

School Attendance Modifications

2026 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Doug Welton

Sponsor:

LONG TITLE**General Description:**

This bill creates citizenship grade standards, attendance-based grading, and a test-out option for core classes.

Highlighted Provisions:

This bill:

- permits and establishes requirements for standardizing citizenship grades;
- requires attendance-based grading;
- repeals individualized attendance plans for attendance-based grading;
- creates a test-out option for core classes;
- establishes a pilot citizenship grade scholarship program in higher education; and
- makes technical changes.

Money Appropriated in this Bill:

None

Other Special Clauses:

None

Utah Code Sections Affected:**AMENDS:**

53G-6-201, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2025, Chapter 34

53G-6-206, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2024, Chapter 516

53G-6-806, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2024, Chapter 21

ENACTS:

53E-4-208, Utah Code Annotated 1953

53G-6-213, Utah Code Annotated 1953

53G-6-214, Utah Code Annotated 1953

53H-11-416, Utah Code Annotated 1953

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

Section 1. Section 53E-4-208 is enacted to read:

53E-4-208 . Citizenship grading standards.

(1) As used in this section:

- (a) "Citizenship grade" means a grade or evaluation that reflects a student's demonstration of character traits, civic responsibility, and social behavior in the educational environment.
- (b) "Character traits" means the same traits described in Section 53G-10-204, including honesty, respect, responsibility, fairness, kindness, and citizenship.

(2) In accordance with Title 63G, Chapter 3, Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act, the state board shall make rules to establish consistent statewide standards for citizenship grading that:

- (a) define the character traits and civic behaviors to be evaluated;
- (b) establish uniform criteria and methods for assessing citizenship;
- (c) provide guidance for an LEA on implementing citizenship grading policies;
- (d) ensure alignment with existing civic and character education requirements under Section 53G-10-204; and
- (e) specify how citizenship grades may be recorded and reported on a student's transcripts.

(3) The state board shall provide professional development and training resources to assist an LEA in implementing citizenship grading standards established under this section.

(4) Beginning with the 2027-2028 school year, an LEA may adopt a citizenship grading policy in accordance with the standards established by the state board under this section.

(5) An LEA's citizenship grading policy:

- (a) shall incorporate attendance as a component of the citizenship grade;
- (b) may not apply to students with a valid excuse as that term is used in Section 53G-6-201;
- (c) shall align with any attendance-based grading policy adopted under Section 53G-6-213; and
- (d) may be implemented in addition to, or as part of, attendance-based grading under Section 53G-6-213.

Section 2. Section 53G-6-201 is amended to read:

53G-6-201 . Definitions.

As used in this part:

- (1)(a) "Absence" or "absent" means the failure of a school-age child assigned to a class

or class period to attend a class or class period.

(b) "Absence" or "absent" does not mean multiple tardies used to calculate an absence for the sake of a truancy.

(2) "Core class" means a course in English language arts, mathematics, science, or social studies and other courses required for high school graduation as described in Section 53E-4-204.

~~[(2)]~~ (3) "Educational neglect" means the same as that term is defined in Section 80-1-102.

~~[(3)]~~ (4)(a) "Home-based microschool" means an individual or association of individuals that:

(i) registers as a business entity in accordance with state and local laws; and

(ii) for compensation, provides kindergarten through grade 12 education services to 16 or fewer students from an individual's residential dwelling, accessory dwelling unit, or residential property.

(b) "Home-based microschool" does not include a daycare.

~~[(4)]~~ (5) "Instructor" means an individual who teaches a student as part of a home-based microschool or micro-education entity.

~~[(5)]~~ (6)(a) "Micro-education entity" means a person or association of persons that:

(i) registers as a business entity in accordance with state and local laws; and

(ii) for compensation, provides kindergarten through grade 12 education services to 100 students or fewer.

(b) "Micro-education entity" does not include:

(i) a daycare;

(ii) a home-based microschool;

(iii) a private school; or

(iv) a school within the public education system.

~~[(6)]~~ (7) "Minor" means an individual who is under 18 years old.

