

Enhancement for At-Risk Students – Program & Administration

August 20, 2019 | Public Education Appropriations Subcommittee

Background

The Enhancement for At-Risk Students Program (often referred to as “EARS”) contains two budgetary programs. The EARS program in the Related to Basic School Program provides the programmatic funding for school districts and charter schools to implement programs for students at-risk of academic failure. There is a corresponding administrative program for EARS in the State Board of Education – MSP Categorical Program Administration line item which provides for associated state administration and programming.

The Compendium of Budget Information (COBI) has additional detail on each of these programs, links below:

[Minimum School Program – Enhancement for At-Risk Students](#)

[MSP Administration – Enhancement for At-Risk Students](#)

[USBE – Enhancement for At-Risk Students](#)

Recommendations

We recommend that the Public Education Appropriations Subcommittee consider the following in reviewing the EARS program:

1. Establish student performance and other metrics to complete the review of the program in 2023 as required by statute. See Utah Code [53F-2-410](#). We recommend the following as a starting point:
 - a. Use the baseline performance and 2022 achievement targets outlined by the State Board of Education in their “Utah Achievement Gaps” publication. See the link below.
 - b. Request the State Board of Education provide recommendations on additional data elements not captured by the performance targets or other non-data elements to consider in the evaluation of the EARS program during the 2020 General Session.
2. In concert with the 2023 program review, study converting the EARS program into a weighted student-based add-on formula to generate WPUs for the program and distribute funding to local education agencies (LEAs).

Budget Issue

Weighted Pupil Unit (WPU) Formula vs. Categorical Program

For the past two budget cycles, the Governor has recommended moving the EARS program from a categorical program to the Basic School Program, or ‘above-the-line,’ and fund it with WPUs. To implement this change, the total amount of funding appropriated to the program would be divided by the WPU Value to generate the WPUs for the program. (Example: \$44,836,000 / \$3,532 WPU Value = 12,694 WPUs.) However, such a move does nothing to change the underlying functioning of the program (i.e. student qualification, distribution of funding, annual funding increases, etc.); it simply changes the location of the program in the state budget and reverses an action by the Legislature in the early 2000s.

In 2002, the Legislature moved “At-Risk Programs” from the Basic School Program to a categorical program in the Related to Basic Program, or ‘below-the-line,’ where similar programs for “Alternative Language Services” and “Highly Impacted Schools” were located. In 2012, the Legislature combined all three programs into the Enhancement for At-Risk Students program.

EARS – Budget, Performance, and Other Details

Since removing the program from the Basic School Program in 2002, the Legislature has adjusted program funding levels for student enrollment growth and WPU Value increases. As a result, moving the program back to the Basic School Program to be funded by WPUs will not have an impact on the program unless the Legislature changes the way WPUs for the program are generated. Namely, moving from a categorical based program to a weighted student-based formula program (see definitions in Appendix A).

The difficulty of moving to a weighted student-based formula is determining which student factors to use (i.e. English language learner, economically disadvantaged, homeless, etc.) and the weighting to apply to each. States approach this issue in various ways. A 2016 report from the Education Commission of the States (ECS) highlights these differences:

[Policy Analysis: The Importance of At-Risk Funding](#)

Based on the ECS report, economic disadvantage is the most common method used to identify students at-risk of academic failure. English language learner and unsatisfactory academic performance are other commonly used methods. For example, recent legislation in Idaho included weightings of 0.25 for students experiencing economic disadvantage and 0.35 for English language learners.

The ECS report shows that states have various student-based formula weightings. The following table estimates the cost of using proxy student-based weightings of 0.10 for economically disadvantaged and 0.15 for English language learners in Utah and using the FY 2020 WPU Value of \$3,532/WPU.

Student-Based Weighting Estimates for At-Risk Funding				
Based on Fall Enrollment 2018-19 School Year				
Category	Number of Students	WPU Weighting	Number of WPUs	WPU Value \$3,532
Economically Disadvantaged	219,827	0.10	21,983	\$77,642,896
English Language Learner	49,374	0.15	7,406	\$26,158,345

Source: Fall Enrollment by Demographics, October 2018. Utah State Board of Education.

Figure 1

Student-based formula programs change the dynamic of determining program funding levels. In student-based formulas, students generate funding based on their characteristics (as defined by the Legislature) instead of applying the number of students to a pre-determined funding level. As a result, a student-based formula can be more expensive to a state than a categorical program (depending on the weighting applied and the number of students that qualify) but there is a clear link between the student, funding, and LEA distribution.

This type of student-based 'Add-on' is common in Utah's education funding model and is the basis for kindergarten, Grades 1-12, special education, and other WPU programs.

