

A SUTHERLAND INSTITUTE  
POLICY PUBLICATION

# Innovation **IN** Education



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A NEW BIRTH OF FREEDOM



A Sutherland Institute Policy Publication

# Innovation in Education

Edited by Christine Cooke

# A Letter from the President

In 1995, Sutherland Institute founder Gaylord Swim saw a need and opportunity to contribute to a generational new birth of freedom through sound public policy, principled conservative thought leadership, and civil dialogue. Today, his vision is more important than ever.

For 23 years, Sutherland has worked tirelessly to provide legislators and decision-makers with inclusive and fact-based research on issues important to Utah and the nation. This publication is indicative of an approach that invites conversation, debate and real solutions.

Education has become a point of contention on so many fronts, including a working definition of choice, recognition of special needs, and – of course – federal mandates and conditional funding.

As with any debate-turned-partisan-issue, at the core we can find principles and shared objectives. Sutherland consistently seeks to clarify those starting points, then build toward solutions based on areas of agreement rather than the most contentious and political fringe issues. It is, after all, the education of the future leaders of our republic that is in the balance.

Thank you for including this and future Sutherland publications in your education and deliberation process.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick B. Larsen", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rick B. Larsen  
President & CEO, Sutherland Institute

# Contents

5	Introduction
7	Innovation in Higher Education: Cutting Costs for College
12	Rethinking the Teaching Profession
17	Innovation and Choice in Public Schools
22	A New Approach to Student Discipline
26	Giving Every Utah Child the Chance to Succeed
31	Innovation for K-12 Mastery: Beyond Time and Place
36	Career Readiness Today



# Introduction

Christine Cooke

When Sutherland Institute embarked on creating a publication about educational innovation, we knew we'd have to start by answering the question, "What do you mean by innovation?"

It's a fair question. And we intend for it to be answered by this work.

For now, we'll concede that innovation to some degree always means change. There's debate about whether that change – to be called innovation – is required to be grand or whether it can be small; whether it must include lawmaking or if it can grow entirely from private players; and whether it can be cultural rather than structural. From our perspective, innovation in education can include all of those.

Let's be clear – not all changes in education are created equal. Some are, in fact, bad. Change for the sake of change is not anyone's goal. Change that leads to students reaching their God-given potential, however, is.

A lot is said about the status quo in education. We hear criticisms that the American classroom has looked the same for the past century and that increased spending has only resulted in stagnant test scores. But the most threatening trait of the status quo is its inertia.

The status quo has a powerful way of maintaining what's already been: a sticky tendency to stay the same for no other reason than that it's easier or less messy

to do so. The status quo burrows into bureaucracy and survives on red tape. It offers onlookers the comfort of assumed wisdom that the best policy is the one that's been around the longest.

Innovation, on the other hand, offers no such comforts or constraints. It pushes and stretches. In all its forms, innovation lives where there is space – especially political space – to expose it to the sunlight of questions and fertilize it with the knowledge that comes from trial and error. It acknowledges the credibility of research-based ideas yet recognizes that research is limited to those ideas that already exist. Innovation brings the discomfort of risk but paves the way to possibilities of better outcomes.

Ultimately, Sutherland Institute is calling for a willingness to innovate and for better outcomes for students as individuals.

Observers of Utah education policymaking might understandably push back on the comments about a needed willingness to accept change. We have innovated in some important ways. And when it comes to making changes in education policy in Utah, we are relentless – perhaps even merciless. Each legislative session, hundreds of education bills are introduced, many of which are passed. There's an annual rush of tedious changes that keeps everyone busy with compliance but does not always offer opportunity to make positive innovative changes. No matter where anyone sits on the

political spectrum, we'd all like to see some sort of pause on education legislation so we can get our statutory bearings.

For anyone who knows what Sutherland Institute stands for, what we've described in our state and what we're calling for is not a contradiction. We believe that the best solutions emerge when our laws assume the competence of those on the ground closest to the issues, and then let them lead the way. We don't need more legislative changes – we need the freedom to allow innovative and sensible changes by those working with students: parents and teachers.

At a minimum, Sutherland Institute hopes this publication serves as a resource for educators and policymakers to find new ideas, to weigh the merits of policies found herein, and to decide how the ideas might apply to students in different regions or states. Though we don't necessarily endorse or recommend any specific policies in this publication, we believe each idea is worth sharing. Topics within the publication include the teaching profession, competency-based education, school discipline, higher education, education choice, industry pathways, and more. Its authors include some of the brightest minds from think tanks and some of the bravest hearts in public schools. For those looking for specific ideas, this publication has a lot to offer.

Still, we hope this publication will do even more. We hope that in Utah, and in other states, this work becomes a launching point for a robust conversation about innovation. Too often education reform gets caught up in the fervor of the next silver-bullet policy or arguments about how much money is spent – and then looks to national rankings for validation. What if the ultimate compliment for a state were its willingness to innovate

in order to meet the needs of the student? What if a culture of space for innovation rather than compliance with mandates won national recognition for a state?

Moving our culture in this direction will require all to accept some uncertainty. It will demand that we express some humility about what will improve education. None of us knows everything, which is why innovation and the space for it may, over time, be what leads us in the right direction.

Here's to being a little uncomfortable and to giving these ideas space within our pages so that innovation – or good changes for students – can exist in our state and in yours.

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*Christine Cooke is director of education policy at Sutherland Institute. She worked as an English teacher at a public school and a residential treatment center prior to becoming an attorney in Utah.*



# Innovation in Higher Education: Cutting Costs for College

Lindsey M. Burke

How should we think about higher education today? Employers report that recent college graduates aren't prepared to enter the workforce;<sup>1</sup> roughly one-third of graduates are underemployed and in jobs that haven't historically required a bachelor's degree;<sup>2</sup> the U.S. has rising college costs and an astronomical \$1.5 trillion in outstanding student loan debt;<sup>3</sup> and, perhaps as a result of those issues, we are seeing renewed interest in career and technical education.

All these factors call into question the notion that college is necessarily the right path for achieving upward mobility. Yet, at the same time, there are countervailing pressures that continue to support the efficacy of higher education. A college graduate is much more likely to have higher average earnings and be employed as a result of obtaining a bachelor's degree relative to non-degree holders. This tension – the push and pull between the perceived need to earn a bachelor's degree and the clear need for reform – have established a need for higher education to make a course correction, which is possible by embracing innovation and reducing dependency on federal subsidies.

## **Increases in college costs**

Although Utah ranks among the lowest in college costs in the country, the price of

tuition at four-year state institutions has increased 60 percent in Utah in real terms, from \$4,231 during the 2004-05 academic year to \$6,788 during the 2017-18 academic year.<sup>4</sup> Utah, however, fares better than the national average. Indeed, nationally, college prices are 3.13 times higher than they were during the 1987-88 academic year, the same year that President Ronald Reagan's

**The answer lies in a combination of reducing federal subsidies . . . and reforming accreditation to allow innovation to flourish.**

education secretary, Bill Bennett, first suggested what would later become known as the Bennett Hypothesis. He wrote in *The New York Times* that “increases in financial aid in recent years have enabled colleges and universities blithely to raise their tuitions, confident that Federal loan subsidies would help cushion the increase.”<sup>5</sup>

Secretary Bennett’s premonition appears to have held true. Economist Richard Vedder explains it this way: “It takes more resources today to educate a postsecondary student than a generation ago. ... Relative to other sectors of the economy, universities are becoming less efficient, less productive, and, consequently, more costly.”<sup>6</sup> The good news is that 57 percent of students who borrowed for college owed less than \$20,000 in 2017. The bad news is that they account for just 16 percent of outstanding student debt across the country. Too many borrowers owe far more. Nearly 20 percent of borrowers owe between \$100,000 and \$200,000 in federal student loan debt.<sup>7</sup> Many of these students are grad students. The percentage of graduate students borrowing more than \$80,000 exceeds 20 percent today, up from just 7 percent during the 2003-04 academic year.<sup>8</sup>