~~[(7)]~~ "Parent" includes:]

~~[(a) a custodial parent of the minor;]~~

~~[(b) a legally appointed guardian of a minor; or]~~

~~[(c) any other person purporting to exercise any authority over the minor which could be exercised by a person described in Subsection (7)(a) or (b).]~~

(8) "School day" means the portion of a day that school is in session in which a school-age child is required to be in school for purposes of receiving instruction.

(9) "School year" means the period of time designated by a local school board or charter

school governing board as the school year for the school where the school-age child:

(a) is enrolled; or

(b) should be enrolled, if the school-age child is not enrolled in school.

(10) "School-age child" means a minor who:

(a) is at least six years old but younger than 18 years old; and

(b) is not emancipated.

(11) "Test-out option" means a rigorous, LEA-established process by which a student may demonstrate proficiency in the content of a core class without attending or enrolling in the course.

~~[(11)]~~ (12)(a) "Truant" means a condition in which a school-age child, without a valid excuse, and subject to Subsection ~~[(11)(b)]~~ (12)(b), is absent for at least:

(i) half of the school day; or

(ii) if the school-age child is enrolled in a learner verified program, as that term is defined by the state board, the relevant amount of time under the LEA's policy regarding the LEA's continuing enrollment measure as it relates to truancy.

(b) A school-age child may not be considered truant under this part more than one time during one day.

~~[(12)]~~ (13) "Truant minor" means a school-age child who:

(a) is subject to the requirements of Section 53G-6-202 or 53G-6-203; and

(b) is truant.

~~[(13)]~~ (14)(a) "Valid excuse" means:

(i) an illness, which may be either mental or physical, regardless of whether the school-age child or parent provides documentation from a medical professional;

(ii) mental or behavioral health of the school-age child;

(iii) a family death;

(iv) an approved school activity;

(v) an absence permitted by a school-age child's:

(A) individualized education program; or

(B) Section 504 accommodation plan;

(vi) competition in a rodeo sanctioned by an international, non-profit organization dedicated to the development of sportsmanship, horsemanship, and character in youth through the sport of rodeo;

(vii) an absence permitted in accordance with Subsection 53G-6-803(5); or

(viii) any other excuse established as valid by a local school board, charter school

governing board, or school district.

- (b) "Valid excuse" does not mean a parent acknowledgment of an absence for a reason other than a reason described in Subsections ~~[(13)(a)(i) through (vii)]~~ (14)(a)(i) through (vii), unless specifically permitted by the local school board, charter school governing board, or school district under Subsection ~~[(13)(a)(viii)]~~ (14)(a)(viii).

Section 3. Section 53G-6-206 is amended to read:

53G-6-206 . Duties of a local school board, charter school governing board, or school district in promoting regular attendance -- Parental involvement -- Liability not imposed -- Report to state board.

(1)(a) As used in this section, "intervention" means a series of non-punitive and increasingly frequent and individualized activities that are designed to:

- (i) create a trusting relationship between teachers, students, and parents;
- (ii) improve attendance;
- (iii) improve academic outcomes; and
- (iv) reduce negative behavior referrals.

(b) "Intervention" includes:

- (i) mentorship programs;
- (ii) family connection to community resources;
- (iii) academic support through small group or individualized tutoring or similar methods; and
- (iv) teaching executive function skills, including:
 - (A) planning;
 - (B) goal setting;
 - (C) understanding and following multi-step directions; and
 - (D) self-regulation.

(2)(a) Subject to Subsection (2)(b), an LEA shall make efforts to promote regular attendance and resolve school absenteeism and truancy issues for each school-age child who is, or should be, enrolled in the LEA.

(b) A school-age child exempt from school attendance under Section 53G-6-204 or 53G-6-702, or a school-age child who is enrolled in a regularly established private school or part-time school, is not considered to be a school-age child who is or should be enrolled in a school district or charter school under Subsection (2)(a).