EARS – Budget, Performance, and Other Details

Budget Detail Tables

State Appropriated Budgets

The Enhancement for At-Risk Students Program (EARS) is the largest at \$44.8 million in FY 2020. Figure 2 provides a 7-year history of appropriations to the EARS program. This categorical program in the Minimum School Program is distributed to school districts and charter schools based on the occurrence of students that meet multiple risk-factors outlined in statute: poverty, mobility, limited English proficiency, chronic absenteeism, homelessness, and low performance on state assessments. An individual student may qualify in up to three of the categories.

Addressing requests for more resources from the State Board of Education and the Governor, Legislators have increased funding for the EARS by \$16.8 million in the past two fiscal years. Statute requires the subcommittee to evaluate in FY 2023 if EARS funding has improved the educational outcomes for students at-risk of academic failure and if the program should continue as established, be amended, or be consolidated into the WPU Value.

Minimum School Program - Enhancement for At-Risk Students State Budget (COBI)							
	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
<i>Sources of Revenue</i>	MSP	MSP	MSP	MSP	MSP	MSP	MSP
Education Fund	\$23,384,300	\$24,376,400	\$25,681,000	\$26,539,500	\$28,034,600	\$38,074,500	\$44,836,000
Education Fund, One-time	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$300,000	\$0
Transfers	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$19,600)	\$0	\$0	\$0
Beginning Nonlapsing	\$351,600	\$242,000	\$369,400	\$981,800	\$881,800	\$881,900	\$818,500
Closing Nonlapsing	(\$351,600)	\$369,300	(\$981,800)	(\$881,900)	(\$818,500)	(\$881,900)	(\$818,500)
Total	\$23,384,300	\$24,987,700	\$25,068,600	\$26,619,800	\$28,097,900	\$38,374,500	\$44,836,000
<i>Categories of Expenditure</i>							
Personnel Services	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
In-State Travel	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Out-of-State Travel	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Current Expense	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$600	\$0	\$0
DP Current Expense	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Other/Pass Through	\$23,384,300	\$24,987,700	\$25,068,600	\$26,619,800	\$28,097,300	\$38,374,500	\$44,836,000
Total	\$23,384,300	\$24,987,700	\$25,068,600	\$26,619,800	\$28,097,900	\$38,374,500	\$44,836,000

Figure 2

During the 2016 General Session, the Legislature separated the state administrative cost functions for the EARS program and appropriated the funding directly to the State Board of Education. This action increased the transparency of administrative costs and ensured that all funds appropriated in the EARS program would be distributed to school districts and charter schools.

It has taken several years to clean up the programmatic vs administrative funding, resulting in additional transfers approved during the 2019 General Session. Figure 3 provides a 4-year history of funding for the administrative portion of the EARS budget, with \$457,200 appropriated for FY 2020. The Board expends most of this funding on personnel supporting the EARS program.

Distribution to Locals

Each year, the State Board of Education executes a distribution formula to allocate appropriated funding to school districts and charter schools. The following table shows the FY 2019 distribution for the EARS program:

[2019 Accountable Process Budget Review – Minimum School Program and School Building Program Distributions](#)

EARS – Budget, Performance, and Other Details

State Board of Education - EARS Administration				
State Budget (COBI)				
	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
Sources of Revenue	Admin.	Admin.	Admin.	Admin.
Education Fund	\$304,800	\$311,700	\$318,200	\$503,900
Education Fund, One-time	\$0	\$1,200	\$1,100	\$1,000
Transfers	(\$39,100)	(\$58,600)	(\$47,700)	(\$47,700)
Beginning Nonlapsing	\$0	\$92,600	\$65,000	\$65,000
Closing Nonlapsing	(\$92,500)	(\$75,600)	(\$65,000)	(\$65,000)
Total	\$173,200	\$271,300	\$271,600	\$457,200
Categories of Expenditure				
Personnel Services	\$152,000	\$246,400	\$238,600	\$424,200
In-State Travel	\$1,600	\$1,000	\$8,600	\$8,600
Out-of-State Travel	\$1,900	\$3,200	\$2,600	\$2,600
Current Expense	\$8,900	\$20,600	\$21,800	\$21,800
DP Current Expense	\$8,800	\$100	\$0	\$0
Other/Pass Through	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$173,200	\$271,300	\$271,600	\$457,200

Figure 3

Local Education Agencies – Reported Revenues and Expenditures

School districts and charter schools report the revenue sources and categories of expenditure for their “At-Risk” programs annually to the State Board of Education. Figure 4 provides a 5-year history of revenues and expenditures for local education agency (LEA) programs. In FY 2018, LEAs report expending \$35.5 million to support at-risk programs. This amount is higher than the \$28.1 million appropriated by the Legislature, indicating that some local property tax revenue or unrestricted state revenue was allocated to support the programs. LEAs use most of the funding to pay salaries and benefits for personnel supporting the program.

