

State of Utah Education Address

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Good Evening. Welcome, members of the State Board of Education, guests, parents, students, and citizens across the great state of Utah. We've gathered this evening at one of Utah's outstanding public charter schools: the Open Classroom. This school provides public school choice options to parents in Salt Lake City and has a unique philosophy. The Open Classroom program came to the Salt Lake City School District in 1977, with a philosophy of education that adults provide guidance to students and students are given the time and space to explore, think deeply, and create a rich learning experience. The Open Classroom has dedicated teachers, perhaps none more so than head teacher Carolyn Turkanis who has been here since its beginning in 1977. Both of her children are graduates of the school. Even after all these years Carolyn still says: "I am passionate about parents participating in their children's learning, and wholeheartedly believe in being part of a community of learners."

Back in the summer of 2009 I was named Utah's 23rd State Superintendent of Public Instruction. As most of you know I have chosen to retire at the end of this year. This is my last State of Education speech.

I hope you'll humor an old history teacher's penchant for finding lessons in the past. Utah's history mirrors American history—just 15 years after the landing of the Mayflower, Boston Latin School, America's first public school, opened its doors (by the way, it has operated continuously since then). In Utah, schools were also quickly established. In fact, on this very site, a public school was opened in 1857 and a public school has been open here ever since. There is a Daughters of the Utah Pioneers monument on the southeast corner of this block that gives its complete history. And educators were quick to organize. 1860 was the year for the first meeting of the Deseret School Teachers Association.

Among the documents in my office are the reports on the state of education made by the early territorial and state superintendents. In 1876, the Superintendent of the District Schools of the Territory of Utah was John Taylor. Superintendent Taylor is remembered by many as the third president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. During his term of office, the establishment of schools was at the forefront of public interest; there were, in the territory in 1876, 377 school districts (compared to our present-day 41 districts). He wrote these words in one of his reports: “Knowledge is the power through which disease is averted and life prolonged; the masses clothed, fed and housed; vice punished and virtue rewarded; and the manifest agencies of commerce and manufacturing made to perform their varied and growing functions; by which time and distance are apparently obliterated, making cosmopolitans of us all and bringing us into close communication with the whole world. These truths having become axioms, it will be both the pleasure and the duty of [the] Legislature . . . to encourage and stimulate [a] system of education . . . best adapted to the necessities of their constituencies, coupled with their ability to sustain.” (Biennial Report of the Superintendent, School Years 1876 and 1877)

I think we would all agree with Superintendent Taylor: Today, knowledge is still power, and it is still our duty to encourage and provide for the education of the children of our State. This is a truth unchanged by the passage of the years.

When Utah was admitted into the Union in 1896, John R. Park became the first State Superintendent of Public Instruction, a position he held until his death three and one-half years later. He wrote: “When we take into consideration the newness of our state and the hard pioneer life of her citizens. . .we cannot but look with admiration and astonishment upon the interest they have taken in the education of their children and the solid foundation they have laid.” He continued, “In proportion to her wealth, Utah has many more children to educate than any other state...in the Union; her deficiency in wealth is not due to shiftlessness or lack of ability on the part of her citizens, but to the fact that most of the returns for the labor so far expended in the State are to be looked for in the future.”

Once again, history speaks to us. More than a century has passed, and it is still true that we look with admiration upon the interest parents take in the education of their children, and it is also still true, a hundred years on. We have many more children to educate than any other state in the Union!

Today, more than 600,000 students in Utah are enrolled in more than 1000 schools. These 600,000 students are taught by more than 30,000 teachers, counselors, and principals. We rely on these committed educators for many things. They are role models for young people in their communities. They work together as collaborative professionals to create safe and inviting places for learning. They create the innovation and progress necessary to achieve success in our schools.