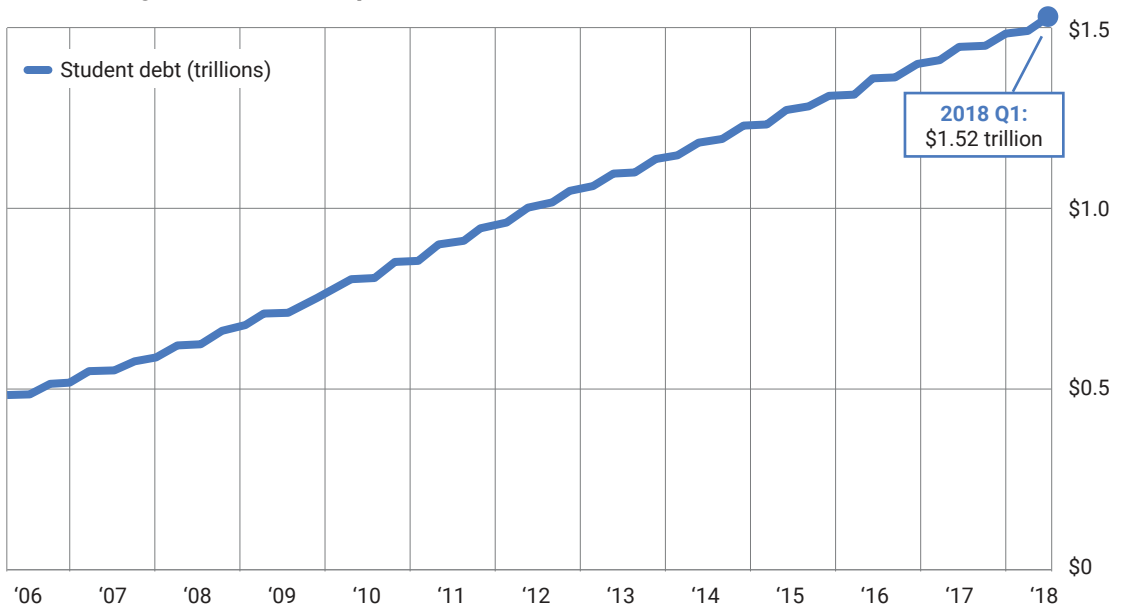
Generally speaking, however, college graduates are leaving undergrad with a manageable amount of debt, accruing about

\$37,000 in student loans on average. But cumulative student loan debt has reached staggering heights: Americans in 2018 owe \$1.5 trillion in outstanding student loan debt – up from \$600 billion just 10 years ago.<sup>9</sup> This has created two nearly intractable problems: (1) All taxpayers – both those with degrees and those without – pay for increasingly generous loan forgiveness policies and pick up the tab for defaults on the \$1.5 trillion, and (2) colleges are empowered to continue spending profligately, knowing the federal student aid trough is open for business. Although college costs are relatively low for Utah residents, Utahns still bear the burden of an overgenerous system of subsidies writ large – seeing college prices increase as a result of the open spigot of federal aid, and being among the taxpayers who must finance forgiveness and defaults on federal student loans when they occur.

Many problems contribute to increases in the price of college for students. In addition

## A depressing milestone

Outstanding student debt surpassed \$1.5 trillion for the first time



Source: Federal Reserve  
Terrence Horan/MarketWatch

to the influx of cash through federal student loans and grants financed by taxpayers, college students tend to take the more leisurely route through the ivory tower, or traditional university experience. My Heritage colleagues Jamie Hall and Mary Clare Amselem joined me in looking at how college students spend their time during their undergraduate career. Incredibly, the average *full-time* college students engage in just 2.76 hours of education-related activities each day. That includes both going to class and studying, as reported by the students themselves on the American Time Use Survey (which likely paints a rosier picture than is actually the case, as respondents may overreport the amount of study time they complete due to social desirability bias). The 2.76 hours each day include just 1.18 hours of class time and 1.53 hours of homework (for a total of 19.3 hours per week). Forty percent of full-time college students do not work at all while in school. College students will not enjoy as much leisure time again until they reach the age of 59, when many Americans cut back on work as they enter retirement.<sup>10</sup> This leisurely stroll through undergrad may explain why the vast majority of students today do not complete college in four years, incurring additional debt to finance a protracted college experience.

## **Infuse innovation to drive down college costs**

What is the best way to drive down college costs and create better higher education environment for students? The answer lies in a combination of reducing federal subsidies (to make space for a restoration of the private lending market) and reforming accreditation to allow innovation to flourish.

Accreditation reform may sound like an esoteric issue with little bearing on

higher education innovation. But it is the linchpin holding the current college cost status quo together. Throughout the 1800s, accreditation – better thought of as quality assurance – was conducted through voluntary associations that shared best practices among institutions. With the advent of the Veterans Readjustment Act – better known as the G.I. Bill – in 1952, accreditation became a requirement for access to federal student aid. Federally sanctioned regional and national accrediting agencies became gatekeepers for federal student aid with the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, marking a major shift in the power of accreditation. The result of what has become a de facto federal system of accreditation serving as the gatekeeper to student aid is a system that has created barriers to entry for innovative higher education startups. It has insulated traditional brick-and-mortar schools from market forces that could reduce costs. As my colleague Amselem explains, “Many families likely assume that because a college is accredited, carrying with it a federal seal of approval, that they can expect some level of quality. Viewed this way, accreditation in its current form masks market signals that would otherwise provide prospective students with useful information about college quality.”<sup>11</sup>

Another major issue with the current accreditation structure is that accreditation is conferred on entire institutions, meaning any course is therefore considered accredited, regardless of the intellectual value of the class. Students may also only access aid to attend degree-terminal institutions, instead of being able to customize their higher education experience to fully reach their earnings and career potential. In order to change this dynamic, access to federal student aid

should be decoupled from accreditation, which should ultimately be restored to a voluntary quality assurance measure. Decoupling would enable industry and other institutions to credential individual courses, apprenticeships, and other specialized programs, which would be a boon for nontraditional students in particular. Sen. Mike Lee has introduced a proposal known as the Higher Education Reform and Opportunity Act (HERO), which would do just that. He explains:

“Imagine having access to credit and student aid and for a program in computer science accredited by Apple or in music accredited by the New York Philharmonic; college-level history classes on-site at Mount Vernon or Gettysburg; medical-technician training developed by the Mayo Clinic; taking massive, open, online courses offered by the best teachers in the world from your living room or the public library. ...[T]raditional colleges would be impelled to cut waste, refocus on their students, and embrace innovation

and experimentation as part of their campus cultures.”<sup>xii</sup>

To bring down college costs, Congress should significantly reduce federal subsidies and decouple federal financing from accreditation. College costs are at an all-time high even as access to knowledge is cheaper than at any other point in human history. Online learning and competency-based options that favor knowledge and skill acquisition over seat time have laid the groundwork to significantly lower college costs and increase access for students. In order to harness the potential of new learning modes and begin to solve the college cost problem, policymakers need to free higher education from the ossified accreditation system.

