



UTAH FOUNDATION

RESEARCH • ANALYZE • INFORM

10 West Broadway, Suite 307
Salt Lake City, UT 84101

801.355.1400
utahfoundation.org

Utah Foundation Report Recommends Long-Term Planning for Education

Public School Population Expected to Grow 64% by 2050

SALT LAKE CITY May 7, 2015 -- Just over 30 percent of Utah's population is under the age of 18, with more than 600,000 students in the state's public schools. That population is expected to grow 64 percent by 2050, when Utah will have almost a million students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Higher education will experience similarly robust growth.

Yet Utah has no long-term, comprehensive, statewide plan for public and higher education in spite of recommendations from civic groups such as Prosperity 2020 and Education First. A new report from the non-partisan Utah Foundation, [*Reaching Toward 2050: Education in the Midst of Population Growth*](#), recommends creating that plan and explains some of the reasons why it's needed.

The report's key findings include:

- Utah is in the middle of the pack for most K-12 test scores and for higher education completion rates.
- Utah has no statewide, comprehensive, long-term plan for education, though the plan proposed by Prosperity 2020 and Education First is innovative compared with other states' plans.
- Utah once had low per-pupil funding but a high funding effort; both measures now rank low against the national average due in part to policy changes over the past two decades. Higher education is relying more on tuition than in past years.
- The concept of "cost disease" is that costs in highly labor intensive industries – like education -- by their very nature increase faster than other industries; accordingly, the cost of education will continue to increase faster than inflation.
- Utah will see a decreasing dependency ratio in coming decades. That builds a better outlook for school finances; in essence, there will be more working adults paying for fewer students' education, which gives policymakers less financial constraint in determining school funding.
- The state has numerous options for funding public schools at a higher level and for reducing college tuition, but only if Utahns and policymakers have the will to do it.

The report was written by Utah Foundation Research Director Shawn Teigen. He says Utah will see an increasingly diverse student population in coming decades, with many more students of varied ethnic backgrounds. "If we want to inspire achievement in those students,"

says Teigen, “we will need experienced teachers who are culturally competent to educate them.”

Teigen also says a long-term approach to education planning will help to protect the resources the state needs to accommodate that growth. “It could help prevent the state from making policy changes which negatively affect our education funding effort,” he says.”

Community and business groups such as Prosperity 2020 have also urged long-term planning for public education. In response to this report, Alan Hall, Chair of Prosperity 2020, said “Today’s prosperity is due to forward-thinking leaders of the past who invested in education. This same opportunity to exhibit lasting leadership exists today. We call on our state leaders to create a long-term plan for education that focuses on the key elements of success: reading and math at grade level, high school graduation and college completion.”

This report is the fourth in a series on Utah’s expected population growth. The others include [*Flowing Toward 2050: Utah’s Water Outlook*](#), released in September, 2014, [*Roadmap to 2050: Planning for Utah’s Future Infrastructure Needs*](#), released in June, 2014, and [*A Snapshot of 2050: An Analysis of Projected Population Change in Utah*](#). All are available on the Utah Foundation website, www.utahfoundation.org.

The work of the Utah Foundation is supported by our sponsors from the business community, philanthropic organizations, local governments, higher education and other contributors. Additional funding for this report was provided by Sorensen Legacy Foundation and CIT Bank.

About the Utah Foundation:

Utah Foundation is a non-profit, non-partisan public policy research group. Its mission is to promote a thriving economy, a well-prepared workforce, and a high quality of life for Utahns by performing thorough, well-supported research that helps policy makers, business and community leaders, and citizens better understand complex issues and providing practical, well-reasoned recommendations for policy change. For more information visit www.utahfoundation.org.

#

Contacts:

Dan Bammes
Communications director, Utah Foundation
(801) 355-1400, ext. 5 Cell: 801-349-5937
dan@utahfoundation.org

Shawn Teigen
Research Director, Utah Foundation
(801) 355-1400, ext. 3
shawn@utahfoundation.org

Steve Kroes
President, Utah Foundation
(801) 355-1400 ext. 1
steve@utahfoundation.org