

GENERAL SESSION

February 22, 2017

Program Topics: Money and Sex Ed

Presented by: Education Committee

Chairs: Erin Preston & Seraya Amirthlingam

Topics:

SB80 School Funding Equity

HB215 Reproductive Health Education and Services

Speakers:

Sen. Lincoln Fillmore (R), District 10

Jay Blain, Director of Policy and Research, Utah Educational Association

Rep. Brian King (D), District 28

Tammy Hirsch, Eagle Forum, Former Alpine District teacher



Sen. Fillmore

SB80 School Funding

Utah's school districts span greatly varying tax bases, and this has resulted in wide differences in what can be spent on education in each district. In fact, the average per pupil spending is misleadingly high because the richest

district, in Park City, along with a few other wealthy areas, contributes much more to the average than the districts that serve 70% of the school population. Sen. Fillmore's bill, which was defeated in the House committee on Feb. 23, would have taken a step towards equalizing funding across all districts.

The state has spent \$150M dollars over the past 20 years as part of the "[Minimum School Program](#)". The whole purpose of

the program is to guarantee that every child has adequate funding for their education regardless of the economic situation of their school district. This goal has not been met. In fact, the gap between the richest and poorest districts has been increasing.

The fastest growing school districts are Nebo, Alpine, Jordan, Davis, Granite, and Weber. These districts have lower than average property values, resulting in a lower tax "yield" than in districts near high density business areas or tourism destinations.

SB80 would have set in place a program for a gradual elimination of the inequity due to variations in property tax yield. The growth in the education fund would have been distributed in a way that increased funding to the poorest districts to compensate for their lesser ability to raise funding through property taxes.

The amount of extra money available for this would \$15M to \$30M per year. This year, for example, there is a \$300M growth in the education fund.

To qualify for the additional funding, a district would need to levy additional taxes. The details of the proposal are “complicated”, but the result is that funding for the 70% of students in the lower yield districts would gradually increase.

Sen. Fillmore pointed out that student funding “equity” in this discussion, is calculated “per district” with respect to property tax yield, not “per pupil”. Special needs students with medical requirements or non-traditional needs can require much more funding than the average.

A WSLC member asked why the legislature was so opposed to raising the state income tax to fund schools. Sen. Fillmore said the question might be a ballot measure in the future. He also made a point about the efficiency of districts with less money, saying that their expenditures were strongly biased towards education, not administration.



Jay Blain

In opposition, Jay Blain said that although UEA agrees with the philosophy of SB80, they feel that it addresses the wrong problem. Rather than try to equalize inadequate funding for schools, the state should increase the overall education budget so that all Utah students can

receive the benefit of a better education.

The “Weighted Pupil Unit” (WPU) is an important measure of Utah education spending, and Blain feels that it has served the state well as it “spreads the pain equally” across the state. The

problem is that there is too little funding overall.

Some years ago, there was a proposed a measure that addressed the funding inequity among districts, and it raised taxes across the whole state. Mr. Blain said that “hurt no one.”

The governor has proposed raising taxes so that local districts will have more money to fulfill their needs. The UEA agrees with this strategy. It would provide badly need funds immediately, whereas SB80 would only provide a small increment to poorer districts and do so over a period of several years.

The UEA feels that the current educational situation is dire and requires immediate help. One aspect of the crisis is the difficulty of retaining quality teachers.

The negative effect of SB80, he told the group, was that it would encumber the future education fund in a way that could become counter-productive in future years. It might depress the WPU, for example. The funding situation requires a holistic approach.

The education fund supplies \$1.3B per year to Utah schools, the bulk of the public school's money.

There was a question about SB80 as contrasted with Sen. Dabakis' income tax bill (which died in committee that morning). Mr. Blain said that it would have been a better solution than SB80. He objects to the lack of flexibility that it would impose on the education fund.

In response to a question, Mr. Blain said that all students in the state are in need, and it might be unrealistic to say that districts that have small property tax bases need more help than other districts.