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# Rethinking the Teaching Profession

Frederick M. Hess and Amy Cummings

Frustration with teacher pay is widespread. This is true even considering that school spending (per pupil, adjusted for inflation) has grown by more than 30 percent since 1992.<sup>1</sup> A big part of the challenge is that it's tougher to pay teachers more when school systems keep adding employees. In recent decades, schools have added staff at a faster rate than they have added students. Between 1992 and 2015, for instance, student enrollment grew by 20 percent – but the teacher workforce grew faster still.<sup>2</sup>

Today, there are more than 3.1 million teachers in the United States.<sup>3</sup> The sheer number of teaching positions makes it not only difficult to pay well, but also to recruit as many talented educators as we'd like. Each year, schools race to hire more than 300,000 new teachers, even as U.S. colleges award just 1.8 million bachelor's degrees across all fields.<sup>4,5</sup> In other words, current circumstances mean that schools need to hire one out of every six graduates – simply to plug attrition. The teaching profession itself has made it increasingly difficult to recruit or compensate educators in a fashion that both attracts and retains talent.

So what can we do about this? Rather than simply shovel more money into the familiar system, a better option is to rethink the profession of teaching. Here are four promising ways to do that:

## Expand the pool of potential teachers

Recruiting new college graduates for teaching positions made sense 50 years ago, when the average bachelor's degree recipient held just five jobs throughout an entire career. Today, they can expect to hold more than 11.<sup>6</sup> Early career transience, coupled with the increasing prevalence of midcareer transitions, makes it impractical to identify future teachers at age 22, fully train them before they enter the profession, and expect them to remain in it for the long haul. The

**Schools need to hire one out of every six new college graduates – simply to plug attrition.**

likelihood that talented college graduates in 2019 will be won over by the promise that they can do pretty much the same job, day in and day out, into the late 2040s is simply divorced from the way the job market works today.

At the same time, current methods of talent-seeking discourage career-changers from becoming teachers. Balky licensure

systems, seniority-based pay, and factory-style pension systems punish career-changers, even as such transitions have become increasingly the norm in the American workforce. When one considers the skills and knowledge that a 40-year-old former engineer, journalist, accountant or computer programmer might bring to the classroom, those norms seem remarkably misguided. Meanwhile, individuals who enter teaching at an older age may be more inclined to stay in the profession than those who become teachers in their early to late 20s and 30s.<sup>7</sup> None of this is to discourage young entrants or discount the notion that some 22-year-olds are ready to play a valuable role in schools, but there are good reasons not to presume that the just-out-of-college teacher should be the *default* recruit.

### **Expand instructional specialization**

Schools require all teachers to devote time and energy to bureaucratic duties – patrolling hallways and cafeterias, taking attendance, and compiling report cards. The problem is that school officials are conscious of expenses related to salary and materials, but they fail to account for the opportunity costs of not leveraging the talent already in schools. The typical teacher, for instance, spends only about 60 percent of their total classroom time on instruction related to core academic subjects, with the remainder consumed by administrative tasks, fundraising, assemblies, socialization and so forth.<sup>8</sup>

The challenge, then, is to find ways to “squeeze more juice from the orange” by utilizing support staff and specialization to ensure that effective teachers are devoting more of their time to educating students. Between 1992 and 2015, the

number of support staff in schools grew by 47 percent – nearly twice the rate of the teacher workforce – and the scant evidence available leaves one skeptical that these employees are utilized in a way that maximizes teacher effectiveness or alleviates teacher responsibilities.<sup>9</sup> Other professions arrange work patterns much differently. Over 12.6 million people work in the health care industry, but just over 660,000 of those are physicians and surgeons.<sup>10</sup> The rest are trained practitioners and support staff with complementary talents. In a well-run medical practice, surgeons do not spend time filling out patient charts or negotiating with insurance companies; these responsibilities are left to nurses or support staff. Such efforts to fully utilize talent and expertise have been largely absent in schooling.

### **Leverage technology in meaningful ways**

Another approach is to utilize technology for tasks where teachers add limited value. For instance, apps that monitor student progress can alleviate the need for teachers to devote substantial time to administering, grading and entering student assessment data. There are also apps that allow parents to track students’ progress in real time without teachers having to put together and share reports with each individual family.

Technology can also help us rethink the way some educational services are delivered. Today’s model requires schools with many classrooms, each with a teacher working face-to-face with a group of students. This “people-everywhere” strategy is expensive, and it makes schools dependent on their ability to attract talented, high-energy staff. Technology has the potential to eliminate such geographic obstacles. For



instance, only about three-quarters of U.S. public schools offer Advanced Placement courses, often due to the challenges of attracting qualified teachers to smaller, rural schools.<sup>11</sup> By utilizing platforms which make these courses available online from qualified instructors, students in these schools can remotely gain access to high-quality instruction.

### Identify and reward good teachers for the role they play in their schools

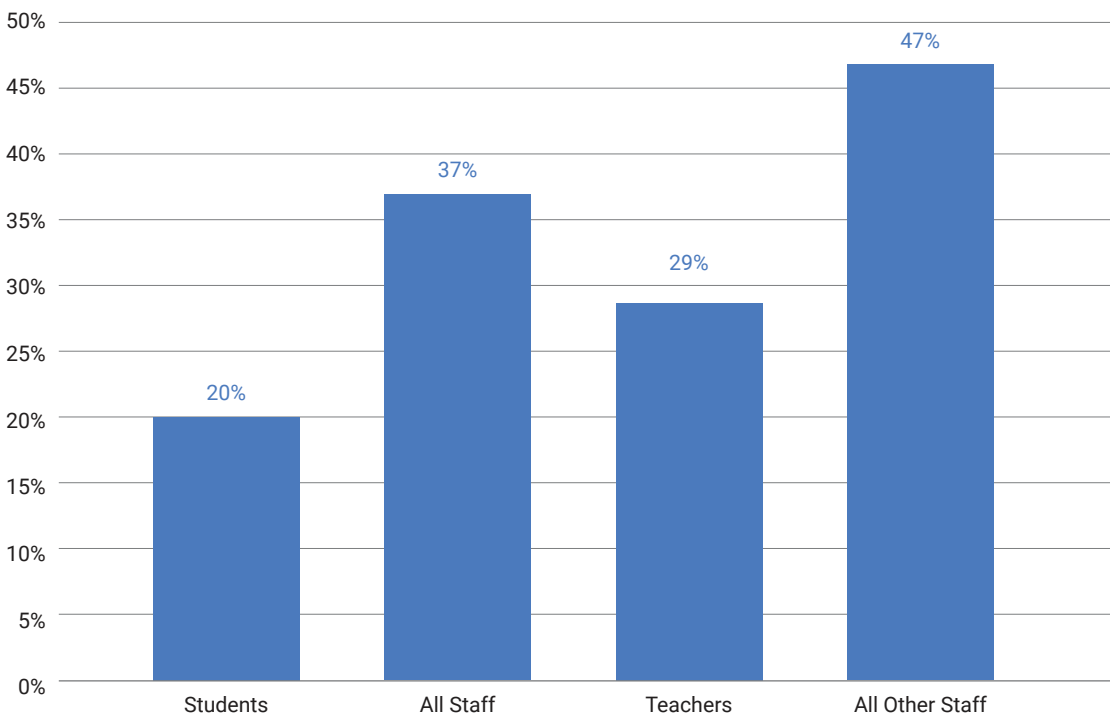
Proponents of compensation reform have too often advocated variations on the Pavlovian approach of paying more for higher student scores, while neglecting the broader design of the profession. After all, nearly 90 percent of school districts in the U.S. still use a step-and-lane pay scale, in which teachers enter the profession at

roughly the same salary and with roughly the same job description.<sup>12</sup> Every teacher pursues the same bonuses and seeks to climb the same career ladder.

However, there are initiatives that are wrestling with how to reward good teachers for the role they play in their schools, such as Opportunity Culture.<sup>13</sup> In such schools, a multi-classroom leader (MCL) leads a team of about six teachers, coaching and mentoring while themselves continuing to teach. MCLs are accountable for the results of the entire team’s students and receive supplemental pay for their extra time and effort. Such initiatives encourage exceptional teachers to remain in the profession and provide an opportunity for upward mobility.

