

Date: June 5, 2026



MEMORANDUM

To: The Utah State Board of Education through Leah Voorhies,
Deputy Superintendent of Student Achievement
From: Utah Special Education Advisory Panel (USEAP)
Subject: Special Education Teacher Recruitment and Retention
Date: May 8, 2026

Introduction:

For the 2025-2026 School Year, the Utah Special Education Advisory Panel (USEAP) chose two priorities to review in depth and about which to make recommendations to the Board. The two priorities were the recruitment and retention of special education teachers and the supports available for families and education to improve the post-school transition of students with disabilities.

For their first priority, USEAP reviewed several studies the Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC) has done for the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) Special Education section regarding [special education teacher preparation, satisfaction, and attrition trends](#). We also reviewed the USBE Alternate Pathway for Professional Educator Licensure for Special Education (APPEL-SpEd). As a result of that in depth study, USEAP makes the following three recommendations to USBE.

Recommendation 1:

The Utah Special Education Advisory Panel (USEAP) recommends that USBE develop an online toolkit for school administrators to better understand the needs of and ability to support special educators.

Context for Recommendation 1:

A review of several years of Utah data collected over several studies by the UEPC concluded that school administrators and educators were often "stretched thin" by evaluation and service implementation responsibilities without enough professional learning or collaborative

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support. About half of special educators transfer schools or leave teaching within three years. The top predictor of special educator teacher retention has been school administrative support. Therefore, USEAP concluded that a low-cost but effective solution for improving Utah special education teacher retention and student outcomes is to support informed coordination between school administrators and teachers providing services.

The proposed initiative can be implemented for minimal cost, solely involving USBE staff time to develop, post, and advertise the online materials. It offers a practical, evidence-based way to improve staff coordination and retention by giving school administrators and special education teachers the structures and knowledge they need to work together and remain in compliance with regulations. An online "toolkit" to support administration coordination with special educators could include such useful information as:

- Plans for behavior/crisis coordination
- Resources for the success of students with disabilities
- Effective relationships with special education teachers and students
- Definitions of roles of Individualized Education Program (IEP) team members
- Example templates to enhance school communication
- Collaboration with the local education agency (LEA) Special Education Director

Recommendation 2:

The Utah Special Education Advisory Panel (USEAP) recommends that the USBE budget IDEA funds for a competitive grant to LEAs to propose and implement innovative approaches to decrease the paperwork burden special education teachers experience when compliantly implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Context for Recommendation 2

If administrative support is the top correlate of a special education teacher's retention, the UEPC studies also articulated that the extent of a teacher's workload, which includes providing services, attending meetings, and ensuring the special education paperwork is compliant is a top correlate for special education teacher attrition. Decreasing the number of students of which each special education teacher is responsible would be a worthy but very expensive

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proposition. But decreasing the paperwork burden of special education teachers could be a much less expensive proposition that could provide quick, and powerful results as special education teachers would be given more time to focus on the work that led them to the profession—instructing students with disabilities.

Providing competitive grants for a few local education agencies to innovate around reducing the paperwork burden of special education, could be cost effective first step to finding solutions that could be scaled statewide.

Recommendation 3:

When USBE is considering proposed Legislation to enhance educational supports for students in the state, the Utah Special Education Advisory Panel (USEAP) recommends that USBE apply an intentional and specific inquiry process to ensure the Legislative action will support students with disabilities.

Context for Recommendation 3

Students with disabilities require specialized instruction and supports. Schools that plan for the needs of students with disabilities first and then plan other students after, produce better outcomes for students with disabilities. It follows that the same applies to state-level decisions. The UEPC studies demonstrated that special education teachers are concerned that policy is made without significant consideration for how it will affect them and/or students with disabilities. Thus, the USBE should consider all policies based on the needs and impact of the policies on students with disabilities. The USBE could frame its decision-making by first continuing to have high expectations for students, and then ask:

- How does the proposed Legislation improve or erode access and inclusion of students with disabilities?
- How does the proposed Legislation protect parents' and adult students' rights to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Procedural Safeguards?
- How does the proposed Legislation ensure the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education to students with disabilities?
- How does the proposed Legislation align with current state initiatives, such as the [Portrait of Meaningful Inclusion](#) and [Utah's Portrait of a Graduate](#)?

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