

State of Utah Education Address

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State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Good evening. Welcome, members of the State Board of Education, guests, parents, students, and citizens across the great state of Utah. We're here at West High School, the state's oldest high school founded in 1890—one of the most diverse, and among the best high schools in Utah. Thanks to Principal Parley Jacobs, his staff, and Salt Lake City School District, our hosts tonight.

A recently released documentary, *Waiting for Superman*, gives a perspective on America's public schools that may be true in some places, but not here. In some cities and states, there are persistently failing and decaying schools. But in Utah, we have schools where engaged students and parents with committed teachers and principals are creating opportunities and success.

West High School exemplifies this in Utah. Last year, the majority of seniors took the ACT test for college admission, and together achieved a composite score of 22, well above the national average. Many students at West participate in the International Baccalaureate program and in Advanced Placement courses. The pass rate here on AP tests is 76 percent, well above the nation's 58 percent. Here is a school in the heart of the city, with a student body as diverse as any in Utah, where success is the norm. I'm proud of West High School and I'm proud of Utah schools.

It's my honor to introduce Gay Beck, a kindergarten teacher at Highland Elementary School in the Alpine School District recently selected as the 2011 Utah Teacher of the Year.

Mrs. Beck, will you please stand to be recognized. This is her 17th year of teaching, but I don't think she is really counting. Like so many teachers in Utah's schools, Mrs. Beck finds her job to be her life's work and a gift that brings her joy. She knows that her five-year-old students don't understand budget cuts or tax rates. Instead, she gives them the sense of wonder and acceptance each one needs to be successful. Mrs. Beck—thank you for representing Utah's great teachers.

Utah is a wonderful place! We think of ourselves as different, and we are—in our geography, our values, our demographics, our economics. Analysts ranking states often place Utah first: for quality of life, for business climate, for quality work force. We've been called the best-managed state in the nation. We have a demographic advantage over other states. The size and youthfulness of our workforce are cited as a competitive advantage that Utah has over other states. We know the numbers: the largest percentage of school age children, the largest percentage of the population under thirty, the lowest mean age, the highest birth rate. This is no disadvantage; it is, in fact, a great advantage.

But we only realize this advantage if we succeed in providing young people with a high quality education. In its 2010 state rankings, *Business Facilities* magazine ranked Utah number one in quality of life and number two in education climate. *Forbes Magazine* ranks Utah as third best for business. When Utah's AAA credit rating was recently reconfirmed—one of only eight states with this rating, Standard and Poor's attributed part of the rating to the quality of education. Last week, as Adobe announced construction of a new facility in Lehi, the company cited education as a significant factor in the decision. But, our advantage only holds if we ensure a successful education for the young people of Utah.

Some of you know I am an admirer of the poetry of Robert Frost. One of his most familiar poems is *The Road Not Taken*. The ideas in this poem are relevant to us tonight.

The Road Not Taken

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

The road we've chosen in Utah values families and children. Our road values personal responsibility, self reliance, and hard work. We value courage and resolve. So how do we act in ways that bring the power of these values to bear on public education? How do we make certain that our chosen road takes us to the destination? I'll talk tonight about things we can do to achieve the promise of freedom and prosperity, securing them for ourselves and preserving them for our children through education.

As I speak tonight, I intend to highlight the successes in schools. I hope no one will mistake this for unwarranted satisfaction or complacency. I know there are students that face difficult challenges in school. I expect us to solve problems and create greater success. But I want you all to know and have confidence that we're building on a foundation of success and competence.

I've recently lost a few pounds and some of my friends have noticed. They ask me, "How did you do it?" When I answer, "It's exercise and diet," I sense a little disappointment. We would all like a new pill or a clever slimming device. But it's just exercise and diet; there is really no short cut. The same principle applies to the governance and improvement of public education. There are no magic bullets, no slick, simple, effortless, free solutions.

The road we've taken requires that we move forward in four key areas. These are: 1) investment of resources; 2) support from businesses and individuals; 3) focus on the vision and mission in "Promises to Keep;" and 4) commitment and engagement by students and parents.

First, let's talk about investment. Public education makes up half of the state's budget. The Legislature appropriated \$2.4 billion for schools this year. With local funding, the total is over \$3 billion. This is a hefty financial commitment we are making, so I want to put this spending—this investment—in clearer perspective.