Ultimately, the goal is to rethink the teaching profession to meet the demands of the 21st century. We have been slowed

### Staffing Surge in American Public Schools, FY 1992 to FY 2015



Source: <http://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Back-to-the-Staffing-Surge-by-Ben-Scafidi.pdf>



by habits of mind, culture, and institutional inertia, but we are feeling our way toward a new and hopefully more fruitful era of teaching and learning. Expanding the pool of potential teachers, incorporating instructional specialization, utilizing technology, and rewarding teachers for the role they play in their schools all provide terrific teachers the potential to make a

bigger impact not only within, but beyond their classrooms.

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# Innovation and Choice in Public Schools

Matt Bowman

Personalized learning through educational choice did not begin with the public charter school movement of the 1990s. It's true that more education options became available during that time (and have grown even more since), but successful public schools and districts have always offered some type of educational choice program to students.

For students who fit a fairly standard profile, the traditional public school system provides valuable access to standardized textbooks, college test prep curriculum, physical and social development training, and guided instruction from skilled teachers.

For struggling students, public schools have offered special education services, credit recovery options, vocational education, and alternative schools. They have provided accelerated students with gifted and talented programs, advanced placement courses and exams, international baccalaureate programs, and early college credit options.

As a result of these choices, the traditional public school system has served most students well for over 100 years – but not all.

## **Demand for more educational choices accelerates**

In today's mobile world – where everything is customized to each individual's

preferences, and handheld devices provide unprecedented access to information – engaged learners expect their educational options to be better tailored to their individual needs, too.

These significant cultural and technological changes from the past 10-15 years have created even more demand for personalized education for which the traditional school model was simply not designed.

**[A]s the demand for personalized choice continues to accelerate, public schools will need to keep innovating to remain relevant.**

Utah is one of the lowest per-pupil funded states in the nation, so teachers and leaders in Utah public schools should continue to look for innovative ways to provide the best education possible while being smart about how each tax dollar is spent. And as the demand for personalized choice continues to accelerate, public schools will need to keep innovating to remain relevant.

Some public school districts in Utah are keeping up with this growing demand through public/private partnerships. One particular growing public/private partnership in Utah is the My Tech High program, used in the Provo and Tooele public school districts – a program that provides public school students in grades K-12 a high-quality, personalized, distance education experience tailored to the individual need of each child.

The My Tech High program aligns with national best practices for online learning as well as with Stanford University’s research-based “social innovation” model, which asserts that public/private partnerships are essential for creating high-quality, long-

My Tech High’s public/private partnership administered by innovative districts.

### **Four ways public schools can offer even more innovative, personalized education**

#### **1. Allow flexible schedules so students can pursue other ambitions**

Some families need flexibility in both educational choices and daily scheduling.

For example, Gavin, a 13-year-old student and actor living in St. George, Utah, has worked with some of the best in Hollywood. He had an amazing experience working with

### **Public School Options**

<b>Public Charter</b>	<b>Credit Recovery</b>
<b>Concurrent Enrollment</b>	<b>Online Courses</b>

### **Four Innovations for Public Schools**

<b>Flexible Schedules</b>	<b>Opportunities for Entrepreneurship</b>
<b>Pathways to College Credit</b>	<b>Technology for Students</b>

lasting, innovative practices.<sup>1</sup> The My Tech High program allows traditional public school students the flexibility, creativity and individuality that many seek through charter schools or independent homeschooling. Any traditional public school can increase educational choice within its own existing system by adopting four key takeaways from

Chris O’Donnell on CBS’s *NCIS*. He also played a role in the film *Maximum Ride*, based on a novel by James Patterson. So far, he’s appeared in over a dozen roles in film and television.<sup>2</sup>

Gavin is a full-time public school student participating in his district’s My Tech High program. The flexibility of this program

makes his acting career possible. Even with his busy schedule of auditions, rehearsals and performances, Gavin can get a full-time, high-quality education.

Here’s what Gavin says about his experience:

“When I go to set, school and work hours are really mixed up and interchanged and all over the place so my educational plan needs to be a lot more flexible. The My Tech High program lets me do schooling on set around my work schedule. I can learn at my own pace which is not something I would get in a regular school. It lets me stretch to what I can do. My parents didn’t want me in the traditional school setting because they were a little concerned about the rate of learning and wanted to see if I could go faster, and I have. It takes a little getting used to at first but it’s fun. I’m having experiences I normally wouldn’t get. That’s a big thing for me.”

Gavin’s summary captures the power of flexible schedules in the life of an individual better than most scholars can. Flexibility allows individual potential to be unleashed.

## **2. Provide opportunities for entrepreneurship**

Harvard Innovation Education Fellow Tony Wagner said it best: “There’s no competitive advantage today in knowing more than the person next to you. The world doesn’t care what you know. What the world cares about is what you can do with what you know.”<sup>3</sup>

One of the most hands-on, real-world and practical ways to apply what you know is through entrepreneurship experiences. Public school programs like My Tech High not only encourage students to start their own business, they offer classes that teach them how to do it.

After an economic downturn, Olivia George, then a 15-year-old living on a farm outside Monticello, Utah, wanted to help with her family finances. She got a part-time job for a local business and she also started walking dogs for neighbors.<sup>4</sup>

Olivia soon noticed a big difference between working for other people and working for herself. That set her on the path to entrepreneurship. Her creativity and hard work in building Blue Mountain Doodles earned her the prestigious Ernst & Young’s Young Entrepreneur of the Year award.<sup>5</sup>

Olivia’s school district partners with My Tech High to offer a personalized, distance education program that fits her busy entrepreneur’s schedule. New dog litters are time-demanding, and a traditional school schedule doesn’t give her the flexibility that she needs. Olivia says a personalized education has helped her love learning because it’s not forced into one standard box. She chooses meaningful learning opportunities and a customized curriculum that aligns with her business and life goals. Through her district’s personalized program, Olivia can pursue her entrepreneurial dream as well as a great education.

## **3. Use educational choice to create pathways to early college credit**

By creating pathways to early college credit, innovative public schools can offer students the opportunity to excel beyond typical expectations and dive deeper into subjects that interest them.

Connor, a 10-year-old student living in Salt Lake City, taught himself to read at 2 1/2 years old. By the time he was 3, he was reading chapter books. When it came time for him to start kindergarten, his parents

realized that he was several grades ahead and needed something different than the traditional school model offered.<sup>6</sup>

Through his district’s personalized, distance education program, Connor has the freedom he needs to explore his interests through a wide range of curriculum options. Connor says he loves learning and that it’s his favorite thing to do. He wants to know all about the world and how it works.

Connor is particularly interested in genetics. After meeting with a professor, Connor decided to enroll in a genetics college class at the University of Utah (with his grandfather as chaperone) as part of his full-time personalized education program. This experience taught him that people are constantly discovering new things and that knowledge is limitless.

#### **4. Encourage innovation by providing technology education to students**

Providing students with hands-on technology experiences allows teachers and educators to prepare young students to become innovators themselves.

Traditional school wasn’t working out for Gerardo, a 13-year-old from West Valley whose parents emigrated from Mexico. It’s not that he went to a bad school – it’s just that a standardized classroom was holding him back. Gerardo had the drive and ability to do more, and faster. His hard-working, motivated parents wanted to find a way to help him succeed.<sup>7</sup>

Gerardo loves technology, art and entrepreneurship. His photography, 3D printing and graphic design skills are enhanced by his understanding of the technology that drives the medium. His entrepreneurial spirit has also created an

intense desire to study topics not typically available in traditional schools. Fortunately, Gerardo is enrolled in a district-run program that provides him access to specific educational tech resources, mentors, teachers and curriculum whenever and however he needs it.

