

USBE Legislative Request Form

(Policy, Funding, & Efficiency/Reductions)

2027 General Session

SECTION 1: THE BOTTOM LINE

Request Title: Preschool Amendments

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Director Reviewer: Sara Wiebke

Nature of Request (Select all that apply):

☒ **Policy Change:** Creating, amending, or repealing Utah State Code.
(Complete Section 4)

☒ **New/Increased Funding:** Seeking new financial resources.
(Complete Section 3)

☐ **Efficiency / Reduction:** Proposing the elimination or reduction of a program, mandate, or funding stream. (Complete Section 3 and/or 4)

Purpose Statement (BLUF - Bottom Line Up Front):

We are requesting a statutory change to the School Readiness Initiative grant program to shift governance to USBE, establish a cost-per-child that functions similar to the Weighed Pupil Unit (WPU), and allow for greater oversight of preschools with stronger connection to the K-12 system.

SECTION 2: THE BUSINESS CASE

The Problem:

The School Readiness (SR) grant program is overseen by the Department of Workforce Services - Office of Childcare (DWS OCC) with support from USBE.

The system to support the SR grant program isn't sufficient to close the gap between preschool and kindergarten. The current governance system places additional burdens on preschool administrators and educators to meet the demands of multiple state agencies. The system also has the unintended outcome of isolating preschools as preschools are grouped with childcare in structure and management at all levels, instead of being incorporated into K-12 systems. Since USBE oversees special education preschool and K-12 education, USBE can connect general education preschool to special education preschool and the K-12 system.

The Utah State Constitution was written in 1895 and went into effect in 1896. At that time, the term "kindergarten" included students ages three to six years old. Also in 1895, the Free Kindergarten Association in Utah passed a school law permitting kindergarten attendance to children ages four to six years old.

Another issue to address is that the current SR grant application, monitoring, and quality improvement processes rely on tools and reporting requirements that can be duplicative and time-intensive for preschools. Preschools need a more streamlined, coordinated approach. DWS OCC utilizes the state procurement process to provide SR grant funding to preschools.

Procurement requires significant administrative overhead which impacts the amount of funds going directly to preschool classrooms. As USBE is the only state agency with a grants management system, USBE can offer a more

efficient application and grant flow-through process to provide funding to preschools.

The Utah charter school law does not include preschool. Charter schools with preschools can only operate preschools as private childcare programs, following the governance for a private childcare program which adds additional administrative burdens.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the USBE Special Education Rules require school districts to provide special education preschool services in the least restrictive environment (LRE). School districts have the special education child find responsibility for children ages three to five who live within the school district boundaries. SR grant funds are one of the few sources available to fund student seats to create inclusive preschool classrooms.

DWS OCC's function is to monitor childcare service quality. One of USBE's functions is to improve instructional quality. With governance at DWS OCC, the focus remains on a minimum quality threshold. With governance at USBE, the focus could move to high-quality developmentally appropriate instruction that supports early intervention to students showing a lack of age-appropriate literacy skills.

SR grant funds are currently one of the few funding sources available to preschools in Utah. These funds are always used in full, but are not sufficient to meet the needs of preschools. For example, in 2024, the funds covered only half of the preschools who met the quality standards in the grant application process. Therefore, we are requesting an increase of \$8 million to the current appropriated amount of \$14 million.

The Source:

This idea emerged through ongoing implementation of the SR grant program and feedback from preschools, preschool coaches, and USBE staff. It is

informed by lessons learned from monitoring activities, [SR grant program self-assessment](#), technical assistance efforts, and grant administration over multiple grant cycles. This policy request reflects recurring feedback that quality improvement efforts and grant funding should be more aligned, efficient, and actionable for preschools. Local education agencies (LEAs) support this idea as many have stated the current system administered by DWS OCC is burdensome and duplicative.

Projected Results:

An increase of students without disabilities in special education preschool classrooms creating more inclusive preschool classrooms.

An increase in kindergarten readiness and literacy proficiency by students who have attended a high-quality preschool.

An increase of families having the choice to send their child to a high-quality preschool.

Consequence of Inaction:

Preschools may continue to experience unnecessary administrative burden and funding delays associated with the current system. Due to the cumbersome nature of the procurement process, which is meant for purchasing, not grant flowthrough, fewer preschools may apply for grant funding, thus impacting special education inclusion efforts in preschool and general education preschool availability for families.

Preschools will continue to focus more on childcare requirements rather than preschool education requirements due to governance being housed at DWS OCC.

We will continue to fall short on funding all eligible, quality preschools.

Evidence & Data:

Fifty-seven percent of kindergarten students in LEAs participating in the High-Quality School Readiness (HQSR) program (one of the SR grant programs) scored "Above Benchmark" on end-of-year Acadience Reading as compared to 49% of kindergarten students in non-HQSR LEAs. Additional funding and a focus on education will help increase kindergarten readiness and literacy proficiency.

SECTION 3: FUNDING, OFFSETS, & EFFICIENCIES

*(Complete **only** if your request involves financial resources or proposing budget cuts)*

Financial Ask:

(If a field does not apply, enter \$0).

- **FY 2027 Ongoing Requested:** \$8 million
- **FY 2027 One-Time Requested:** \$0
- **Proposed Offsets / Savings:** \$0 *(Amount saved by cutting redundancies or reallocating existing funds)*

The Offset Strategy:

If you are requesting new funds, what duplicate programs, ineffective streams, or outdated mandates could be cut or reallocated to fund this? Please name the specific programs/funds.

Future Obligations:

Does this request create multi-year scale-up costs or ongoing maintenance obligations?

☐ Yes

☒ No

If yes, please describe: _____

Itemized Budget Request:

(Please detail how the funding will be utilized across the following categories).

	FY 2027 (Current)	FY 2028 (proposed)

TOTAL REQUESTED	\$14 million	\$22 million
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New USBE FTEs Requested: 0

Can current FTEs be assigned these responsibilities? Explain.

Yes, USBE has two preschool specialists that can be assigned these responsibilities.

If no FTEs are required, explain.

N/A

Performance Measures:

An increase of the percentage of students with disabilities receiving services in a regular education preschool, which is defined as a preschool that includes a majority (at least 50%) of students without disabilities.

An increase in kindergarten readiness and literacy proficiency by students who have attended a high-quality preschool.

An increase in the number of students served in a high-quality preschool.

SECTION 4: POLICY & STATUTE

Code Sections Affected: *(List specific state code references, or write "New Code")*

[Utah Code Section 35A-15](#)

Suggested Legislative Solution:

Remove language specifying that the SR grant program for preschools is administered and overseen by DWS OCC.

Amend language to state that the oversight and funding of preschool would be housed at USBE. Childcare oversight would remain with DWS OCC.

Add in language to include a cost-per-child, much like the WPU which is used for grades K-12.

Safeguards:

This policy change does not create unintended consequences for specific geographic areas or student populations.