Nearly 600,000 students are enrolled in 1,000 Utah schools, and we're still growing. We welcomed 25,000 new students in the last two years and opened forty new schools. Think of this as 1,000 additional classrooms filled with children. These new students were welcomed while resources were shrinking. Over the last two years, education funding fell by \$200 million. Growth and less money created challenges that were met by committed teachers and principals,

skilled administrators and governing boards. It's what I have recently called "the Utah Education Miracle."

In Utah we spend about \$6,200 per student, less than any other state. But I think there is another story in this number worth telling. Think of the same number for a minute as "cost per student" rather than "spending per student." From this perspective Utah leads the nation. We're the national leader in cost management by a large margin. We are nearly 25 percent more efficient than the next closest state, Tennessee. From this perspective, I see our schools in a positive light, as more productive. I see leaders producing results that are above the average, and school boards and charter boards making effective management decisions, all with the lowest administrative overhead in the country.

Productivity requires results. On the ACT, Utah ranks eighth among states that test more than half their graduates. Our graduation rate of more than 88 percent is near the top. More than 67 percent of students in AP courses pass the exams, while the national average is only 58 percent.

Some states have higher achievement than we do. Last week, a Utah Foundation report compared Utah to six other states: New Jersey, Vermont, New Hampshire, Minnesota, Wyoming, and South Dakota. Our student results on some tests trail these states. What wasn't reported is that the cost per student in Wyoming and Vermont is more than \$16,000; in New Jersey, it's more than \$14,000. Our Utah cost of just \$6,228 per student is far below these states.

I don't want to claim that other perspectives are inaccurate, but I worry when I see that advocates are making arguments based on the premise that Utah public schools are failing, or are wasteful, or are poorly managed. Sadly, something repeated often enough begins to be taken as

the truth, false though it may be. People who thrive on the claim that our schools are failing, that they are poorly run, are ignoring the facts. Utah schools are the most efficient in the country and Utah citizens receive the best return on investment in the country.

As I said before, I'm not satisfied with "doing okay." I expect greater success and achievement that will include many more students and additional investment. I don't intend to simply ask for more money. Asking for more without clear strategy creates a black hole that can't be filled by any of amount money. Asking to spend the same as another state invites the criticism of throwing money at problems. I intend to describe carefully chosen strategic investments that will produce high returns. I am a pragmatist. We should neither expect nor desire to spend as much as some of the other states I've mentioned. To spend at the level of Vermont would take another \$6 billion from our economy. That's not realistic. But we do have to make investments to prosper.

More growth is coming—at least 50,000 students in the next five years. There will be unacceptable declines in the quality of education if we don't provide the financial resources necessary to support our children in their schools. There are investments required just to keep what we have. I called it a "Utah miracle"—what we achieve with our current investment. The greater Utah miracle will be what we achieve with new investment. I'll speak of new investments in terms of strategic, targeted spending.

Here are four areas for investment we should consider:

1) First, early childhood education, expanded kindergarten opportunities, and early grade support. It may be hard to imagine that a child could begin school never having held a book, never having been read to, but it's true for some Utah children. Investing early to assure that a

child is ready for school, maintaining that support to assure that a child has the literacy and numeracy skills to move forward with success from 3rd grade—these investments pay high dividends.

2) Second, information and communications technology has the potential to revolutionize learning and management in our schools. Dr. Clayton Christensen, a West High graduate, has written extensively about what he calls “disruptive technologies.” Applying his principles leads me to believe that we must move carefully and experimentally. We need to be certain that we only take to scale applications of technology that have been proven by small demonstrations. I have identified a small allocation of discretionary funds that I intend to make available to charter schools and districts for these kinds of demonstration projects. In November, I will invite proposals for innovative applications of technology that can be demonstrated for less than \$50,000 each. I hope to be able to fund several of these proposals. With firm results from pilot projects, I’ll approach the Legislature with recommendations for specific targeted investment in technology.

3) Next, aligning the curriculum to meet the needs of business and the workforce is an area of vital investment. I am troubled that more students say their goals are to become film critics and psychologists than to be engineers and scientists. Whether through increased counseling or through other means, aligning student studies in high school to the opportunities and needs in the work force will require an investment. One of the high returning investments we already made and should increase is in a web portal called *Utah Futures* www.utahfutures.org. At *Utah Futures*, students get information about the careers with the highest future employment, great guidance on the high school courses they’ll need, and

information about post-secondary programs leading to those careers. More investment here will pay off in better alignment between education and workforce needs and will pay great dividends.