#### **Innovation in public education starts in the local community**

Our country’s youths are intelligent and talented. Teachers and parents – working with innovative administrators, school boards and local community leaders – are in the best position to decide what their personalized educational choices should look like for the youths in their communities. State and federal elected officials and education leaders should focus on providing helpful resources and insights to local educators and then let learning happen.

By giving traditional public schools the power to engage in public/private partnerships, we can ensure that public schools continue to innovate in meaningful ways that match our changing society – a place where creativity is nourished, critical thinking skills are authentically developed, and the love of lifelong learning is planted deep in the hearts of our children.

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*Matt Bowman is the founder/CEO of My Tech High, which partners with innovative public-school districts to offer personalized distance education programs focused on technology and entrepreneurship.*

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# A New Approach to Student Discipline

Paul Meyers

In August 2014, the Standard School District in Bakersfield, California, implemented a new program called Alternative to Suspension that immediately changed the school climate and significantly reduced the number of suspensions at Standard Middle School.

In the first week of school in 2014, one of our eighth-grade students – who had been frequently removed from class in the previous school year for various rule violations – was referred to this new restorative program. I stopped by the Alternative to Suspension classroom to observe the process and asked her what was different about this year’s approach. She piped right up and said, “This year it feels like the staff cares about me.” Curious, I asked why. “Last year,” she continued, “I either got sent home or put in the detention room where all I did is sit and do nothing. This year the staff are talking to us and helping us with our problems.”

Word of this new discipline approach quickly spread among the students, parents and even the local newspaper,<sup>1</sup> and the response was very positive.

## The basics of the Alternative to Suspension program

The Alternative to Suspension (ATS) is a five-day behavior intervention program that is based on restorative practices. During the

five days in the program, the student has a chance to make restitution for the harm they caused and to build relationships with the ATS teacher, the school counselor, the school psychologist, site administration, or other trusted adults on campus. Instead of using traditional suspension, the school places disruptive students in the ATS program, where they have complete access to their education but complete removal from interaction with their usual peers.

The ATS program teaches the student skills to replace their dysfunctional habits, supports the transition of the student

“This year it feels like the staff cares about me.”

back into the regular class, and provides regular check-ins with the student and their teachers to make sure the student is behaving accordingly. ATS is effective in helping students correct the behavior that caused their removal from the regular school program. More importantly, this change has transformed the mindset of staff and has altered the way our district treats students in a variety of policies.

Most districts post the school rules in every classroom – and if the rules are disobeyed,



schoolteachers and administrators consistently dole out step-by-step consequences of increasing punishment, hoping that at some point the behavioral theory of stimulus-response or action-consequence will eventually force the student into compliance. The lesson the student often learns is to either follow the rules or get in trouble.

However, this behavioral approach of managing children does not help the students learn better ways to behave; does not build relationships with students or families; and does not teach how to make

more productive and more likely to make positive changes when those in authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them.”<sup>22</sup>

ATS has worked in my district because even though the students are isolated from the general student population while they are in the program, the focus is on building relationships. The ATS class starts before school and ends an hour before the regular dismissal bell rings.

Students are not allowed out during the school day when they’re in the ATS class, which takes place in a self-contained



amends after their behavior has impacted the school community.

**A look at restorative practices**

The ATS program is based on restorative practices. Restorative practices, also known as restorative justice, originated in the criminal justice system as an alternative to punishment and incarceration. Adapted for use in schools, restorative practices are a set of principles and strategies to encourage students to accept responsibility for their behavior and repair any harm caused by their actions. The foundation of restorative practices is based on the core values of respect, inclusion, responsibility, empathy, honesty, openness and accountability. The basic premise of restorative practices is that “people are happier, more cooperative,

classroom with a restroom. The teacher provides physical education, and students eat breakfast and lunch in the classroom. Students spend a good part of their day keeping up with their classwork, and often their teachers drop in during their lunch or prep period to check on them. Students also participate in a restorative circle – similar to group counseling – with the other students in the class, facilitated by the school psychologist. Many schools have a version of restorative practices, but we feel strongly about the need for a specific curriculum to guide the student’s development over the next five days of the program.

The ATS program objectives are for students to learn three things: (1) how to communicate better; (2) how to build relationships and use the support system at school; and (3) how to amend or repair

the harm they have caused others. To achieve these objectives, students are guided through a five-day curriculum developed by Blue Water Educational Consulting.<sup>3</sup>

Day 1 focuses on the student taking ownership and becoming accountable for his or her behavior. The focus of Day 2 is on learning about all the support available at the school and making connections with adult staff members able and willing to help the student. By Day 3, the student begins setting goals and listing what he or she is willing to do differently in the future. In Day 4, the student will learn new behaviors, apply strategies and practice skills that will help him or her respond differently in the future. In addition, the student begins developing the plan on how he or she will restore the community that was harmed. Day 5 is the summation day, when the work of the previous four days is reviewed and discussed to prepare the student for re-entry into the regular classroom.

The student reintegration plan will often include making some type of amends or apology, and this too must be practiced and supported by an adult. Last, a follow-up plan is set for each student; it typically sets a time and date for a follow-up meeting with a student-selected, trusted adult on campus to see if the new skills and strategies are working, and whether the student would like additional support. The follow-up plan is a key component of the program, and performed properly it significantly reduces recidivism.

## **Skepticism of the new approach**

A common criticism of schools using restorative practices is that they are soft on discipline and no longer have consequences for misbehavior – that they have just stopped suspending disruptive students.

Critics often say that although suspension rates go down, schools have become less safe because students are just not disciplined any more.

When first implementing the ATS program, we faced similar criticism. But in time, students, staff and parents better understood the program and learned that ATS does not keep disruptive students in the classroom – in fact, ATS does the exact opposite. It provides a structured setting away from the other students where the problem behavior can be corrected while the student remains in school and attends to their studies. Staff also appreciate the students' apologies for their behavior and plans for how their behavior will improve.

The ATS program has made the middle school campus safer, with fewer classroom disruptions, fewer referrals to the office, and improved student attendance. Anecdotally, staff will tell you how much of a difference ATS has made in improved student engagement and overall school spirit. Quantifiable data support these claims – ATS has decreased school suspensions at Standard Middle School by 33.3 percent in the last five years. As the number of students that were suspended decreased, enrollment increased by 69 students and the average daily attendance percentage improved from 92.88 percent in 2013-14 to 94.28 percent in 2017-18.<sup>4</sup> These are positive indicators that the school climate has improved since implementing ATS.

Student suspension still takes place on a regular basis, despite increased support systems for students and newly learned strategies for improved behavior. A few students will continue to violate the school rules or commit offenses at school for which suspension is the correct consequence. When ATS is not a constructive

option, the administration will still use home suspension.

### **The way forward**

But more often than not, the student responds favorably to ATS and the restorative practices and principles they learn. Many students lack adult support in their lives, and the ATS program lets the kids know we care about them. The truth

is, when kids know you care about them, they are much less likely to cause trouble for you. In the end, ATS reinforces a culture of caring in a school and helps build effective student-staff relationships – and that changes everything.

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*Paul Meyers is superintendent of Standard School District in Bakersfield, California.*

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# Giving Every Utah Child the Chance to Succeed

Jonathan Butcher

Three adopted children, two biological children, two private school scholarships, three district schools, and one mom. Over the last 10 years, Andrea Wiggins has made more parenting decisions about how and where her children will learn than some parents will in a lifetime.

But her daughter, Elizabeth, had unique needs that stretched even Andrea’s knowledge of how to help a child succeed.