(3) The efforts described in Subsection (2) shall include, as reasonably feasible:

- (a) counseling of the school-age child by school authorities;

- (b)(i) issuing a notice of truancy to the school-age child in accordance with Section 53G-6-203; or
- (ii) issuing a notice of compulsory education violation to the school-age child's parent in accordance with Section 53G-6-202;
- (c) making any necessary adjustment to the curriculum and schedule to meet special needs of the school-age child;
- (d) considering alternatives proposed by the school-age child's parent;
- (e) incorporating attendance in the school-age child's course score or grade ~~[if:]~~ as described in Section 53G-6-213;
- ~~[(i) incorporation is determined appropriate through an individualized plan the school-age child's parent and teacher develops;]~~
- ~~[(ii) parental written consent is obtained for the individualized plan; and]~~
- ~~[(iii) the parent retains the ability to revoke the parent's consent described in Subsection (3)(e)(ii) at any time].~~
- (f) monitoring school attendance of the school-age child;
- (g) voluntary participation in truancy mediation, if available; and
- (h) providing the school-age child's parent, upon request, with a list of resources available to assist the parent in resolving the school-age child's attendance problems.
- (4) In addition to the efforts described in Subsection (3), the local school board, charter school governing board, or school district may enlist the assistance of community and law enforcement agencies and organizations for early intervention services as appropriate and reasonably feasible in accordance with Section 53G-8-211.
- (5) This section does not impose civil liability on boards of education, local school boards, charter school governing boards, school districts, or their employees.
- (6) Proceedings initiated under this part do not obligate or preclude action by the Division of Child and Family Services under Section 53G-6-210.
- (7) ~~[Each]~~ An LEA shall annually report the following data separately to the state board:
- (a) absences with a valid excuse; and
- (b) absences without a valid excuse.
- Section 4. Section **53G-6-213** is enacted to read:
- 53G-6-213 . Attendance-based grading.**
- (1) An LEA shall adopt a policy that requires a student's attendance in a class to account for at least 10% and up to 20% of the student's final grade for a course in grades 7 through 12.

- (2) An LEA shall ensure the LEA's policy under Subsection (1):
- (a) shall be publicly posted and available to parents and students, including through the parent portal described in Section 53G-6-806;
 - (b) shall specify the percentage of the final grade that attendance will comprise, which may not be less than 10% or more than 20%;
 - (c) may permit valid excused absences, as defined in Section 53G-6-201, to be excluded from attendance-based grade calculations; and
 - (d) should establish reasonable limits on the number of valid excused absences that may be excluded from attendance-based grade calculations to ensure accountability for class participation while accommodating student needs.
- (3) If an LEA permits students to earn credit through a test-out option under Section 53G-6-214, the LEA may require students who decline to test out and instead enroll in the course to comply with any attendance-based grading policy adopted under this section.

Section 5. Section **53G-6-214** is enacted to read:

53G-6-214 . Test-out option for core classes.

- (1) Beginning with the 2027-2028 school year, an LEA shall offer students in grades 7 through 12 a test-out option for core classes.
- (2) An LEA shall establish a policy for each test-out option that includes:
- (a) clear academic proficiency standards aligned with the state core standards;
 - (b) an assessment or portfolio-based demonstration of mastery;
 - (c) a grade or a pass or fail designation for transcript and grade point average purposes;
and
 - (d) procedures to notify students and parents of the test-out opportunity.
- (3) A student who earns credit through the test-out process is not required to attend the course and is exempt from any attendance-based grading policy under Section 53G-6-213.
- (4) If a student enrolls in a core class despite being eligible to test out, the LEA shall require compliance with the courses' attendance requirements described in Section 53G-6-213 as part of the student's grade.
- (5) In accordance with Title 63G, Chapter 3, Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act, the state board shall make rules to establish minimum requirements for LEA test-out procedures described in this section and ensure consistency with graduation standards.

Section 6. Section **53G-6-806** is amended to read:

53G-6-806 . Parent portal.

(1) As used in this section:

(a) "Parent portal" means the posting the state board is required to provide under this section.

(b) "School" means a public elementary or secondary school, including a charter school.