4) Finally, we must invest in the professional abilities of our teachers. The most important school variable in student achievement is the quality of instruction in the classroom. There is an art of teaching. I've met charismatic individuals that I admire and know I can never equal. I hope for this in every classroom. But there is also a science of instruction that we should expect in every classroom. We have more than enough research to clearly understand the elements of high quality instruction, and we must be certain that every teacher understands and uses them. Failure to invest in the human capital within our schools—our teachers—will lead to disappointment in every other investment.

The Utah Constitution establishes a partnership for governance of the state's school system. It requires that the Legislature provide for the establishment and maintenance of public schools, and that the State Board of Education exercise general control and supervision over schools. I respect the Legislature's responsibility to set budgets for our school system. So while I and the Board will make recommendations regarding taxes and budgets, we recognize that the Legislature has sole responsibility for raising revenue and appropriating it. It can only be through a healthy, respectful partnership that we can succeed in making and managing our education investment. Remember, education is an investment in our children that pays dividends today and beyond, through generations we will never see.

Our public schools in Utah are truly strengthened by the commitment and support of businesses. We have a long record of business effort that is sometimes under-appreciated and unrecognized. I'll describe just a few of these programs tonight. I'll start by recognizing some

extraordinary leaders that have joined us here tonight at West High School. I ask that you all stand so that we can recognize you together:

Mark Bouchard	Salt Lake Chamber
Rob Brough	KSL Teacher Feature (Zions Bank)
Linda Folkerson	Keys/Road to Success
Robert and Katharine Garff	Keys/Road to Success
Sharon Johnson	Sterling Scholar Awards
Beverley Taylor Sorenson	Sorenson arts education programs
Jim Sorenson, Jr.	Sorenson arts education programs
Lisa Cluff	Sorenson arts education programs

For 52 years, the Deseret News KSL Sterling Scholar program has provided recognition for Utah high school students, so much a part of the fabric that we've almost forgotten its corporate sponsorship. Every year, thousands of students are motivated by this program that recognizes excellence in achievement, and hundreds receive significant scholarships. Sharon Johnson is the Deseret News KSL Sterling Scholar Director and has joined us tonight.

Each year, The Huntsman Foundation provides Huntsman Awards for Excellence in Education, a \$10,000 award to each of ten teachers, administrators, and volunteers. Jon and Karen Huntsman wrote, "The Awards are our family's way of expressing gratitude to educators throughout Utah." These are not empty words, my friends.

Teacher Feature on KSL Radio is a partnership with Zions Bank and other sponsors. You've surely heard the weekly announcements on the KSL Morning News with Grant and Amanda. Selected teachers are treated to dinner at La Caille, Hale Center Theater tickets, and an overnight stay at Anniversary Inn. Rob Brough from Zions Bank has joined us tonight, along with Steven Jackson of Timpanogos High School, who is this week's featured teacher.

Let me tell you about “Keys to Success,” sponsored by the Ken Garff Companies. In its seventh year, “Keys to Success” focuses on post-secondary preparation, incentive based learning, and motivating students to excel academically. Here’s the motivation—over 250,000 prizes including cars, laptop computers, grants and scholarships that have been given to more than 125,000 students in 62 high schools. The “Road to Success” program motivates elementary students, reaching 175,000 students in 242 schools. Students qualify for great prizes, including bicycles, with the ultimate goal that students will all be reading at or above grade level. Bob and Kathi Garff, are with us tonight.

The Larry H. Miller Education Project, with partners Zions Bank and Weber State University, is based on the idea that teachers bring history to life when they have experienced history themselves. The project takes Utah history teachers on learning seminars to sites across the country—this year to Civil War battle sites, on the trail of Lewis and Clark, and to historic locations from American literature. I am sure you can all imagine what these experiences have done for these teachers.

Anyone who has been around Utah education very long knows Beverley Taylor Sorenson. Here is a remarkable women who sees a need and steps forward. When budget challenges led to cuts in arts programs and staff in elementary schools, Beverley went to work—to fund training, materials, and supplies. Today, through her advocacy and personal financial commitment, the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Elementary Arts Learning Initiative supports arts education in fifty-nine elementary schools. Beverley Taylor Sorenson is an inspiration to me, and I hope, is my friend.

I know there are contributions from many other individuals and businesses. The Salt Lake City Chamber of Commerce is certainly stepping forward to be a powerful voice of support for schools. Mark Bouchard, chair of its Education Task Force, is here tonight. The contributions are too numerous to count, but I see them on the outfield fence of every high school ball field across the state. Join me now in thanking not just our guests here tonight, but in applauding all the efforts of businesses and individuals who actively contribute to Utah public education.