Andrea adopted Elizabeth as a toddler and knew Elizabeth “had some significant attachment issues and a lot of learning delays.”

“I was brand new to being a mom,” said Andrea. “I had gone through college and had my special education teaching perspective, but living with it every single day at home, there was definitely something going on.”

Eventually, doctors diagnosed Elizabeth with several intellectual, cognitive and emotional impairments including reactive attachment disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Andrea and her family live in Florida, where lawmakers enacted the nation’s second education savings account law in 2014 (now called Gardiner Scholarships) – around the same time Elizabeth was ready for middle school. In accordance with this law, Florida deposits approximately \$10,000 in a private

account that parents of children with special needs can use to buy education products and services.<sup>1</sup>

Andrea applied for an account for Elizabeth and was able to buy curriculum materials and pay for intensive therapies and private

**Today, some 15,000 children and their families are using an account to customize their learning experience or choose a private school.**

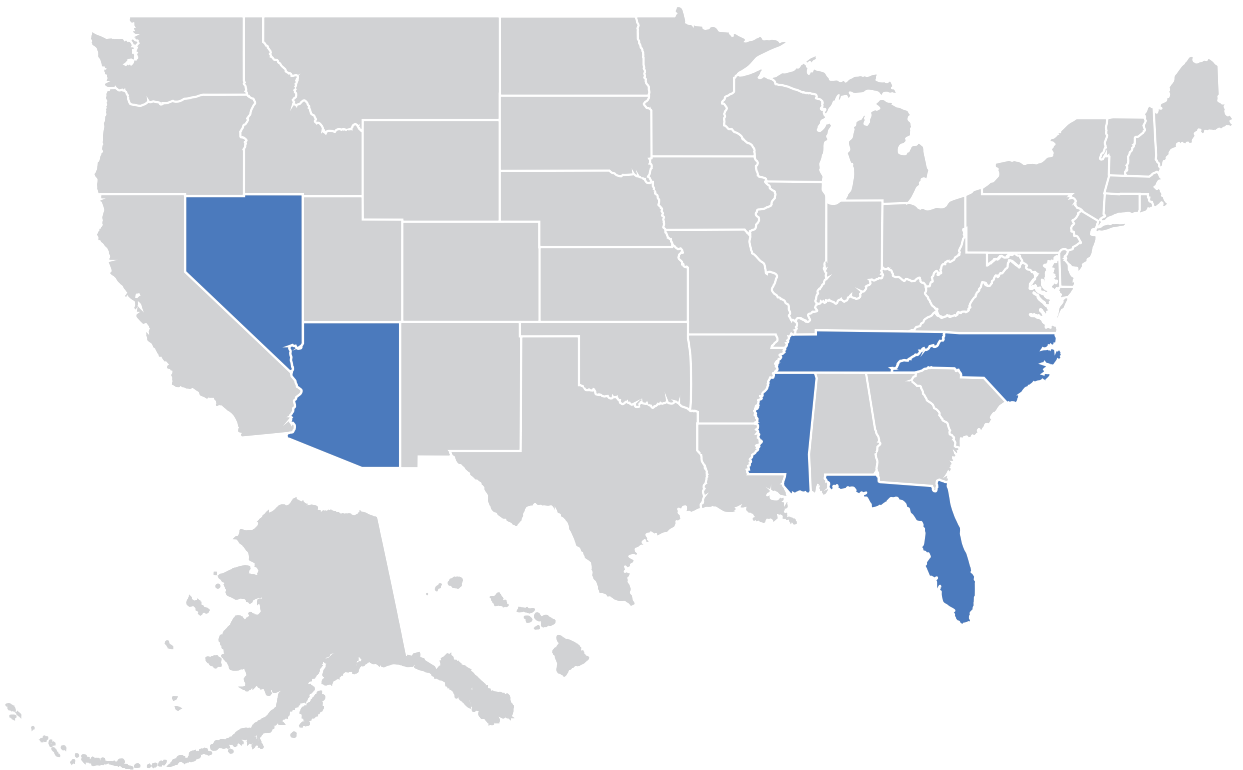
school tuition. “I could reinforce what was and wasn’t happening in the classroom,” Andrea said.

Today, approximately 10,000 Florida children are using Gardiner Scholarships to find education therapies, hire personal tutors, pay private school tuition or purchase learning materials like textbooks or other instruction-related services.<sup>2</sup>

Florida is one of six states where legislators have made these flexible accounts available to students. Arizona lawmakers enacted the nation's first accounts in 2011 (called Empowerment Scholarship Accounts), and after Florida Gov. Rick Scott signed Florida's law three years later, lawmakers in

population is growing rapidly, which means a larger K-12 population, more children with special needs, and an employment sector that is also changing. Education savings accounts can give parents and students more education opportunities today and help prepare students for challenges in the future.

## States with Education Savings Account programs



Nevada, Tennessee and Mississippi adopted similar proposals in 2015.<sup>3</sup> North Carolina lawmakers enacted an account law in 2017.

Today, some 15,000 children and their families are using an account to customize their learning experience or choose a private school.

Utah families need flexible solutions to prepare students from different backgrounds for a workforce that looks different today than it did even a decade ago. Utah's

After using an account to pay for therapeutic services, along with private school tuition, Andrea felt Elizabeth had developed the emotional and academic skills to succeed in a district high school. Andrea says Elizabeth is thriving there today.

She says, "We really wouldn't be where we are without the intense therapies that I was able to do because of the Gardiner scholarship."

## Education savings accounts around the U.S.

Education savings accounts give children from all walks of life the chance to find an education that meets their needs. In Florida, children with special needs can attend a private school that has specially trained staff to help students with unique needs, or parents can use an account to buy the materials and services needed to educate their child at home.

In Arizona, the accounts also offer students with special needs these options. Additionally, Arizona's accounts have broader eligibility rules than the other states with account laws: Students previously assigned to failing schools, students living on Native American reservations, children in military families, and adopted children are among the eligible students who can apply. Today, nearly 13 percent of Arizona account holders are children from military families, 11 percent were students assigned to failing public schools, and another 10 percent are children adopted from the state foster care system or siblings of current account holders.<sup>4</sup>

Every child is unique, and research finds that families in Florida and Arizona are using the accounts for multiple education products and services to help children with different needs. In Florida, 35 percent of account holders used an account for more than one education product or service in 2014-15 and 42 percent in 2015-16, while 34 percent of Arizona account holders customized their child's education with an account from 2011 to 2013 and 28 percent from 2013 to 2015.<sup>5</sup>

## Utah's changing population and workforce

Utah is one of the nation's fastest-growing states, and Utah's K-12 enrollment and

population of special-needs students reflects this growth.<sup>6</sup> Currently, 12 percent of Utah K-12 students have special needs, which is close to the national average (13 percent), but Utah leads the nation in terms of an increase in the percent of students with special needs.<sup>7</sup> Between 2000 and 2014, the number of children receiving special services in Utah increased by nearly 44 percent.

Overall, Utah saw K-12 enrollment increase by 11 percent between 2009 and 2014, the third-largest rate of growth among U.S. states.<sup>8</sup>

Such figures mean a dramatic influx of students in general as well as children with a variety of needs. And new district schools are not cheap: In 2017, six Utah school districts asked voters for bond proposals totaling more than \$800 million to build or refurbish new school buildings to accommodate "additional students, new technology and safety upgrades."<sup>9</sup> Because education savings accounts would allow parents to look for private options, part-time public school services, or home-based learning opportunities, the accounts could ease the pressure on taxpayers who are the ones paying for additional public school facilities to accommodate new students.

