Agency: UTAH STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Request Title: *K-3 Classroom Excellence Grant Program*

Purpose Statement: This request proposes the creation of the K-3 Classroom Excellence Grant Program. This statewide, competitive grant would provide matching funds to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to hire and train paraprofessionals for service in kindergarten through 3rd-grade classrooms.

What is the nature of your request?

Select one:

POLICY REQUEST – You are seeking changes to Utah State Code to improve your program/services.

FUNDING REQUEST – You are seeking new or additional financial resources to support a program/service for education.

BOTH POLICY and FUNDING – You are proposing a new program or expansion of an existing program that will require new/amended state code and financial resources.

Current Funding for FY 2026: *(Provide <u>current year</u> funding differentiating one-time and ongoing funding for the program.)*

FY 2026 Ongoing Funding = $000

FY 2026 One-Time Funding = $000

Projected Results: *(Provide 1-2 bullets on how the policy/funding request would lead to a measurable outcome in the K-12 education system (ex. performance measure).)*

- **Increase the percentage of 3rd-grade students reading on grade level by providing direct, small-group instruction.**
- **Improve classroom environments by providing immediate behavioral support to students, reducing disruptions and increasing instructional time for all learners.**
- **Studies have found that hiring additional paraprofessionals to deliver targeted instruction can be a cost-effective strategy for improving student test scores, particularly in reading.**

Rationale:

- Leverages State Funds: The matching requirement ensures local investment and allows state dollars to support a greater number of positions.
- Promotes Innovation and Accountability: A competitive process encourages LEAs to develop high-quality, evidence-based plans for how they will train and deploy paraprofessionals for maximum academic impact.
- Targeted Support: The grant criteria can prioritize schools with the greatest need, such as those in the state's springboard program or the Federal School Improvement programs or those with significant early literacy gaps.
- Special Education Support: Additional well-trained paraprofessionals could decrease in time when identifying needed student supports as paraprofessionals are trained in student identification methods such as literacy/math screening or Child Find practices

If not funded/approved:

 LEAs will continue to address student needs with existing resources, and a valuable opportunity to leverage state funds for targeted, early-grade support will be missed.

USBE Lead Point of Contact:

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USBE Section:Policy

FUNDING REQUEST

Board Action for Request: For Consideration in the October Board Meeting.

1. **Summarize the request, the specific problem it will solve, and how it will solve the problem.**

   This request seeks $20 million in ongoing state funds to create a total program of at least $40 million when combined with local matching funds. This program will allow LEAs to hire, train, and deploy paraprofessionals to provide targeted academic and behavioral interventions in K-3 classrooms, addressing critical needs in early learning and classroom management.

2. Amount Requested:

Funding Source	Amount ($)
FY 2027 one-time funding	**$ 20,000,000**
FY 2027 ongoing funding	**$**
TOTAL funding requested	**$ 20,000,000**

Provide an itemized budget, including revenue and expenditure sources, for how the funding will be utilized.

Funding Source(s): State General Fund

Cost Category: Other Charges/Pass Through: $20,000,000

This entire amount will be distributed to LEAs through a competitive grant process. With a 1:1 local match, this will create a total program of at least $40,000,000, sufficient to fund approximately 650-700 paraprofessionals at an estimated total cost of $30,000 per position (including salary and benefits).

3. Describe the history of the issues or concerns including relevant context and timelines:

Since 2020, educators statewide have reported a marked increase in classroom disruptions and students exhibiting lagging social-emotional skills. This trend, combined with persistent academic achievement gaps, has placed an unsustainable burden on K-3 teachers. While some LEAs have used local funds to hire support staff, there is no consistent, statewide strategy to ensure this critical support is available where it is needed most.

4. **What are the suggested legislative solutions?**
   The suggested solution is to amend Utah Code to create the K-3 Classroom Excellence Grant Program. The statute should direct the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) to administer a competitive grant with a local matching requirement. The legislation should specify that grant applications be scored on the quality of their plans for recruiting, training, deploying, and supervising paraprofessionals to deliver evidence-based academic and behavioral interventions.

5. **To what extent is this request scalable? Articulate the impacts if lower funding amounts were provided for this request.**

   The competitive grant model makes this request highly scalable. If a lower amount of state funding is appropriated, the program remains viable, and USBE will simply award fewer grants based on the available funds.

6. **What has been done or considered to address this problem with existing resources, instead of requesting additional state funding?**

   LEAs currently use a variety of limited funding streams, such as federal Title I funds or local property tax revenue, to hire paraprofessionals. However, these resources are insufficient to provide comprehensive support across all K-3 classrooms and often result in inequities between districts.

   USBE has already developed a strong support system for paraprofessionals with training options and the [Utah Standards for Instructional Paraeducators](#). This grant program would only build upon this solid foundation.

7. **Describe how the funding case supports the goals and metrics of the [USBE Strategic Plan](#).**

Early Learning & Personalized Teaching and Learning: By providing targeted, individualized instruction in literacy and numeracy.

Safe and Healthy Schools: By adding another trained adult to the classroom, the program will improve the classroom climate, reduce disruptive behavior, and provide immediate support to students struggling with self-regulation, thereby increasing safety and instructional time.

8. **Provide details, sources, research, and analysis to which forms evidence-basis for this request or the associated program.**
Extensive educational research shows that the impact of paraprofessionals is maximized when they are trained and deployed to deliver structured interventions. For example:
https://fullbloom.bynder.com/m/38dfec999ac1abc4/original/HDT-Case-Study_Massachusetts_Literacy.pdf

Academic Impact: Meta-analyses of tutoring programs show that well-trained paraprofessionals can produce substantial learning gains, equivalent to a student advancing from the 50th to the 66th percentile.

Behavioral Impact: The presence of a trained paraprofessional has a direct effect on classroom management. This additional adult can provide co-regulation support for dysregulated students, implement behavior intervention plans, and proactively de-escalate situations. This frees the teacher to continue instruction for the rest of the class, reducing overall disruptions and fostering a more stable learning environment for every student.

9. **Which populations or geographic areas will benefit most from this request? What safeguards will be implemented to prevent inequities or other unintended distributional consequences as it relates to this request?**

The competitive grant criteria will be structured to prioritize LEAs with schools demonstrating the highest need, including those in the school turnaround program, schools with low 3rd-grade reading scores, and those with high rates of chronic absenteeism or disciplinary incidents. This ensures resources are directed to the students and educators who will benefit most. A clear and transparent scoring rubric will be used to ensure equitable awarding of grants.