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.