Utah's workforce needs are also changing. Jobs such as cashiers, retail salespersons, and waiters are growing at a slower pace than occupations in the fields of information technology and health care.<sup>10</sup> Parents can use an education savings account to change what their student is learning and how their child is being prepared for the future – either by selecting a new school, enrolling a student in early college classes, or purchasing materials and services to educate their child at home in place of or in addition to what their child is learning in the classroom.

Parents can use the accounts to prepare their children for whatever their academic or professional career may hold.

## Conclusion

Kathy Visser’s son, Jordan, was one of the first Arizona students to use an education savings account in 2011, the year Arizona enacted the nation’s first account law. For seven years, the Vissers have used an account to help Jordan with his mild cerebral palsy and autism. Kathy says that no single school – public or private – had all the services Jordan needed, and she explains that with an education savings account, “I actually had other options about what to do for Jordan.”

“What I’m doing now is splitting what we are doing between academics and job training,” Kathy says. “We are starting to look at more targeting his workforce capabilities.” Across Arizona, Florida, Tennessee and Mississippi, and soon North Carolina, thousands of

families are using accounts to prepare mainstream students and children with special needs for the future.<sup>11</sup>

Research demonstrates that account holders are choosing more than one education option at a time for their child, distinguishing the accounts from assigned district schools or private school scholarships. Utah’s remarkable growth and dynamic job sector needs education solutions like education savings accounts, so that families and lawmakers can help prepare students for a successful education and career – and for life.

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*Jonathan Butcher is a senior policy analyst in Heritage’s Center for Education Policy. He serves as a senior fellow at the Goldwater Institute.*

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# Innovation for K-12 Mastery: Beyond Time and Place

Karla Phillips

In an era marked by rapid change, one thing has remained constant – school.

While we often lament, and sometimes ridicule, our 19th-century approach to schooling, we must answer some fundamental questions to understand just *how* that change should come about. Does education really need to change – and why? How should education change? What role can state policy play in bringing about this change?

The answer to the first question is an emphatic *yes*. In the United States, we are keenly aware of the need to think differently about how school works. However, for most people, the primary rationale for changing education is not that schools are *outdated* but rather that they are *inadequate*.<sup>1</sup> Research has demonstrated that most people – from parents and teachers to voters – agree that a K-12 education should adequately prepare students with the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in college, careers and a rapidly changing world.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, that is not the case for many students.

Consider a few relevant outcomes from Utah. Last year, the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) released a policy brief on developmental education that noted,

“[O]f freshmen who entered USHE institutions *without delay* after high school graduation, 7 percent enrolled in developmental English and 33 percent enrolled in developmental math.”<sup>3</sup> How do we reconcile this with a statewide high

**[R]emember that flexibility in time, pace and place is not the goal of a competency-based system – rather it is the means to an end.**

school graduation rate of 86 percent? The time has come to question some deeply rooted traditions.

The timeworn practice of awarding credits and diplomas based on seat time and sometimes only barely passing grades has been sending mixed messages and false signals to students and their families concerning students’ readiness for college or

career. And a competency-based system has the potential to correct these signals.

Competency-based education is grounded in the idea that students should progress to more advanced content after they demonstrate mastery of prerequisite content and skills – regardless of the time spent in class or even where instruction takes place. The goal moves from simply earning points, grades and credits to accomplishing learning objectives. However, removing the security blankets of attendance, participation and extra credit will necessitate the creation of innovative opportunities and pathways for students to succeed.

## **Time, place and pace**

Moving away from the traditional age-based, grade-level system will require us to think differently about where, when and how students learn and their ability to show what they know. In our survey of current state laws and policies supporting competency-based education, we discussed state policies that encourage anytime, anywhere learning.<sup>4</sup>

Anytime, anywhere learning can happen in many forms, and it is a critical lever for competency-based education. It is the recognition that maximization of time, place and pace is necessary in order to have all students demonstrate mastery of key concepts and skills before advancing to the next level of learning.

A strong competency-based system will have well-defined learning objectives and clear, calibrated definitions of proficiency. With this foundation, states and schools can open up new anytime, anywhere learning opportunities by using these common objectives and proficiency definitions. These new opportunities include: (1) capturing learning that is already happening in and

out of school; (2) maximizing the extended learning opportunities currently available to students; and (3) creating new learning opportunities beyond current options.<sup>5</sup>

Just as Betheny Gross of the Center on Reinventing Public Education cautioned educators not to exchange high-quality content for the “iconography” of personalized learning (outward appearances, such as student groupings and project-based learning), policymakers must also stay vigilant to not lose sight of the ultimate goal.<sup>6</sup> Phrases such as “getting rid of seat time” are oft-repeated refrains, but it is important to remember that flexibility in time, pace and place is not the goal of a competency-based system – rather it is the means to an end. That *end* is demonstrating true college and career readiness.

The typical school experience is not just tradition. In many ways it is enshrined in state laws, rules and regulations. Educators need supportive state policy to encourage and incentivize innovation as well as their ability to amplify and augment learning opportunities outside of the traditional school building and school day.

## **The role of state policy**

More and more states are leveraging innovation and pilot programs to motivate schools to transition to competency-based models. In fact, over 20 states have broadly defined innovation programs, and 10 states have more specific competency-based pilot programs.<sup>7</sup> Utah is one of those states. In 2016, the Utah Legislature authorized a Competency-Based Education Grants program, but the state’s journey began years before. My organization, Foundation for Excellence in Education, chronicled Utah’s story in *Policy, Pilots, and the Path to Competency-Based Education: Tale of*

*Three States* and in the follow-up report, *The Path to Personalized Learning: The Next Chapter in the Tale of Three States*.<sup>8,9</sup>

One of the goals of competency-based initiatives like the one in Utah is to identify policies that inhibit or disincentivize innovation. From pioneering states, we have learned several instructive lessons that can inform future efforts to innovate in education.

## How does it compare?

Traditional Education	Competency-Based Education
<b>What does instruction look like?</b>	
Teach to the middle	Student-centered
(VS)	
<b>How do students receive credit?</b>	
Passing grade	Mastery of content
(VS)	
<b>How do students progress?</b>	
Age-based & seat time	Upon mastery
(VS)	
<b>When are students assessed?</b>	
End of year	When ready
(VS)	

Source: <https://www.excelined.org/downloads/competency-based-education-state-communications-tool-kit-february-2016/>

For one, the proliferation of innovative models across the country demonstrates that there are no policy barriers that

prohibit a school’s transition to competency-based education, but there are certainly policies that serve as disincentives and obstacles. These barriers are rarely the widely debated policies of assessment and accountability. Most often they are the pedestrian requirements of reporting and data transmission.

It is also curious that even when sufficient opportunities exist for schools to apply for waivers or flexibility to develop competency-based programs, these opportunities are often underutilized. As noted by Andy Calkins of the Next Generation Learning Challenge, “The super-innovators just ignore conditions that don’t suit them, and they create with duct tape and baling wire whatever resources the market and policy fail to provide.”<sup>10</sup> Rather than contemplating big policy barriers, we need to begin looking for the Band-Aids, so to speak, that schools are applying and develop long-term, systemic solutions.

Seat-time requirements are the most frequently cited issue competency-based education encounters. Although it is true that our traditional system holds time as the constant and learning the variable, make no mistake – flipping this paradigm is akin to turning the Titanic. Time-based policies have long tentacles that stretch deeply into existing school systems. For example, time is often used for funding purposes or credit and course completion. This transition will take time and need support.

Finally, the changes required for a schoolwide transition to a competency-based system will ultimately touch just about every aspect of a school including schedules, calendars, assessment and grading. Fortunately, how that looks and feels will vary from school to school. Being competency-based doesn’t imply any one

instructional model – thus critical decision-making authority will remain with local communities. Variation in implementation is a great benefit; however, it also makes evaluation difficult.

