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150 South State Street, Suite 444
Salt Lake City, Utah 84111

801.355.1400
utahfoundation.org

Study Examines K-12 Education Outcomes in Light of Spending *Utah Compares Respectably to Neighboring and Peer States, Despite Smaller Per-Pupil Investments*

Utah may spend less per student in its public schools than any other state, but Utah students are doing as well or better than comparable states on a range of measures of educational outcomes. A new study from Utah Foundation, *Making the Grade? K-12 Outcomes and Spending in Utah*, compares the performance of students here with neighboring states in the Mountain West and with several peer states selected for their similarity to Utah's population demographics. It then places the outcomes in the context of spending.

Key findings of the study include:

- In examining student outcomes overall, Utah compares well nationally and with Mountain States, and is about average when compared with peer states, which Utah Foundation determined using statistical analysis of five student demographic factors.
- Utah students improved over time on a statewide annual assessment, with an increase in proficiency during the five years that the test was administered. However, less than half of Utah's students were proficient or better on the English, math and science tests.
- Utah compares very well on ACT scores. Utah ranks third among the 19 states that test most of their high school graduates.
- In terms of high school graduation rates, Utah is among the top tier of Mountain States and in the middle of its peer states.
- Utah districts show a wide range of outcomes on the state's annual assessment, student ACT scores and graduation rates.
- While Utah spends less – and in most cases far less – per pupil than the other Mountain States and its peer states, it performs respectably overall in terms of outcomes. And while higher-spending states tend to outperform the rest of the states, Utah outperforms higher-spending states collectively on several measures.
- While higher spending has limited links to better education outcomes, at some level spending can become decisive. Utah is the lowest in the nation in per-pupil K-12 operational education spending and therefore may fall short of its potential.

“When it comes to taxpayer investments in K-12 education, Utah is getting a comparatively solid return in terms of outcomes,” said Utah Foundation President Peter Reichard. “We do about as well as similar states that spend far more. The question for Utahns is, do we aspire to a higher goal? And to what extent is additional spending necessary to get us there?”

The study *Making the Grade? K-12 Outcomes and Spending in Utah* is available on the Utah Foundation website at www.utahfoundation.org. Thanks to the **Larry H. & Gail Miller Foundation** and the **Lawrence T. & Janet T. Dee Foundation** for providing grant support for this project.

Founded in 1945, Utah Foundation's mission is to produce objective, thorough and well-reasoned research and analysis that promotes the effective use of public resources, a thriving economy, a well-prepared workforce and a high quality of life for Utahns. Utah Foundation seeks to help decision-makers and citizens understand and address complex issues. Utah Foundation also offers constructive guidance to improve governmental policies, programs and structures.

Utah Foundation is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization.

Contacts:

Dan Bammes - Communications Director, Utah Foundation
(801)355-1400, ext. 5; (801)349-5937 (cell)
dan@utahfoundation.org

Shawn Teigen - Vice President and Research Director, Utah Foundation
801-355-1400, ext. 3
shawn@utahfoundation.org

Peter Reichard - President, Utah Foundation
(801)355-1400, ext. 1
peter@utahfoundation.org