

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FEDERAL INTERVENTION IN PUBLIC EDUCATION: IS IT GOOD FOR UTAH?

RESPONSIBLE CITIZEN SUMMARY

Background

- The federal government funded just .5 percent (one half of one percent) of Utah's total public education budget in 1919 but that number has gradually increased to 12.6 percent in 2009
- Regulations attached to federal funding have steadily expanded to influence every public school and student in Utah

What's at stake?

- Federal education programs burden state and local educators with rigid, complex regulations that prevent them from doing what is best for Utah children
- Federal officials offer one-size-fits-all solutions to unique problems in Utah communities – officials that are not accountable to Utah taxpayers and parents
- Participating in federal "stimulus" programs, including "Race to the Top," would increase the state's dependence on federal funding for education by as much as 123 percent and would force Utah to comply with additional regulations

What's next?

- Utahns need to decide if they will continue to accept federal dollars and the burdensome regulations attached to them, or if they will become more self-reliant as communities and as a state by reducing their dependence on federal funds

Responsible *Citizenship*[™]

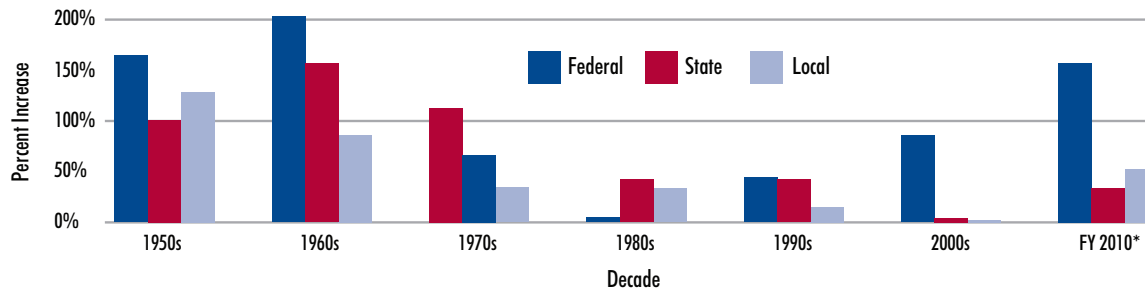
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Over the past decade, the federal government has extended its influence into Utah public education more than ever before. Now, Congress is offering the state hundreds of millions of dollars in "stimulus" funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which includes President Obama's "Race to the Top" initiative. Accepting these funds would increase Utah's dependence on federal aid for education by as much as 123 percent and require educators to comply with more regulations. Chart 1 illustrates the huge increase in federal funds over the past decade and the possible dramatic increase in Fiscal Year 2010, as contrasted with much smaller increases from state and local resources.

This time of decision presents a unique opportunity to consider three vital questions: How has the federal role in Utah public education evolved? How has it influenced the state's education system and its students? And, moving forward, what role should the federal government play in Utah education?

Early on, federal intervention was rare and non-intrusive. Since the 1940s, however, federal spending per capita for Utah education programs has grown 1,573 percent, whereas state spending has grown 494 percent, and local spending 178 percent. This money and the regulations attached to it have enabled the federal government to expand its influence into Utah schools little by little, mostly through programs designed to assist low-income, disabled, and minority students. More recently, the federal government has tried to influence all schools and students by requiring states to adopt federal standards and by holding schools accountable for student performance

Chart 1: Increase in Public Education Budget Per Decade by Source



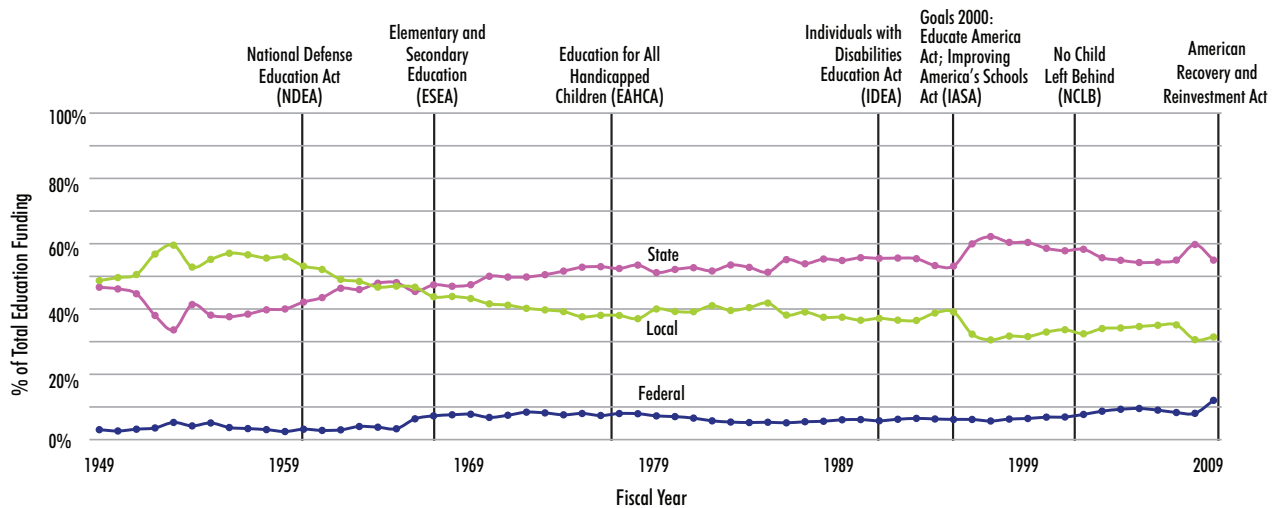
*Fiscal year 2010 is projected based on ARRA funds the state may receive. **Note:** Percent changes are based on average funding per decade. All amounts are adjusted for inflation. **Data source:** State Superintendent Annual Reports and Legislative Fiscal Analyst⁴³

on standardized tests. Today, though the federal government funds a minor portion of Utah public education, its influence permeates the system throughout.

As represented in Chart 2, the federal government has historically contributed less funding to Utah public education than state and local governments, but its contribution rate has increased from 3.6 percent of total public education spending in 1949 to 12.6 percent in 2009.

Federal programs have benefited Utah to some degree, mostly by enhancing education budgets, but they have also distorted state and local finances, burdened educators with rigid, complex regulations that conflict with their priorities, and diminished accountability to taxpayers and parents. Utahns recognize these problems and worry that federal regulations inhibit state and local educators from doing what is best for their children. They prefer to regain their autonomy by opting out of

Chart 2: Funding Sources and Key Legislation in Utah Public Education 1949-2009



Data source: State Superintendent Annual Reports, 1896-2008, and Legislative Fiscal Analyst

federal programs, but have found the lure of additional funding hard to resist.

In recent years, Utah officials have pushed back against the U.S. Department of Education but, in the end, they have retreated for fear of biting the hand

that feeds them – to the tune of \$531 million last year. As the federal government continues to propose and revise its initiatives, Utahns need to choose whether to accept an ever-expanding federal presence in Utah public education or move toward greater self-reliance as a state.



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