## Conclusion

After two decades of standardization, the pendulum is swinging toward providing more flexibility to states, schools and students. The question for policymakers will be how much flexibility can be provided without compromising quality, equity and accountability.

We have an opportunity to seize on the growing consensus that providing both

schools and students flexibility in where, when and how they demonstrate and apply their knowledge may possibly be the best way we can truly ensure college and career readiness for all students. But a true innovative mindset is essential. This requires more than just adding technology to the classroom; it requires confronting the uncomfortable realities of an education system in which we all grew up and our students are now experiencing.

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## NOTES

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# Career Readiness Today

Kimberlee Carlile

When people think of Utah, they often think of our strong economy or our business-friendly state – but what about our workforce potential? What about Utah’s ability to *develop* the talent for high-wage, high-demand jobs, not merely to *attract* it?

Creating a culture of career readiness within our state is critical today and essential for the years ahead.

Students today have increasing access to explore careers and better prepare themselves for their future. In many cases, students are graduating high school with post-secondary credit, certifications, and hands-on experience working with industry. But we need more students to have these types of experiences.

## **Hands-on learning, the real linchpin**

Work-based learning – training for students in the workplace – has grown tremendously in recent years. Whether it be through internships, job shadows or industry mentors, this allows students to gain knowledge, experience success and develop confidence in an industry in which they are interested. It will enable them to see firsthand what a career in that field is like, long before they spend hours of schooling and barrels of money on a career they may not enjoy.

It seems like career exploration would be foremost on young people’s minds

– after all, it is what they will end up doing for the majority of life. Other countries take career exploration very seriously. For example, in Singapore, students meet rigorously with career counselors beginning in middle school.<sup>1</sup> In Switzerland, students take on career apprenticeships at the age of 15.<sup>2</sup> After studying what is working well in other countries, and even in other states, Utah has developed its model for success.

**Utah’s career pathway programs have brought a lot of attention to the state – people want to understand how multiple industry and education partners work together, collaborating toward the same goal, to increase the talent pipeline.**

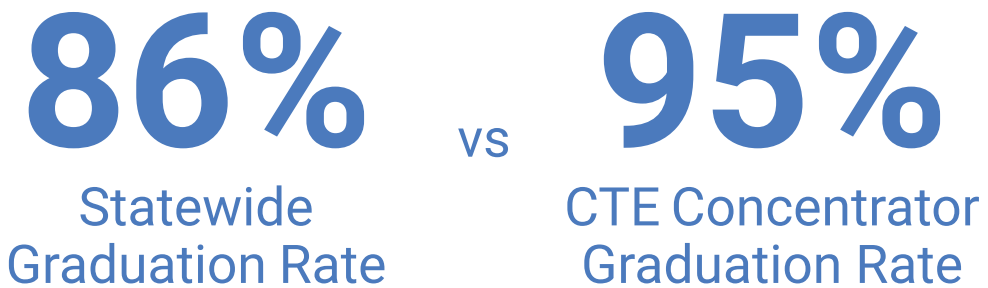
## Industry and education alignment – the Utah way

Three years ago, aerospace companies came together to discuss a workforce shortage they were facing in Utah. Partnering with education leaders, they were able to build a new type of certification that both employers and educators agreed upon. Today, the Utah Aerospace Pathways program allows students in high school, as well as adult learners, to receive training in the aerospace industry. Two critical components happened to make this program a reality: (1) Industry helped write the curriculum for this program, and (2)

the state, other pathway programs have been created. In the life sciences industry, a Medical Innovations Pathway program was created. For the diesel industry, it was Diesel Tech Pathways. Most recently, a new Tech Pathway Program is getting students involved in the tech industry.

All of these programs have been developed because of Governor Gary Herbert’s Talent Ready Utah Initiative, which was established to increase industry and education partnerships.

Other examples include InsideSales.com teaching coding to elementary school



industry provided externships for students to come work in their companies.

As an outcome, over 100 students have graduated with this specific industry-recognized credential, many of whom are now still employed with those companies; industry and education continue to partner; and most of all, students today now have the opportunity to explore an industry about which they previously had little knowledge.

## A return on investment for industry

As Utah Aerospace Pathways continues to expand to additional school districts across

children and Cummins Rocky Mountain donating 24 engines to high school students studying to be diesel technicians. Women Tech Council provides female mentors to girls interested in the tech industry, and at Wasatch CAPS, students complete work projects for local employers. Over the past year, we have seen hundreds of students participate in these types of work-based learning opportunities. And this is just the start.

But we need more employers investing in education. When they do so, industry employers will have a stronger pool of qualified employees, they will earn greater awareness about their industry, and most



importantly, they will contribute to more young people’s lives.

## **How do businesses get involved?**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) at the Utah State Board of Education is a critical partner for work-based learning. CTE’s focus on credentials and career-focused programs have allowed students to become more informed about career development and has even been shown to improve graduation rates. Studies show that students who engage in a CTE concentrator – which requires a student to complete one and a half credits in a single program of study – have a 95 percent high school graduation rate.<sup>3</sup>

Each district in Utah has a CTE representative who works closely with industry to enhance its student education experience. Companies who work with CTE representatives have direct contact with their local communities. Many businesses partner with Talent Ready Utah to look for recommendations, funding and other resources for education alignment.

## **What’s in it for the students?**

Over the past couple of years, two main areas have been enhanced to strengthen career readiness and improve student success in Utah.

The first area has been previously mentioned: work-based learning. Through industry involvement, students can understand more about a specific career. They access hands-on experience in the industry and make contacts within the companies while completing job shadows, internships, etc. Not every student will go into the career they initially dreamed of – many of them will change their minds

multiple times. Having work-based learning will aid young students in making important life decisions, like choosing a career, long before they have graduated from college or postsecondary school.

The other area is stackable credentials. Although some institutions have been doing this for some time, this concept has taken off in Utah in the past couple years. A pathway is built from public education (K-12) classes that lead to courses at the local tech college or community college that then stack into a degree at a four-year institution. For students, stackable credentials can cut down on duplicative coursework or help keep them from having to start over when they transfer to a university.

A structural benefit is that education systems – K-12, technical colleges, universities – are encouraged to operate together seamlessly, knowing what each system is teaching in a specific course and then aligning coursework for the betterment of the student.

It takes a lot of collaboration up front, but many regions in the state are leading out in this pathway model. For example, Weber State University has multiple pathway programs that stack into their degrees from three or more tech colleges in their region as well as their local school districts. Southern Utah University and Southwest Technical College now offer dual enrollment. There are many ways for education partners to collaborate better. This is just one area that has been strengthened in recent years, and the good news is we can do even more.

## **Collaboration is key**

Utah’s career pathway programs have brought a lot of attention to the state – people want to understand how multiple industry and education partners can work



together, collaborating on the same goal: to increase the number of people in the talent pipeline. In 2016 Utah was selected as one of six states by the National Governors Association to enhance work-based learning, focusing on creating more programs, providing more assistance and encouraging more businesses to partner with education.

This effort has also required the participation and collaboration of government entities including Utah Governor's Office of Economic Development; Governor Herbert's education advisor, Tami Pyfer; the Department of Workforce Services; the Utah System of Technical Education; the State Board of Education; the Utah System of Higher Education; and the Salt Lake Chamber.

A specific example of collaboration is Talent Ready Utah grants, which are funded

and administered by the Department of Workforce Services. These grants provide funding that supports workforce alignments through industry and education partnerships. Many of the pathway programs and other initiatives across the state have received funding from these grants to implement programs in their local communities.

To attract and train quality talent, it is critical that we work arm-in-arm and continue to collaborate and enhance education pathways for students to follow and become career-ready.

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