As Superintendent John Park said: “More trust is reposed in educators than is or ever has been reposed in any other class of public servants, and, therefore, more responsibility is borne by them than by any other public servants.” With us tonight are some of the best examples of Utah’s outstanding teachers. Eight former Teachers of the Year are here -- Hal Adams, Tim Bailey, Gay Beck, Scott Crump, Sharon Gallagher-Fishbaugh, Mary Jane Morris, Leigh VandenAkker and Macie Wolfe. I’ve made it a practice for the last three years to meet with these past Teachers of the Year. I have learned a lot from their wisdom and advice. I hope I can call them my friends. So, thank you my friends. We also have with us Utah’s 2013 Teacher of the Year, Sara Hacken, an English and history teacher at Lakeridge Junior High in Orem. I surprised Mrs. Hacken with the announcement that she was the Teacher of the Year at a banquet in Salt Lake last Friday. Sara’s reaction and the tears in her eyes told me much about both her humility and the depth of her commitment to her profession and the children that she teaches. She is a great representative of Utah’s teachers.

I would also like to introduce Utah’s 2013 Superintendent of the Year, Dale Lamborn from Rich School District. In Superintendent Lamborn’s rural district, most of his high school seniors earn college credit through distance education. In the past three years, 41 students have graduated from Rich High School with a high school diploma and an Associate’s degree. That’s

nearly half the students. His advice to students: “The better prepared you are, the more opportunities you will have.”

It is because of superintendents like Dale, along with great school principals, that our public schools operate more efficiently than any other in the country. Utah has the nation’s lowest administrative costs and our schools are rated by the U. S. Chamber of Commerce as providing its citizens a better return on investment than any other state.

Teachers and leaders like these are helping students to achieve great results. Last year more than 20,000 Utah students took more than 33,000 Advanced Placement (AP) exams (which included nearly 2,000 Calculus AP exams) and Utah students passed those tests 68 percent of the time compared with a 59 percent national average. Utah students passed the AP Calculus exam 66 percent of the time, by the way. More than 120 Utah students earned International Baccalaureate diplomas in 2011. And also in 2011, more than 26,000 Utah students earned 185,000 hours of college credit through the concurrent enrollment program.

These numbers are enough to counter anyone who says Utah high schoolers are wasting their time. These students are ambitious and hard working.

I have loved visiting schools around our state. There is incredible variety in the circumstances in our schools. At Glendale Middle School here in urban Salt Lake City, over 750 students are enrolled in grades 6-8, with enormous challenges of poverty, English language acquisition, and high mobility. I visited there recently with representatives of the U.S. Department of Education. Principal Chris Gesteland led us through the school where about a quarter of the students are English language learners and nearly all of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Students and teachers alike told me about the excitement in the school’s atmosphere. We saw some of that atmosphere in Mr. Ryan Hansen’s math classroom where he had his students rap their way through some division problems. Let me extend my congratulations to Mr. Hansen, not just for his wonderful teaching, but to him and his wife on the birth of a new baby boy last week.

I also recently visited schools in the Cache School District in northern Utah. Superintendent Steve Norton has been a great leader in the Cache School District for 16 years. In the Cache District, an intense focus on reading has resulted in 90 percent of the district's elementary students and 92 percent of the district's secondary students being proficient in literacy. For elementary students, that's 9 percent better than the state average and it's 5 percent better than the state average for secondary students.

Last month I met with Iron County Superintendent Jim Johnson and his team which includes counselors, teachers, and school board members. We spoke about the plans in their schools to ensure that all students leave high school college, career, and life ready. Middle school students in the Iron County School District are tested for interest and aptitude and begin exploring what's needed in a career path that meets their interests and aptitudes. The idea is to get all students on the path to 1- 2- 4- or more years of post-secondary education. Once the students enter ninth grade, counselors will work with the student to create a plan of study in high school that will help them meet their goals. The system is flexible enough to give students a chance to adjust as interests change or new strengths are discovered, but focused enough to make sure students are aimed at clear post-secondary goals. Iron County School District is fully committed to students graduating from high school-- college, career, and life ready.

I have been to the most remote schools in the state. In the extreme northeast corner of Utah, the Daggett County School District serves 178 students in the Flaming Gorge Reservoir area. Superintendent Bruce Northcott leads a total faculty of 14 full-time and three part-time outstanding teachers and for the past three years has achieved a high school graduation rate of 100 percent. In a small district, a high school becomes the focus of the community. Last March, the high school put on a production of the musical "Annie." When the auditions failed to produce a suitable "Daddy Warbucks," the school turned to Superintendent Northcott, who they knew would accept the part. Forty students from the elementary, junior high, and high school, including four of Bruce's own children, put on six performances, all sold out!

