)
50 maximize funds used for public school construction and reflect efficient and
51 economic use of those funds, including adopting guidelines that address a school's
52 safety and a school's essential needs rather than encouraging or endorsing excessive
53 costs per square foot of construction or nonessential facilities, design, or furnishings.

54 (3) Before a school district or charter school may begin public school construction, the
55 school district or charter school shall:

56 (a) review the guidelines adopted by the state board under this section; [and]

57 (b) review available designs in the school building design library established in Section
58 53E-3-713;

59 [(b)] (c) take into consideration the guidelines when planning the public school
60 construction[.] ; and

61 (d) comply with design ownership and submission requirements established in Section
62 53E-3-713.

63 (4) In adopting the guidelines for public school construction, the state board shall consider
64 the following and adopt alternative guidelines as needed:

65 (a) location factors, including whether the school is in a rural or urban setting, and
66 climate factors;
67 (b) variations in guidelines for significant or minimal projected student population
68 growth;
69 (c) guidelines specific to schools that serve various populations and grades, including
70 high schools, junior high schools, middle schools, elementary schools, alternative
71 schools, and schools for people with disabilities; and
72 (d) year-round use.

73 (5) The guidelines shall address the following:

74 (a) square footage per student;
75 (b) minimum and maximum required real property for a public school;
76 (c) athletic facilities and fields, playgrounds, and hard surface play areas;
77 (d) necessary specifications to meet the safety standards created by the state security
78 chief in Section 53E-3-706;
79 (e) cost per square foot;
80 (f) minimum and maximum qualities and costs for building materials;
81 (g) design efficiency;
82 (h) parking;
83 (i) furnishing;
84 (j) proof of compliance with applicable building codes; [and]
85 (k) safety[.];
86 (l) allowable project delivery methods including design-bid-build, construction manager
87 or general contractor, and design-build approaches that demonstrate cost savings
88 potential; and
89 (m) if applicable, the LEA's qualifications to manage a construction manager or general
90 contractor delivery method.

91 Section 2. Section **53E-3-713** is enacted to read:

92 **53E-3-713 . School building design library -- Development and use.**

93 (1) As used in this section:

94 (a) "Elementary school" means a school that serves students primarily in kindergarten
95 through grade 6.
96 (b) "High school" means a school that serves students primarily in grades 9 through 12.
97 (c) "Middle school" means a school that serves students primarily in grades 6 through 8
98 or grades 7 through 9.

99 (d) "Multi-level school" means a school that serves students across multiple grade
100 ranges, including K-12 schools and other grade combinations that span more than one
101 school type category.

102 (e) "School building design library" or "design library" means the collection of
103 architectural plans and specification packages maintained by the state board under
104 this section.

105 (2)(a) No later than January 1, 2028, the state board shall establish and maintain a school
106 building design library that includes designs for:

- 107 (i) elementary schools;
- 108 (ii) middle schools;
- 109 (iii) high schools; and
- 110 (iv) multi-level schools.

111 (b) The state board may develop and include in the design library three standard designs
112 for each school type listed in Subsection (2)(a) that vary by enrollment size and
113 educational program needs.

114 (c) The state board shall ensure that designs included in the design library:
115 (i) meet all applicable building codes and safety requirements;
116 (ii) provide flexibility for different geographic and climatic conditions;
117 (iii) accommodate students with disabilities;
118 (iv) incorporate modern educational practices and technology infrastructure;
119 (v) allow for future expansion or modification; and
120 (vi) reflect best practices in school design and construction.

121 (d) If developing standardized designs for the design library, the state board shall consult
122 with:
123 (i) licensed architects with experience in school design;
124 (ii) LEA representatives;
125 (iii) construction industry professionals;
126 (iv) educators and school administrators; and
127 (v) the Division of Facilities Construction and Management Administration.

128 (3)(a) When an LEA enters into a contract for architectural or engineering services for
129 school construction using public funds, the LEA shall:

- 130 (i) require in the contract that the LEA owns all plans, specifications, and design
131 documents produced under the contract; and
- 132 (ii) retain all intellectual property rights to the design.

133 (b) An LEA that completes a school building design shall submit the final design
134 documents to the state board for inclusion in the design library.

135 (c) The state board shall:
136 (i) review submitted designs for completeness and compliance with applicable codes;
137 (ii) add qualifying designs to the design library within 90 days of submission; and
138 (iii) make designs available to other LEAs at no cost.

139 (4) An LEA constructing a new school building may:

140 (a) select a design from the design library;
141 (b) adapt a design from the design library to meet local needs; or
142 (c) develop an original design in accordance with Subsection (3).

143 (5)(a) The state board shall review and update the design library as frequently as needed
144 to:

145 (i) incorporate new technologies and educational practices;
146 (ii) address changes in building codes and safety requirements;
147 (iii) improve cost efficiency; and
148 (iv) respond to feedback from LEAs.

149 (b) The state board may make interim updates to the design library as needed to address
150 safety issues or significant cost savings opportunities.

151 (6) The state board shall:

152 (a) publish the design library on the state board's website in a format that allows an LEA
153 to search and compare designs; and
154 (b) provide technical assistance to an LEA regarding use of designs from the library.

155 (7) The state board may adopt rules in accordance with Title 63G, Chapter 3, Utah
156 Administrative Rulemaking Act, to:

157 (a) establish procedures for design submission and review;
158 (b) define technical standards for designs in the library;
159 (c) establish standardized formats for design documents; and
160 (d) establish any other procedures necessary to implement this section.

161 Section 3. Section **53E-3-714** is enacted to read:

162 **53E-3-714 . Public school construction cost reporting and transparency.**

163 (1) The state board shall establish standardized reporting requirements for all school
164 construction projects exceeding \$1,000,000.

165 (2) An LEA shall report to the state board:

166 (a) total project costs including design fees, construction costs, and contingencies;

167 (b) cost per square foot;
168 (c) design and construction timeline;
169 (d) whether the project used a design from the design library and any cost impacts; and
170 (e) change order costs and reasons.

171 (3) The state board shall publish on the state board's website:

172 (a) all LEA construction project data in a searchable, comparable format;
173 (b) annual comparative analyses of construction costs across LEAs; and
174 (c) best practices for cost-effective school construction.

175 (4) The state board shall update the published data annually.

176 **Section 4. Effective Date.**

177 This bill takes effect on July 1, 2026.