

In partnership with the Utah State Board of Education and the Mosakowski Institute, Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG) conducted a review of the state of student behavior and mental health in Utah, collecting data on both the **top needs** of educators and the **actionable steps** that will help them better meet the needs of students.

Schools across the country have simultaneously witnessed **increased challenges related to student behavior**. In 2024, 80% percent of public school leaders across the country reported that they “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement, “The COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering effects continue to negatively impact the behavioral development of students at my school.”[1] Student behavior is also a significant concern in Utah. **Across all of Utah’s Local Education Agencies (LEAs), improving behavioral outcomes and increasing mental health support is a top goal.**[2]



Read the full report

“Student behavior has impacted every single aspect of our LEA. An extremely large amount of our time and resources are spent addressing behavior concerns. We see a trend of increasing behavioral needs in both quantity of children and severity. This is exhausting our teachers and our resources.”

Utah education leaders report increased behavior and mental health challenges.

- The severity of students’ behavior, including violent behaviors, and mental health challenges has increased since the pandemic.
- Students are presenting these challenging behaviors at a younger age.
- More students are requiring a wider range of behavior and mental health support than pre-pandemic.

Utah education leaders report negative impacts from unmet student behavior and mental health needs.

- More classroom time dedicated to behavior management, drawing away from time dedicated to instruction.
- Increased staff burnout and turnover.



Finding 1.

Schools need more student support professionals.

Utah does not meet the recommended ratio for staff roles dedicated to supporting student mental health and behavior.[4] To meet the nationally recommended student-to-staff ratios, LEAs would need **4 times** as many school psychologists, **2 times** as many school counselors, and **2.6 times** as many school social workers as they employ now.

LEAs report that it is **hard to recruit qualified staff given that the private sector often pays considerably more**. For example, the average salary for **school psychologist in Utah is \$92,451**, compared to **\$110,630 in the private sector.**[5]

	Nationally Recommended Ratio	Utah Ratio	Utah Ranking among States
School Psychologists	500:1	1,971:1	41 of 50
School Counselors	250:1	499:1	44 of 50
School Social Workers	250:1	663:1	40 of 50



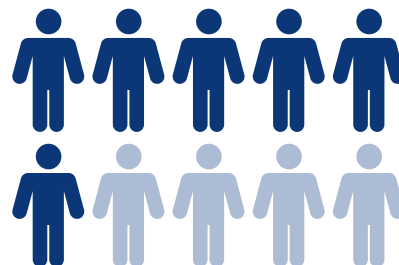
Finding 2.

Educators and support staff need more training.

LEA leaders report that many of the educators who are new to the field are not leaving educator preparation programs with the necessary classroom management and tiered intervention skills to effectively support students. This was reflected in PCG's data collection, as **43%** of staff listed as supporting behavior **are not formally trained in supporting student behavior**.

The lack of training is particularly acute for positions that are not traditionally considered behavior and mental health roles, such as administrators and classroom teachers. Despite spending up to **50% of their day** supporting student behavior, **only 26% of these staff** are trained to do so.

4 out of 10 staff supporting behavior and mental health are not trained to do so.



Finding 3.

Schools need more funding for student behavior and mental health support.

Utah ranks last in the U.S. in both **per pupil expenditure** and **per pupil student behavior related expenditure**.^[6] PCG estimates that between **7%-12%** of LEAs student behavior and mental health expenses in 2023-2024 were funded by ESSER, which expired in fall 2024. With ESSER funds expiring, LEAs will be **losing an average of \$5.6 million** each.^[7] Staffing costs account for 80% of Utah LEAs total spending. It would cost approximately \$407 million more for the state to meet the nationally recommended staffing ratios for behavior support professionals.

Utah Ranks:

51st in per pupil expenditures
51st in student behavior related expenditures



Finding 4.

LEAs request flexibility in funding and policy, not a one-size-fits-all approach.

"I spend 95% of my time on 5% of my budget"

LEA leaders noted challenges with much of the existing state policy and funding, including:

- **Inflexible state-level requirements** that don't account for unique LEA needs based on size, geography, student population.
- **Unfunded mandates** that require additional resources without providing the necessary budget.
- **High number of low-dollar grant opportunities** offered by the state that require significant administrative effort to apply for and report on.

Consolidated grant funds, such as the Prevention Block Grant, were cited as being more useful than smaller restricted grants.

[1] National Center for Education Statistics. (2024, July 18). About One-Quarter of Public Schools Reported That Lack of Focus or Inattention From Students Had a Severe Negative Impact on Learning in 2023-24. https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/7_18_2024.asp

[2] Utah State Board of Education. Annual Report 2025. <https://schools.utah.gov/superintendentannualreport/2025USBEAnnualReport.pdf>

[3] American School Counselor Association. School Counselor Roles & Ratios. <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/about-school-counseling/school-counselor-roles-ratios>

[4] Bureau of Labor Statistics. May 2023 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates – Utah. https://www.bls.gov/oes/2023/may/oes_ut.htm. Retrieved February 3, 2025.

[5] United States Census Bureau. 2022 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2022/econ/school-finances/secondary-education-finance.html>

[6] Utah State Board of Education. ESSER Reserve Approved Projects.

https://schools.utah.gov/coronavirus/_corona_virus/_caresactfunding_/ESSERReserveApprovedProjects.pdf