So what do I ask of you now? Continue your efforts and find ways to enlist others with you. Many of the programs I recognized tonight are not the work of a single business—they are partnerships. If you are looking for a program in which you can be a partner, there are many. Jim Wall, retired publisher of the *Deseret Morning News* is leading the creation of the Utah Business Education Community Trust, an effort that will more effectively engage business and make matches with schools. You can look for a major announcement from the Trust in the near future regarding a new web portal that will greatly enhance links between of schools and businesses.

Next, be positive! As I look across the landscape of business and community support, I can't help but notice how many recognize the great work of individuals. These individuals are part of a successful system. We all win when we talk about schools in Utah and start with the perspective of success. I'm sure when we talked to Adobe about expanding in Utah, we told them about our great schools. Let's make sure our own citizens and educators get the same message.

Finally, I hope that every new business that comes to Utah or starts in Utah would consider it a civic obligation to commit resources to our public schools. We want a climate of taxation and regulation conducive to business. I call on business leaders to support reasonable revenue to support public schools. You business leaders know better than most what it takes to run an enterprise as significant as our schools. We need your voices in support.

The State Board of Education's statement of vision and mission for public education is called "Promises to Keep." This document, rooted in the Utah Constitution, gives clarity to the purposes of public schools. In "Promises to Keep" we have defined the work schools must do. It consists of four promises to our citizens: ensuring literacy and numeracy for all children, providing high quality instruction for all children, establishing curriculum with high standards and relevance for all children, and providing accountability measures to inform students and teachers as well as communities and policymakers.

I want to report progress we are making on these promises. I'll start with literacy. One of our great needs has been to accelerate learning for struggling readers and English learners. I'm excited about results from a technology-based program called "Fast Forward" from Imagine Learning. This software has been licensed for the entire state and is available in most elementary schools. Students get instruction tailored to their needs and some are moving up multiple grade levels in reading and writing in just months. Within the next few weeks, we'll post detailed statistics regarding the success of this program online at www.schools.utah.gov. The "Fast Forward" software has been combined with a program of family literacy centers. We now have more than 60 family literacy centers across the state serving 6,800 families.

We know that the quality of classroom instruction is the most powerful school variable in student learning. Researchers find that high quality classroom instruction can lead to multiple-year student gains in a single year, and poor classroom instruction can create deficits that may take years to fill. At Orem Junior High School, Principal Joe Jensen and his faculty have refocused the energy of their school to provide high quality instruction and assure mastery for all students in math and language arts. With a faculty working as a professional learning community, they carefully track weekly student performance, and increase the instructional time in core classes for targeted students. In the last year, Orem Junior High School increased proficiency in math 17 percent, and in English/language arts 8 percent. Tardiness decreased 78 percent and unexcused absences fell 60 percent. Principal Jensen and his teachers exemplify the creative and motivated educators in Utah's schools. Principal Jensen, will you please stand and be recognized.

This summer the State Board of Education, along with most other states, adopted new core curriculum standards. These new Common Core Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn and are designed to reflect the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. They are internationally benchmarked so that our Utah students will be prepared to compete with students anywhere. The standards are available on line at www.corestandards.org. I have read them and am confident that they are right for our state.

Now, the truly exciting development is the much-improved assessment program that will come with Common Core Standards. Utah is a leader in a consortium of states developing next-generation assessments aligned with the common standards. These new tests will be computer-

adaptive—meaning that technology will allow for tests specifically tailored to individual students. The testing will all be done on computers, and will provide a much-improved level of information for students, parents, and teachers. The tests will provide summative information—information that tells us where students ended. They will also provide crucial new formative information—data along the way—that will guide teachers, students, and parents in making those adjustments that are needed for students to be successful.

Let me share the work of two initiatives led by my staff. First, we have very effective models for year-round education in elementary schools, but no one in the country has a secondary school model. It's possible that a year-round model for secondary schools could provide enhanced opportunities for students, perhaps increased pay for teachers, and more efficient use of school buildings. I believe, along with others, that this is a concept worth studying. We intend to prepare a model for review so that we can determine what might be possible, practical, and in the end, desirable. I'll report this work by the end of the year.

Second, research tells us that today's students need more education than ever to be prepared for success in college and careers; but there are worries about the effectiveness and rigor of the 12th grade. A task force has been preparing recommendations to assure that students are fully engaged in this vital year. We expect part of the solution to include improved counseling and better student planning. We are also looking for the results of a decision made by the State Board of Education in 2006 to raise graduation requirements. The class of 2011 is the first class to approach graduation under these higher requirements and I'm looking for real improvement.

