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## Issue Brief – Basic School Program Building Blocks

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MINIMUM SCHOOL PROGRAM

NUMBER: MSP 4

### SUMMARY

The majority of adjustments to funding for Basic School Programs occur through increasing the number of WPU's allocated to a specific program to accommodate additional students, or through increases in the value of the WPU. Sometimes budgetary issues emerge outside of these annual program funding adjustments. This brief outlines FY 2009 issues related to the funding levels of two Basic School Programs and provides recommendations to the Legislature.

### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

An increasing student population and program demands have prompted the State Board of Education to request additional funding from the Legislature to support Comprehensive Guidance Counseling and Special Education State Programs – Impact Aid. The following subsections provide further information to the Legislature on these programs.

#### *Comprehensive Guidance Counseling*

Utah's Comprehensive Guidance Counseling program "is designed to assist students through specific self-appraisal and self-improvement activities to better enable them to effectively plan to meet educational goals."<sup>1</sup> School counselors provide services in the public schools that assist students, parents and school staff in "school guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support."<sup>2</sup> The demand for school counselors increases with growth in additional students and schools.

Similarly, additional requirements associated with individual student planning and system support have impacted the workloads of Utah's school counselors. According to the State Board of Education's FY 2009 budget request for comprehensive guidance, "funding has not kept pace as new schools have implemented the program and as counselors have picked up additional responsibilities of U-PASS [Utah Performance Assessment System for Students]." Many school counselors facilitate the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test (UBSCT), ensure students meet increased graduation requirements, schedule student classes, provide personalized career development opportunities, and counsel students.

In FY 2007, district counselor to student ratios for secondary schools ranged from 1:162 in Tintic School District to 1:451 in Carbon School District. Based on USOE data, of the estimated 284 secondary schools, nearly 50 percent had estimated counselor to student ratios above the recommended 1:250. Finally, over 80 high schools in the school districts have counselor to student ratios over 1:400.

- **Recommendation:** The Analyst recommends placing \$3,000,000 in ongoing funding for Comprehensive Guidance Counseling on the subcommittee's priorities list for FY 2009.

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<sup>1</sup> Utah State Office of Education, Comprehensive Guidance Program: Utah Model. Retrieved from: <http://www.schools.utah.gov/ate/compguide/model.html>, January 20, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Utah State Office of Education, Comprehensive Guidance Program: The Utah Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Program: CCP Synopsis. Received: January 18, 2008.

### *Special Education State Programs – Impact Aid*

The Special Education State Programs category in the Minimum School Programs funds special education programs in state institutions and district impact aid. Impact aid is provided to districts and charter schools to support serving special education students whose extensive needs cost the district or charter school more than \$15,000 a year. School districts and charter schools must apply for impact aid each year. State impact aid funding provides some reimbursement for actual expenditures incurred by the district or charter school.

In FY 2007, the USOE reports that school districts incurred a total of \$4.4 million in actual expenses providing educational services to students with a per-student cost exceeding \$15,000. These expenditures represent additional funding provided by the school districts and charter schools exceeding the \$15,000 base threshold. The impact aid program provided \$169,100 in state funding to support district or charter school expenditures over \$15,000 per student. Minimum School Program funding received by the school district or charter school through its WPU allocation for these students would be included in the first \$15,000 of student expenditures.

The State Board of Education has requested an additional \$3,225,100 in additional funding for the program. In addition to the state funding, the State Office of Education is able to expend nearly \$1 million in federal IDEA funds to support district reimbursements. The requested amount would fully fund the actual expenditures in the school districts and charter schools over \$15,000 per student.

- **Comment:** Each year, school districts and charter schools supply the majority of funding necessary to provide education services to these high-cost students. The subcommittee may wish to consider the financial impact on school districts and charter schools related to these high-cost special education students.

State funding allocated through the WPU provides a basic mechanism to estimate the costs of educating an average student. However, additional WPU programs supplement this basic student-cost average based on defined student characteristics. The subcommittee may wish to evaluate the WPU weightings provided for these special education students.

### **LEGISLATIVE ACTION**

The subcommittee may wish to consider the following as it develops the FY 2009 budget for Public Education:

- Providing \$3,000,000 in ongoing Uniform School Funds to support reducing the counselor to student ratio through the Comprehensive Guidance Counseling program.