Two weeks ago, I traveled to Navajo Mountain High School, accompanied by State Board member Mark Openshaw. From Page, Arizona, we drove south and east 90 miles through Arizona before turning back north into Utah to a small American Indian community tucked between Lake Powell on the north, Navajo Mountain on the west, the Arizona border on the south and rugged canyons on every side. Here twenty-eight Navajo students attend high school. I met with the entire student body in the small auditorium. The room is designed with native traditions in mind, so its circular shape is modeled after a Navajo dwelling, or hogan, with the entrance facing east. Students at Navajo Mountain High School have the same ambitions as students everywhere—to graduate from high school, to join the military, or go to good colleges; to own their own businesses, to become teachers, or doctors, or engineers. With just four teachers, the range of class offerings available to them is severely limited. The principal, Mr. Orlo Knight, teaches social studies and CTE. Mr. Gary Rock teaches English/language arts and reading and is the school's webmaster. Mr. Todd Small Canyon teaches math and is the athletic director. Mr. Kurt Wood teaches science, Russian, and music. It is one of the few schools in the state that offers a Russian program.

I can report to you, from my personal knowledge based on observation, that our schools are strong. We have committed teachers, skilled leaders, and engaged students in every corner of this great state. We're not perfect, we have plenty to do - but we are building on a strong foundation.

In my office here in Salt Lake City, I try not to fall into the trap of thinking that one solution will work in all situations. For those of us along the Wasatch Front, it's easy to forget how rural and remote some of our schools are. I can draw a 65-mile circle extending from where we are right now, and encompass about 85 percent of our student population. Believe it or not, Utah ranks eighth in the nation in urban density. So, it is good to remember that what works here on the Wasatch Front may be very different from what works in Orderville or Grouse Creek or Navajo Mountain or Dutch John.

Still, even with the differences in circumstances and problems, there are certain principles that are universal. In my work with the State Board of Education we have stated these

fundamental truths about the purposes of public education in our statement of Vision and Mission called “Promises to Keep.” I have always tried to have this vision and mission guide my daily work.

The writers of Utah’s Constitution described their purpose for all of government as “securing and perpetuating principles of free government.” That is a lofty goal. The creation of a system of public schools is a mandate in the State Constitution to support that vision of securing and perpetuating freedom.

Freedom requires a citizenry that is capable of participation in the civic and political dialogue of the day. It requires a certain level of economic prosperity. Freedom relies on a community with strong social and moral values, along with a loyalty and respect for constitutional principles. Of course, building a community with these attributes is not the sole responsibility of public education. Families, community organizations, and churches all have a role, but our forefathers who wrote our constitution believed that public schools--public education are essential to preserving our freedom. This is the core of our vision for public education.

Superintendent John Park, who in addition to his service as Superintendent of Public Instruction was also president of the University of Utah, said in an address to graduating teachers in 1885, "I would have you remember that the best intellectual ability will result in failure unless it has underlying it a stratum of moral culture. Always remember in your teaching that the grand purpose of your labors is to make citizens--active, thinking, intelligent, industrious, and moral men and women." That is still our vision today for public schools – to make citizens.

The vision describes our broad purpose. The mission describes our daily work. Our mission, described in Promises to Keep, is to ensure literacy and numeracy for every child, provide high quality instruction, establish curriculum with high standards and relevance, and require effective assessment.

In today’s world, literacy goes well beyond simply being able to read a sentence. It includes writing, speaking and listening skills, along with strong quantitative skills—that is,

mathematics. People may be tired of me saying this, but I want to repeat it here tonight. There is no other success in our schools that can compensate for failure to teach every child to read. The great American historian Barbara Tuchman once wrote, “Books are the carriers of civilization. Without books, history is silent, literature dumb, science crippled, thought and speculation at a standstill. Without books, the development of civilization would have been impossible. ... [Books] are engines of change, windows on the world and lighthouses erected in the sea of time. They are companions, teachers, magicians, bankers of the treasures of the mind. Books are humanity in print.”

