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Dear members of the Utah State Legislature,

In response to several inquiries, please allow me to share the budget position of the Utah Education Association, a position developed only after receiving input from thousands of educators across the state.

We believe Utah public school students are best served by allocating as much funding as possible directly to the WPU. Specifically, we are requesting that rather than designate line items for technology, professional development or other earmarked uses, those funds be rolled into the WPU. It's important to recognize this position is a shift from recent years. In fact, just last year we asked for \$24 million to help restore a portion of the \$78 million cut from teacher professional development during the recession.

But things have changed since then.

Today we face arguably the most **critical teacher shortage** of our lifetime. A study conducted earlier this month by the Utah School Superintendents Association found that in 16 reporting Utah school districts, there are currently about 600 classrooms staffed by interns, non-licensed teaching candidates or long-term substitutes. Universities are reporting a dramatic drop in the number of students choosing education as a course of study. A student today faces a greater chance of sitting in a classroom with an unqualified teacher than perhaps ever in modern history.

Educators, school boards, administrators and parents are all feeling the crunch...and it's the students who suffer. We must address the situation before the crisis escalates.

Earmarked dollars won't cut it. In one school teachers may be overburdened by large class sizes, in another there may be a need for teacher mentors, and in yet another enhanced salaries or benefits may be required to attract and retain quality teachers. Our local school boards, administrators, teachers and parents need the flexibility to collaboratively address teacher shortages in ways as unique as the communities in which they live and work. Directing funds through the WPU provides this flexibility.

Please know that most teachers I talk to recognize the difficult position legislators face in balancing the state budget. We very much appreciate efforts made in recent years to support funding for public education. We stand ready as willing partners in finding ways to provide the resources our students so desperately need.

Sincerely,

Sharon Gallagher-Fishbaugh, M.A., NBCT
President, Utah Education Association