At-Risk Programs					
LEA Budgets (Annual Program Report)					
Sources of Revenue	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018
Beginning Balance	\$2,217,600	\$1,886,900	\$1,527,000	\$1,281,000	\$759,300
Local	\$1,617,100	\$1,986,400	\$2,283,300	\$2,110,500	\$5,235,800
State	\$22,654,600	\$23,154,600	\$26,099,800	\$28,866,400	\$29,726,200
Federal	\$1,267,400	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$27,756,700	\$27,027,900	\$29,910,100	\$32,257,900	\$35,721,300
Categories of Expenditure					
Salaries	\$16,133,700	\$16,644,300	\$19,104,100	\$20,968,300	\$23,946,900
Benefits	\$6,235,600	\$6,444,100	\$6,894,400	\$7,440,700	\$8,355,700
Purchased Services	\$876,700	\$1,093,900	\$1,119,500	\$1,778,600	\$1,597,500
Supplies	\$1,110,600	\$708,400	\$1,103,800	\$1,328,100	\$1,077,100
Property	\$189,400	\$134,900	\$157,800	\$124,800	\$81,600
Other	\$217,600	\$383,600	\$439,300	\$546,100	\$456,800
Total	\$24,763,600	\$25,409,200	\$28,818,900	\$32,186,600	\$35,515,600

Figure 4

EARS – Budget, Performance, and Other Details

Performance Metrics

The State Board of Education has not established performance metrics and targets specific to the EARS program. However, the Education Elevated strategic plan of the Board includes a goal to address achievement gaps between various student groups (i.e. economically disadvantaged, students learning English, students with disabilities, and students that identify as racial minorities) and their peers. EARS funding is distributed to LEAs based on many of these categories. The following links provide additional data on the Board strategic plan:

[Education Elevated](#)

[Utah Achievement Gaps](#)

Figures 5-7 provide data on graduation rates, proficiency on state assessments, and proficiency on the federal National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). In each of these cases, the categories of “Econ. Disadvantaged” or “Limited English Proficiency” may apply to aspects of the EARS program.

Cohort Graduation Rate									
Year	All Students	Econ. Disadvantaged	English Learner	African American/ Black	American Indian	Asian	Hispanic/ Latino	Pacific Islander	White
2018	87%	77%	70%	76%	77%	92%	78%	85%	89%
2017	86%	77%	67%	73%	74%	89%	77%	86%	88%
2016	85%	75%	65%	73%	70%	89%	74%	84%	87%
2015	84%	76%	65%	68%	69%	88%	74%	83%	87%
2014	83%	72%	61%	66%	65%	85%	72%	82%	86%

Figure 5

SAGE: Percent of Students Statewide At or Above Proficient												
	All			Econ. Disadvantaged			Limited English Proficiency			Mobile		
	Language Arts	Math	Science	Language Arts	Math	Science	Language Arts	Math	Science	Language Arts	Math	Science
2018	44.9%	46.1%	48.5%	29.5%	30.2%	32.6%	14.5%	17.3%	15.0%	28.1%	28.2%	30.4%
2017	43.6%	45.7%	47.5%	28.7%	30.3%	31.6%	12.0%	15.3%	10.5%	26.7%	28.2%	29.5%
2016	44.1%	46.5%	48.7%	28.8%	30.7%	32.4%	10.7%	14.3%	8.9%	27.3%	28.2%	30.4%
2015	44.1%	44.6%	46.8%	28.5%	29.4%	31.0%	9.8%	13.1%	8.0%	26.9%	26.3%	28.0%

Figure 6

NAEP: Percentage of Utah Students At or Above Proficient								
	Not Eligible for School Lunch				Eligible for School Lunch			
	Grade 4 Math	Grade 4 Reading	Grade 8 Math	Grade 8 Reading	Grade 4 Math	Grade 4 Reading	Grade 8 Math	Grade 8 Reading
2017	55%	51%	49%	46%	30%	26%	22%	25%

Figure 7

Recommendation

We recommend that the subcommittee use the baseline performance and 2022 achievement targets identified by the State Board of Education in its “Utah Achievement Gaps” publication in the evaluation of the EARS program required in statute. To facilitate this review, we further recommend that the subcommittee request that the Board provide recommendations on additional baseline metrics and targets specific to the EARS program during the 2020 General Session.

Appendix A – Definitions¹

Categorical Program

The state distributes money to local education agencies based on certain conditions (i.e. student qualification, teacher qualification, transportation routes, etc.)

Student-Based - Flat Weight System

Local education agencies receive funding for each student who meets the identification criteria (i.e. English Language Learner, Homeless, Economically Disadvantaged, Gifted, etc.). The weight or dollar amount is the same regardless of the student's individual characteristics.

Student-Based – Multiple Weights System

The state distributes funding using more than one or a scaled weighting or dollar amount based on certain factors (i.e. severity of disability, tiered amounts based on grade level, proficiency level on state assessments, school size, remoteness, etc.)

¹ Adapted from Education Commission of the States, [50-State Comparison: K-12 Funding](#). Accessed August 2019.