Our mission is to ensure that all children receive high quality instruction in every classroom every day. We educators know that the contribution we make to student learning occurs through the process of high quality instruction in our schools. Whenever we talk about improving student learning, we know that the way to do it is to raise the quality of instruction.

In Utah, our total public education spending is about \$5 billion annually. We require that schools hold class for about 1000 hours a year. So it’s simple math to see that as a state we spend about \$5 million per hour of class. My challenge to every superintendent, principal, charter director, and teacher is to ensure that citizens get their \$5 million worth every hour of every day.

Our mission is to make certain that all students are engaged in curriculum that embodies high standards and relevance to the world students will encounter after high school. We want students to be ready for college or careers, and life, prepared to succeed at whatever they may choose. Whether a graduate pursues a degree as an electrical engineer or an apprenticeship to become an electrician, we must be sure that our curriculum is relevant with appropriate standards of excellence so that every student is ready. The State Board of Education adopted in 2010 new, more rigorous standards in English/language arts, and in mathematics. These standards are intended to ensure that all Utah graduates are prepared for the challenges of college and careers. Over the last year, there has arisen a small but very vocal and persistent challenge to these standards. Tonight, I repeat what I have said before. These new Utah Core Standards are right for Utah students. They have the support of the great majority of Utah teachers and Utah

curriculum experts. The standards have been adopted in such a way that our state control over our Utah schools has not been diminished. These are state standards under State Board of Education control. They expand opportunity for Utah students. The adoption of these standards was and continues to be the right decision.

We must have assessments that inform both instruction and accountability. In recent years, it seems like there has been so much focus on accountability for schools that we lost sight of the goal that assessment should help teachers provide the most effective instruction for every child. We all want to know if our schools are effective; we can't forget about accountability. But we also need to ensure that testing effectively informs teachers, parents, and students.

The Utah Constitution creates a partnership for the governance of Utah public schools. The Legislature is responsible to establish and maintain the public schools, the Board is responsible for general control and supervision of those schools. As part of its responsibility in this partnership, the Board makes recommendations each year to the Legislature for the General Session. Over the next several months, between now and the session, you'll hear in detail the Board recommendations. Tonight, I would like to address just two key issues.

First is funding for public education. Beginning in 2008, we experienced several very lean years. We've been through bad times, but things in the Utah economy are improving. Last year, for the first time, funding finally returned to the 2008 level, and this year we are slightly above the 2008 funding level. However, remember that in the years since 2008, our schools have added more than 50,000 new students, so our funding for each student this year is still less than it was in 2008.

Here is an important point. We cannot have the best school system in the country and be the lowest in the country in funding. Just for emphasis, let me repeat. We can't be first and also be last! We don't have to outspend everyone else, but Utah's current position in last place when it comes to the fiscal resources available for public education is standing in the way of progress and of our goal to be the best. We can no longer ask ourselves "if" we will fund growth, "if" we will invest in professional development, "if" we will invest in technology. We must fund growth

and we must invest.

For many years, the demand has been that public education do more with less. Let's talk about how much less Utah students are provided to support their education. For the education of each of our students, Utah allocates 15 percent fewer dollars than any other state, and 62 percent fewer dollars than what is allocated for the typical student in the country. And I already related to you the history of the past five years.

Now let me tell you how much more we've done with the "less" that I have just described. Utah leads the nation in dual immersion programs. The growth has happened during these lean years. This year 78 Utah schools are offering dual immersion in Chinese, French, Portuguese, and Spanish. Students in these schools don't just study a foreign language; they receive part of their daily instruction in that language. Dual immersion gives Utah students a leg up in a competitive world marketplace.

For several years, Utah high schools have participated in a pilot program that would have every graduate take the ACT. Because they took the ACT, many students who had not thought themselves capable of college work find that they are. From 2011 to 2012, Utah Black students increased their participation in the ACT by a third; American Indian students by 53 percent; Pacific Islander students by 63 percent, and Hispanic students, Utah's largest minority group, by nearly 77 percent.

With fewer dollars—both total state dollars and dollars per student—we have dramatically increased student academic results. Here is one of the most outstanding examples of the increased student achievement. Overall results on the 8th grade English language arts proficiency tests have risen from 77 percent in 2005 to 90 percent in 2012. Hispanic eighth grade students improved from 52 to 78 percent, American Indian students improved from 51 to 73 percent and Caucasian students improved from 81 to 93 percent.