One more development worth highlighting: there are more than 7,000 elementary students in Utah enrolled in Chinese language instruction. With nearly two billion speakers, Chinese is one of the world's most spoken languages. When Chinese is included with languages like Spanish and French taught in Utah schools, there are almost 100,000 students studying world languages. We like to say that the "world is welcome in Utah," and we want to be sure that when the world comes, we speak its languages!

Last week, I spent an afternoon and evening in the Logan City School District. I was impressed with the commitment that was evident throughout the district. At Logan High School, a group of dedicated Hispanic students have organized the club, Latinos in Action, a leadership effort to inspire peers to be more engaged and successful in school. I want to introduce to you one of the leaders of Logan High School's Latinos in Action, a student named Karla Pensamiento. She is a great example of engagement and leadership. Her parents arrived here from Guatemala in 1992, and Karla was born two months later. She's working to be an attorney, but I can tell you she is also working to raise up other students with her. I appreciate her example.

Two Utah values we take great pride in are personal responsibility and family responsibility. For 150 years, these values have been central to our approach to solving problems in Utah. I'm often asked what we could do in Utah schools to make improvements without significantly increasing costs. Of course, few of us really want to pay more in taxes if we can avoid it, and all of us want our schools to produce nation-leading results. So people ask me, "What would be the thing that would 'turbo-charge' our schools?"

I've thought a lot about this. I've talked tonight about some of the steps we're taking within the school system as we strive in this direction. Statistics and our own experience tell us that personal and family choices and values have more impact on variation in student achievement than anything schools do. Imagine the effect on achievement in Utah's schools if every student worked as hard as the hardest working student. Imagine the possibilities if every parent were as engaged as the most engaged parents. The difference between successful students and unsuccessful students is not that successful students are smarter. The difference is that successful students are engaged, committed, and devote time to their studies. They work hard.

Their parents are central to their success. When I talk about parental engagement, I'm not asking parents to bring more cookies to class, or buy more gift wrap. I'm speaking of a much more specific engagement in their children's school work. I'm asking parents to read to their children. I'm asking parents to spend time with their children on their schoolwork. I'm asking parents to communicate with teachers by attending parent teacher conferences.

I saw parent commitment in a different light recently when I visited the English Language Center of Cache Valley. I met a group of adult students studying English. I asked to hear their stories and was surprised. They were older adults who came to the United States as refugees. They raised their children here and were just now learning English. When I asked why they hadn't learned earlier, many replied that they worked two or three jobs to provide for their children. I asked about their children and they reported with pride in their faces that their sons and daughters are graduating from universities and working as professionals. I was humbled to learn of the sacrifices of these parents for their children, and at the same time reminded of the continuing reality of the American dream.

There are some things that only parents and students can do, that no program or appropriation or policy will ever replace. Parents and students: I call on you to step up to a higher level of commitment and be a part of a great Utah miracle. Let's show the rest of the country what happens in a state that truly, TRULY, lives up to the values of personal responsibility.

I never want to be accused of sidestepping my responsibility or the responsibility of schools to deliver on the promises in "Promises to Keep." I promise to be aggressive and persistent in assuring that schools do their part.

Education faces difficult issues, and there are occasions when the work to find solutions breaks down into accusations, hostility, even name-calling. Of course disagreement is important and necessary, but it is also essential that we learn to respect differences of opinion and strive for a spirit of civility. There is a citizens group that has labeled 2011 as the "Year of Civility." I hope every year will be a year of civility and I add my voice to their call.

As you all know, we're about a month away from the general election, which will include voting for candidates for the Legislature, the State Board of Education, and local school boards. I encourage citizens of Utah to pay particular attention to candidates' views and values relative to public education, and to vote.

Let me close by paraphrasing the final lines of Robert Frost's poem.

. . . Two roads diverged in a wood, and we—

We took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

We've chosen a road to travel, and we choose again every day. Utahns have chosen a different road in education from other states, with more children and lower taxes. It's a road that requires efforts and sacrifices unlike other states, and it's a road with promise. We will realize a great Utah miracle if we commit to strategic investments in our children, if we build strong business and community partnerships, if we keep the promises that schools make, and if parents and students rise to a higher level of effort and engagement. We can lead the nation as a state where every school is great, where there is great teaching in every classroom, and where every student excels.

Thank you for coming tonight, and God bless Utah, and especially, its children. Thank you.