(2)(a) The state board shall post information that allows a parent of a student enrolled in a school to:

(i) access an LEA's policies required by Sections 53G-6-213, 53G-9-203, and 53G-9-605;

(ii) be informed of resources and steps to follow when a student has been the subject, perpetrator, or bystander of bullying, cyber-bullying, hazing, retaliation, or abusive conduct such as:

(A) resources for the student, including short-term mental health services;

(B) options for the student to make changes to the student's educational environment;

(C) options for alternative school enrollment;

(D) options for differentiated start or stop times;

(E) options for differentiated exit and entrance locations; and

(F) the designated employee for an LEA who addresses incidents of bullying, cyber-bullying, hazing, retaliation, and abusive conduct;

(iii) be informed of the steps and resources for filing a grievance with a school or LEA regarding bullying, cyber-bullying, hazing, or retaliation;

(iv) be informed of the steps and resources for seeking accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq;

(v) be informed of the steps and resources for seeking accommodations under state or federal law regarding religious accommodations;

(vi) be informed of the steps and resources for filing a grievance for an alleged violation of state or federal law, including:

(A) Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. Sec. 2000d-2000d-4;

(B) Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1681-1688;

(C) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. Sec. 794; and

(D) Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. Sec. 12131-12165;

(vii) receive information about constitutional rights and freedoms afforded to families

- 269 in public education;
- 270 (viii) be informed of how to access an internal audit hotline if established by the state
- 271 board; and
- 272 (ix) be informed of services for military families.
- 273 (b) In addition to the information required under Subsection (2)(a), the state board:
- 274 (i) shall include in the parent portal:
- 275 (A) the comparison tool created under Section 53G-6-805;
- 276 (B) school level safety data, including data points described in Section 53E-3-516;
- 277 and
- 278 (C) a link to the public safety portal described in Section 63A-16-1002; and
- 279 (ii) may include in the parent portal other information that the state board determines
- 280 is helpful to parents.
- 281 (3)(a) The state board shall post the parent portal at a location that is easily located by a
- 282 parent.
- 283 (b) The state board shall update the parent portal at least annually.
- 284 (c) In accordance with state and federal law, the state board may collaborate with a
- 285 third-party to provide safety data visualization in comparison to other states' data.
- 286 (4) An LEA shall annually notify each of the following of how to access the parent portal:
- 287 (a) a parent of a student; and
- 288 (b) a teacher, principal, or other professional staff within the LEA.
- 289 Section 7. Section **53H-11-416** is enacted to read:
- 290 **53H-11-416 . Citizenship grades scholarship pilot program.**
- 291 (1) As used in this section:
- 292 (a) "Citizenship grade" means the same as that term is defined in Section 53E-4-208.
- 293 (b) "Eligible student" means a student who:
- 294 (i) participated in the pilot program during grades 9 through 11 and the first half of
- 295 grade 12;
- 296 (ii) earned citizenship grades as tracked under this section;
- 297 (iii) applies for the scholarship in accordance with board rules; and
- 298 (iv) meets eligibility criteria established by the board in accordance with Subsection
- 299 (6)(b).
- 300 (c) "Participating institution" means an institution within the Utah System of Higher
- 301 Education that is selected to participate in the pilot program under this section.
- 302 (d) "Participating LEA" means a local education agency selected to participate in the

pilot program under this section.

(e) "Pilot program" means the citizenship grades scholarship pilot program described in this section.

(f) "Qualifying student" means a student enrolled in a participating LEA during the pilot program period.

(2) Subject to legislative appropriations, the board shall establish a pilot program beginning with the 2027-2028 school year to provide scholarships to eligible students based on citizenship grades and attendance.

(3) The board shall:

(a) in collaboration with the State Board of Education:

(i) identify the geographic service region of one or two participating institutions;

(ii) select one or more participating LEAs within the service region identified under Subsection (3)(a)(i); and

(iii) coordinate with the State Board of Education and participating LEAs regarding implementation of the pilot program;

(b) select one or two participating institutions to award scholarships under the pilot program; and

(c) provide oversight and evaluation of the pilot program in accordance with this section.

(4) A participating LEA shall:

(a) implement citizenship grading policies in accordance with Section 53E-4-208;

(b) track citizenship grades and attendance for qualifying students;

(c) report citizenship grades and attendance data to the State Board of Education; and

(d) notify qualifying students and parents of the scholarship opportunity and requirements.

(5) The State Board of Education shall:

(a) provide technical assistance to participating LEAs in implementing citizenship grading standards;

(b) ensure citizenship grades from participating LEAs are entered into the appropriate statewide student data system; and

(c) provide the board and participating institutions with access to citizenship grade and attendance data for eligible students as necessary for scholarship administration and program evaluation.