In addition to the demand to do more with less, there has been a persistent call for public schools to be more adaptable and accepting of change. Let me give you examples of change that have been embraced by Utah public schools in the last several years.

Utah parents have lots of choices. For many years, our state has offered open enrollment. Parents aren't obliged to send their children to the school nearest their home or even to a school within their district. There are now 88 charter schools in Utah. Last year nearly 45,000 students – almost 8 percent of the public school population – attended a charter school. We also offer private school scholarships to students with special needs. Each of the 686 students who requested a Carson Smith Scholarship received one. And Utah's Public Education Online program offers students the chance to earn high school credit through online courses.

We needed to create a streamlined method for dealing with underperforming teachers. With the passage of legislation that the State Board and I asked for and supported, we have placed strong new tools in principal's hands that will allow them to more effectively manage their schools, that speed up the process for removing the lowest performing teachers, and that prevent automatic pay increases for failing employees. I appreciate Senator Aaron Osmond for responding when the State Board asked him to take on this difficult issue and for his exceptional effort to achieve the passage of SB64 The Public Education Employment Reform Act.

So what do we need to do now? Now it is time to step up and invest. I have a few specific recommendations. The first is to fund growth. It is simply foolish to expect students to come to schools without providing the schools with resources to educate those students. Until 2008, the Legislature funded growth in its "base" budget. It should return to that practice as soon as feasible.

Second, is to avoid the temptation to reduce revenue during times of prosperity. Our state's habit of reducing revenue during good times is simply wrong-headed, especially when unmet needs are so great. It would be as though Joseph in Egypt has told the Pharaoh to reduce the planting of crops during the seven "fat" years as the best way to prepare for the coming "lean" years. The correct principle was understood by Utah's 3rd State Superintendent,

A.C. Nelson, who in 1902 said, “The popular men are the men who find a way to reduce taxation.” When the Superintendent wrote about “popular men,” he was not thinking of it as a complimentary term. The “popular man” in early 20th Century political terms was the man who did the convenient or easy thing to please the masses, the demagogue, not the man who did the right thing to meet the needs of the time and set a good course for the future.

Finally, relative to funding, we need to make our investments count. Superintendent John Park said, in 1896, “Our education is not improved in proportion to its increase in costliness unless it can be made to do so.”

Our key investments must be in people and in technology. We rely on teachers. They are the key to all success we may have. We need to improve teacher preparation. We have to compensate teachers so that we attract and keep great people. We need to talk positively about the teaching profession so that teachers feel valued. And, we must provide opportunities for learning and growth so that teachers are not only expected to continually improve, but are given the resources to make that happen.

Regarding technology, we are just beginning to see the transformative possibilities of technology. I submit that our efforts to drive improvement in student achievement by replacing teachers with software is misguided. The power of technology will be fully harnessed when we understand how it will drive high quality instruction, working in synergy with great teachers rather than replacing them. I believe that the work to fully integrate technology in our schools is a more massive project than we have imagined. It isn't a “repaving project:” its more like rebuilding the I-15 corridor from Ogden to Santaquin. This year we invested \$3 million in technology through Senator Jerry Stevenson's SB248 Smart School Technology. This appropriation turned out to be enough to equip 3 schools. We have 1000 schools. The model in this program may or may not be the right model, but it makes clear the magnitude of the investment that will be necessary.

The other issue to be addressed is governance. In the past several years, there has been a general effort to make public education governance more political. There are those who would

like the election of school board members, both at the state and local level, to become partisan elections. The current election process, where a panel of “stakeholders” representing various interests chooses the candidates that the public then can vote for, is no substitute for the process of open elections. The process is made even worse as most of those appointed to serve on this panel are lobbyists, so where the idea is that manufacturers would be represented, there is not a manufacturer, but rather a lobbyist for some manufacturers; not a doctor, but a lobbyist for health care. Utah would be best served by open, non-partisan elections for board members who have governance responsibilities for public schools.

