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For Immediate Release

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Utah ESSA State Plan Approved by U.S. Secretary of Education

SALT LAKE CITY— Utah’s state plan under the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) received final approval Thursday by U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos.

Under ESSA, approved in 2015 as a replacement for No Child Left Behind, states must set specific academic measures in a consolidated state plan. The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) first submitted [its plan](#) last fall and has worked with the U.S. Department of Education to clarify and amend parts of it over the last several months.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Sydnee Dickson said Utah’s plan emphasizes the state’s commitment to ensuring equitable access to, and participation in, federally assisted programs for students who are traditionally underserved.

“Utah’s plan provides strategies to engage school communities in continuous improvement on behalf of each student. We are committed to increasing equity and access to educational excellence in our schools and supporting our educators as they work to close achievement gaps,” Dickson said.

Plan approval was delayed while state officials worked with staff at the Department of Education on language surrounding a conflict over how to calculate the scores of students who opt out of statewide tests. An initial [request for a waiver](#) and a [later request for DeVos to use her transitional authority](#) to grant Utah a one-year reprieve from the provision [were denied](#). However, agreed upon changes to the plan will allow Utah to maintain one accountability system for the 2018-19 school year. In order to focus on serving schools most in need of support and to meet federal requirements, USBE will take extra steps to accurately identify schools that require support while also pursuing a long-term alignment of systems.

Utah's plan outlines how the state has and will continue to direct federal funds to serve specific student populations to close achievement gaps and increase equity and access to quality instruction. Utah envisions its plan will promote educational equity via the following strategies:

- Explicitly stating ambitious goals to increase high school graduation rates and significantly reduce gaps in achievement by the year 2022.
- Increasing emphasis on student learning growth in assessing school performance.
- Emphasizing access to, and performance in, readiness coursework, including Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Career and Technical Education courses.
- Collaborating with the Utah System of Higher Education and the Utah Partnership for Transforming Education Preparation to improve teacher preparation, teacher performance measures, and the statewide licensing system.
- Directing additional resources and support to low-performing schools based on school performance and a comprehensive needs-based assessment.
- Examining the distribution of effective educators to ensure equitable access.
- Collaborating with other state agencies and community partners to provide support to schools on trauma-informed practices to improve school climate.
- Creating a grants management system to assist local education agencies in identifying and applying for grants to assist targeted student populations.

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