(6) In accordance with Title 63G, Chapter 3, Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act, the board shall make rules to:

- 337 (a) establish criteria for selecting participating institutions and participating LEAs,
338 including consideration of:
339 (i) geographic diversity;
340 (ii) institutional capacity to track student outcomes; and
341 (iii) LEA capacity to implement citizenship grading systems;
342 (b) establish minimum eligibility requirements for eligible students, which may include:
343 (i) citizenship grade thresholds;
344 (ii) attendance requirements;
345 (iii) completion of a Free Application for Federal Student Aid or a board-approved
346 alternative; and
347 (iv) enrollment in a participating institution within a specified time period after high
348 school graduation;
349 (c) establish scholarship award amounts up to a maximum of \$1,500 per eligible student;
350 (d) establish disbursement procedures that require:
351 (i) for an eligible student enrolled in a degree-granting institution, disbursement of
352 the scholarship award after the student completes the first semester; and
353 (ii) for an eligible student enrolled in a technical college or a degree-granting
354 institution acting in the degree-granting institution's technical education role
355 described in Section 53H-3-608, disbursement of the scholarship award when the
356 student completes 50% of required credits for the student's program;
357 (e) establish procedures for:
358 (i) the board to verify student eligibility and administer scholarship awards;
359 (ii) participating institutions to:
360 (A) verify student enrollment and academic standing;
361 (B) track scholarship recipients' academic progress, completion rates, and time to
362 completion; and
363 (C) report scholarship data to the board;
364 (f) establish data sharing agreements between the board, the State Board of Education,
365 participating LEAs, and participating institutions to facilitate program administration
366 and evaluation; and
367 (g) establish any other requirements necessary for effective implementation and
368 evaluation of the pilot program.
369 (7) A participating institution shall:
370 (a) verify student enrollment and academic standing for scholarship recipients;

- (b) notify the board when a scholarship recipient meets the disbursement requirements under Subsection (6)(d);
- (c) track outcomes for scholarship recipients, including:
- (i) academic performance;
 - (ii) completion rates;
 - (iii) time to completion compared to non-scholarship students; and
 - (iv) retention rates;
- (d) maintain records of all scholarship awards and student outcomes; and
- (e) report scholarship data and student outcomes to the board as required by board rules.
- (8) The board:
- (a) shall award scholarships to eligible students based on citizenship grades and attendance in accordance with board rules;
 - (b) may consider citizenship grades and attendance as primary factors in awarding scholarships but may also consider other academic and merit-based criteria; and
 - (c) may not award a scholarship under this section to an eligible student in an amount that exceeds \$1,500.
- (9) The board shall ensure the pilot program:
- (a) operates for a period of four academic years, beginning with qualifying students enrolled during the 2027-2028 school year and ending with the final scholarship disbursements for students from the cohort that graduates high school in the 2030-2031 school year;
 - (b) includes evaluation metrics to assess:
 - (i) the effectiveness of using citizenship grades as an incentive for school attendance;
 - (ii) correlations between citizenship grades, attendance, and postsecondary success;
 - (iii) scholarship recipients' completion rates compared to non-scholarship students;and
 - (iv) whether scholarship recipients complete their programs faster or slower than non-scholarship students; and
 - (c) maintains mechanisms to collect longitudinal data on qualifying students and scholarship recipients.
- (10) On or before October 1, 2032, the board and the State Board of Education shall collaborate to submit a report to the Education Interim Committee that includes:
- (a) an evaluation of the pilot program's effectiveness in:
 - (i) improving student attendance during grades 9 through 12;

- (ii) promoting positive citizenship behaviors;
- (iii) increasing postsecondary enrollment among participating students; and
- (iv) improving postsecondary completion rates;
- (b) data on scholarship recipients' outcomes, including:
 - (i) completion rates compared to non-scholarship students;
 - (ii) time to completion compared to non-scholarship students;
 - (iii) retention rates; and
 - (iv) academic performance;
- (c) analysis of correlations between citizenship grades, attendance patterns, and postsecondary success;
- (d) costs of program administration and scholarship disbursements;
- (e) feedback from participating institutions, participating LEAs, students, and parents;
- (f) recommendations regarding the expansion, modification, or discontinuation of the pilot program; and
- (g) any proposed legislative changes needed to implement the recommendations.

Section 8. Effective Date.

This bill takes effect on May 6, 2026.