There has even been talk of a constitutional amendment to eliminate the independent school board, giving control of public schools over to either the governor or the legislature. These ideas will not serve Utah citizens well. Examples abound of what goes wrong when public education becomes the fodder for partisan electoral politics. Partisan electoral politics always give voice to the evangelists of the extreme and purveyors of simplistic solutions for complex problems. Let’s keep partisan politics out of our schools.

Tonight I referred to the words of some of my early predecessors. Here is another nugget of wisdom from State Superintendent John Park, in 1898. He wrote, “We have arrived at a stage in the development of public education when mere enthusiasm is not sufficient. What is wanted now is wisdom on the part of those who administer public education and those who make the laws governing it. Along with the demands upon the people should go a determination to use to the best possible advantage what the people so willingly give.”

It is in this light that we make our requests for investment. Now is the time for action and for more than “mere enthusiasm.”

All reports are that Utah is leading the nation out of the economic storm of the last four years. We continue to recognize that careful prioritization will be necessary, but tonight I call on our governing partners in Utah public education, our Legislature, to make a renewed commitment to public education, by making available the resources required to garner the returns necessary on this most important investment. It is nearly universally accepted that Utah public

schools have the highest return on the investment of tax dollars of any system in the nation. The time has come to increase our allocation in this high return investment.

We have strong partners in this call for investment. A powerful coalition of business leaders has formed a group called Prosperity 2020. Mark Bouchard, the chairman of this group, is here with us tonight, and lends an influential voice to its agenda. Utah business leaders know that the most important investment in a vibrant economy is education, that education is the path to enduring prosperity. I thank Prosperity 2020 for its vision and support.

I appreciate the partnership that Governor Herbert has led through his Commission for Education Excellence. Over the past three years, this Commission has championed vital goals for our state by bringing together leaders from public education, higher education, stakeholder groups, and the Legislature.

With this emerging alignment of purpose, the time is now for our state to step forward with the effort and investment necessary. As prosperity returns, we must avoid the pitfalls of the past, the temptation to do just enough, the allure of reducing effort as the economy improves. Let's set that course right. Let's make that investment in our children, in our future.

Now, as I conclude, I wish to take a moment for an expression of gratitude. My wife and I reached this decision about my retirement after careful thought and contemplation. I have appreciated the expressions of regret for this decision that have come from so many; I'm grateful that so few have said, "It's about time!" A career in education has brought immeasurable rewards to me and to my family. I have been blessed to associate with people of amazing talent and commitment.

Perhaps the greatest blessing of my work has been the chance to associate with great teachers and students. Not infrequently, I hear people lament about the sad state of the world, and particularly about their doubts in the young people, the rising generation. I wish they could see what I see when I am in our schools. I see students with amazing talent, with ambition, with compassion, and with a powerful commitment to do good. Sure, there are, as there have always been, those who make poor decisions and throw away opportunity. But these are the minority. I

feel overwhelming confidence in young people. I have feelings of great optimism. We will be in good hands in the future as these young people mature and become our leaders and champions.

During the last three and one-half years as State Superintendent, I have appreciated the loyalty and support of my executive team, Deputy Superintendent Martell Menlove, along with Associate Superintendents Brenda Hales, Judy Park, Bruce Williams and his predecessor, Todd Hauber. I have been greatly blessed to work with an outstanding State Board of Education, led by Board Chair Debra Roberts and Vice Chair Dixie Allen. The members of the State Board are good men and women, with the best interests of our state and its children always at the forefront of their work. The singular characteristic of all our work together has been a commitment to our constitutional duties and our sense of vision and mission for public education in Utah. For all your kindnesses to me, and for the opportunity to serve, I thank you.

I'll conclude tonight with one of my favorite poems by Carl Sandburg entitled the Teamsters Farewell:

GOOD-BY now to the streets and the clash of wheels and locking hubs,

The sun coming on the brass buckles and harness knobs.

The muscles of the horses sliding under their heavy haunches,

Good-by now to the traffic policeman and his whistle,

The smash of the iron hoof on the stones,

All the crazy wonderful slamming roar of the street--

Lord, there's noises I'm going to be hungry for

May God attend to the youth of our great state and pour out upon them His choicest blessings, and may God bless all of you and this great state of Utah.