



2020 Utah Education Funding Study Overview

WHY

To inform decisions about how to best target resources to meet evolving student needs.

Utah's education system looks different from the system the funding model was designed for in the 1970s.

Utah's education funding system has not been independently examined since the 1990s.

WHAT

Primary research objective was to determine the extent to which current funding formulas meet their intended purposes and provide equal educational opportunities (Section 53F-2-103).

This was NOT an adequacy study to attempt to pinpoint a dollar amount of funding necessary to reach a certain performance standard.

WHO

The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) commissioned the study (USBE also commissioned the 1990 funding study).

USBE developed the scope of work in partnership with Legislative leaders and local education leaders.

WestEd and Augenblick Palaich and Associates (APA) conducted the independent research, which included developing recommendations.

- WestEd and APA own those recommendations -USBE did not weigh in on them.

Business administrators, superintendents, charter directors, and principals also participated in focus groups, interviews, and surveys to inform the findings.

Key Findings

The study found that the fundamentals of Utah's education funding system are strong. General findings identify opportunities to improve within a foundation well designed to meet state principles. Key findings (among over 30 in total) include:

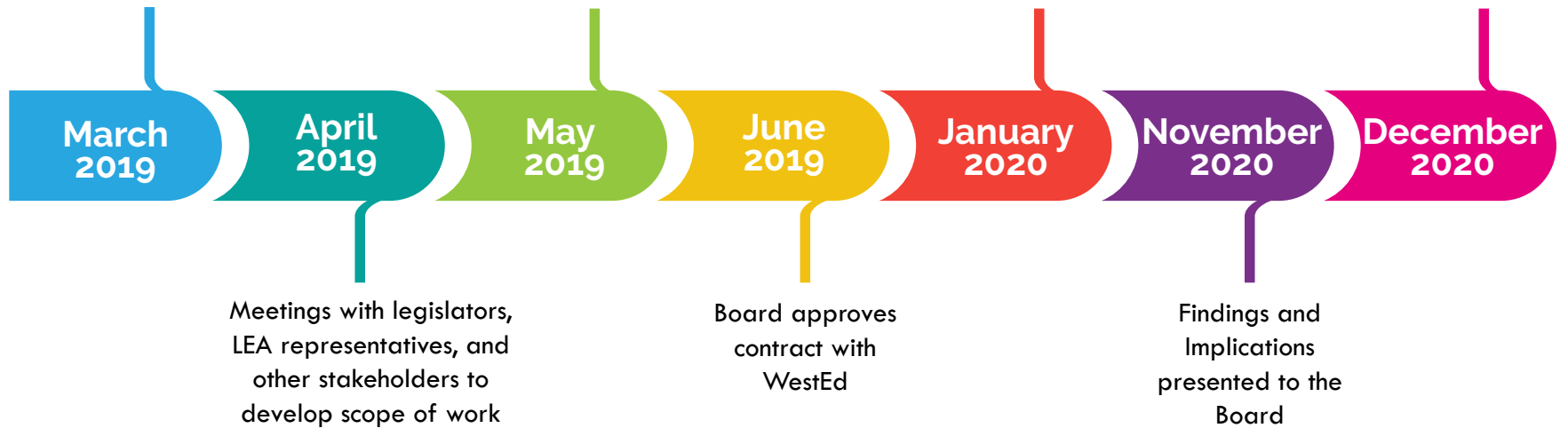
- Utah's funding system is not providing sufficient additional resources for students with greater needs.
 - Currently, Utah only explicitly targets between 1-5% additional resources for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds
- Although equalization policies are in effect, the impacts of these policies on mitigating disparities in local property wealth are limited.
 - More equitable state funding systems run the vast majority of all funding through the equalized state funding formula (i.e., the WPU). Utah's basic rate is the second lowest among 15 states that levy something similar.
- Current policies intended to address needs associated with district characteristics such as size or remoteness do not fully address costs.



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Board voted to direct staff to engage a researcher to conduct a comprehensive education funding study



Meetings with legislators, LEA representatives, and other stakeholders to develop scope of work

Board approves contract with WestEd

Findings and Implications presented to the Board

Examined Utah data and talked to Utah educators

Mixed methods approach, including:

- Rigorous statistical analysis (cost function analysis)
 - Provided estimates for the cost of various inputs (such as labor and school supplies) and key characteristics of the educational environment (such as differences in student need or a lack of economies of scale)
 - In economics, the cost function is primarily used by businesses to determine which investments to make
- Successful schools qualitative analysis
 - Identified a set of highly successful schools and conducted interviews to understand how they use resources to promote student success

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The full report will be published soon at: schools.utah.gov