HB215 Reproductive Health Education and Services

Rep. King

Utah has strict limits on what can be told to students about premarital or extramarital sexual relations. Teachers who violate those rules can be charged with a crime. In Rep. King's view, the result is that some students do not get essential health information about pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, even if their parents would favor a more comprehensive course of instruction. HB215 allows parents to opt-in to an expanded education for their children. The material must be age-appropriate (instruction could not begin before 4th grade), evidence-based, and approved by the local school board.

Rep. King ran a similar bill last year. This year, at the suggestion of Gail Ruzicka, he added an amendment requiring a notice to be given to parents who opt-in for the enhanced instruction. The purpose of the notice is to explain exactly what topics are covered. The amendment was not adopted, and the bill has not left the House Education Committee.

The bill provides for instruction that is not simply abstinence-based, but it still emphasizes that healthy behavior includes minimizing sexual activity and using birth control. Current Utah law criminalizes the discussion of some of the material that would be taught in the expanded curriculum, and Rep. King's bill would remove that liability for the teachers of expanded sex ed.

The Salt Lake Tribune reported on a pornography website that purported to have established a sex education component specifically for its Utah-based customers. Rep. King said that the legislature should take steps to assure

that sex education can be had in school rather than in such risky places.

A WSLC member asked if a future bill might address healthy sexual identities. Rep. King said he was willing to talk to anyone about the various perspectives on sex education.

Under current law, it is difficult to teach about sexual protection methods because teachers can “define” but not “describe” contraception. This has a chilling effect on instructors.



Tammy Hirsch

Tammy Hirsch taught dance and health in the Alpine School District and is an opponent of any expansion of the curriculum. She argued the importance abstinence-based instruction on the grounds that it was the only way to absolutely prevent sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted teen pregnancies.

In her experience, Utah's abstinence-based instruction is complete and covers 6 “standards”, including contraception. She said that Rep. King's discussion of prohibitions against discussing those topics was inaccurate. She wanted the group to know that Utah Planned Parenthood “supported” Rep. King.

Utah teaches “sperm-to-egg” fertilization, contraceptive methods, and sexually transmitted diseases (she notes that the term “infection” minimizes the effect of HIV).

Intricacies of intercourse, sexual stimulation, erotic behavior, encouragement of homosexuality, encouragement of the use of condoms, etc. are forbidden topics for Utah sex ed.

Ms. Hirsch said that the term “comprehensive sex education” covered

those topics and a distressing panoply of horrifying other things that are not disclosed to parents. Comprehensive sex ed is deceptive “big time” because it covers, for example, masturbation for small children. In her view, the topic should never be mentioned in a classroom, and she elaborated on various aspects of it. She deplored the “perversion” of instruction in Hawaii.

She was floored by what she had read in a comprehensive sex ed book. Assertions such as “you might not have the same morals as your parents”, “we are all born as sexual creatures”, offend her. Her belief that “babies are pure” is at odds with that idea.

In California, some schools have representatives from Planned Parenthood teaching sex ed. Ms. Hirsch found this objectionable. She herself is not afraid to object to forms of sexual intercourse that deviate from a single clinical definition [Ed. Omitted from this newsletter]. She further claimed that the pockets of Planned Parenthood are lined with the money from the graduates of comprehensive sex ed courses who go on to get STDs and unplanned pregnancies.

Gender identification also offended her, and she referred to the website 23andMe for a refutation of the idea that gender

identification could be different than what the X and Y chromosomes indicate. WSLC member Sophia Hawes-Tingey gave a statement saying that as a transgender woman she disagreed with Ms. Hirsch's viewpoint. Although she does not advocate teaching the complexities of gender acquisition in Utah schools, she was perturbed that someone with so little scientific information would make claims about the subject in public. Ms. Hirsch vigorously defended her assertions by referring again to 23andMe.

Another WSLC member wondered if Ms. Hirsch was entirely truthful about what Utah could expect from expanded sex ed. She noted that only opt-in families would be affected by the instruction, and further, the school board would review the material for appropriateness. She also deplored the cases in which Utah parents had been deprived of the most enjoyable aspects of sexual relations because of their very constrained education on the “intricacies” of intercourse.

Ms. Hirsch referred to the “national sexuality standards” and said that the topics she has referred to are in them. She again warned against naïve assumptions about what might lurk in comprehensive sex ed.

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