



Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind

Interim Study Recommendations | November 18, 2025

To: Executive Appropriations Committee
Sen. Jerry Stevenson, Senate Chair
Rep. Val Peterson, House Chair

From: Public Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Sen. Heidi Balderee, Senate Chair
Rep. Stephen Whyte, House Chair

Subject: Intent Language Report on the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind

During the 2025 General Session, the Legislature passed intent language requiring an interim study of the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (USDB). This study, with an approved legislative audit, aims to provide recommendations to address inaccurate student and financial data, governance and financial management issues, and uncertainty about the role of USDB in the statewide public education system.

Summary of Recommendations

We make multiple recommendations in four major categories: Governance, Role in the Public Education System, Finance Data & Resident LEA Responsibility, and Provision of Capital Facilities. We intend that the recommendations made in this report provide a way to conclude the many questions and issues focused on USDB over the past several years and restore confidence in USDB operations and data.

- Governance – Amend statute to include USDB oversight within operations of the State Board of Education, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and function of the USDB Advisory Council.
- Role in the Public Education System – Provide statutory language outlining the purpose and role of USDB, prioritize delivery of service and coordination with Local Education Agencies (LEA), and limit in-house education at USDB to students who are deaf, blind, or deafblind.
- Finance, Data, & Resident LEA Responsibility – Amend statute to provide a statewide standard for accounting for students served by USDB within the Weighted Pupil Unit (WPU) framework. Consider intent language for the 2026 budget directing the State Board to develop processes and recommendations for consideration by the Legislature. Implement budget changes to separate accounting functions for certain USDB programs.
- Provision of Capital Facilities – Amend statute to strengthen the dual role of USDB and LEAs in providing capital facilities for student. Clarify that the State Board is the responsible entity in managing capital facilities at USDB and make recommendations to the Legislature, not USDB leadership. Consider intent language for the 2026 budget directing the State Board to develop a plan for the provision of comprehensive secondary education opportunities for USDB students.

Background

During the 2025 General Session, the Legislature passed intent language in Item 9 of House Bill 2, Public Education Budget Amendments requiring the following:

The Legislature intends that the State Board of Education, in consultation with the Public Education Appropriations Subcommittee and the Education Interim Committee, review the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind's governance, role within the public education system, scope of services, funding for students, obligations of the student's resident local education agency in the provision of services and facilities, and the provision of capital facilities for the schools. The Legislature further intends that the Public Education Appropriations Subcommittee report findings and recommendations to the Executive Appropriations Committee by November 15, 2025.

In addition to the report required by this intent language, we reviewed multiple documents, committee presentations, and audits with our staff to develop recommendations. Major documents reviewed include:

- [USDB Budget Review](#) – Legislative Fiscal Analyst, June 2022
- [Proposed Buildings for the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind](#) – Memorandum to the Executive Appropriations Committee, November 2022
- [Space Utilization by the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind](#) – Legislative Auditor General, April 2023
- [Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind Strategic Facilities Plan](#) – Utah State Board of Education, May 2023
- USDB Statewide Masterplan – Division of Facilities Construction and Management
 - HOK Masterplan Report, Spring 2024
 - Dickson + Partners Report, September 2024
 - USDB Salt Lake City Campus Site Capacity Study, December 2024
- [Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind Audit](#), Utah State Board of Education, September 2025
- [USDB Working Group Summary and Recommendations](#) & [Presentation](#), Utah State Board of Education, October 2025
- Systemic Audit of Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, Legislative Auditor General, Release Pending

The following recommendations provide a starting point for the Legislature to consider how to address long-term systemic concerns within the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind. These recommendations are divided into four major categories: Governance; Role in the Public Education System; Finance, Data, & Resident Local Education Agency (LEA) Responsibility; and Provision of Capital Facilities.

Note: The Systemic Audit of Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind by the Legislative Auditor General is nearing completion. The Legislature may wish to further modify these recommendations based on audit findings once released.

A. Governance

During the 2025 General Session, the Legislature passed House Bill 537, Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind Amendments which converted USDB from a public corporation (component unit of the state) to a subdivision of the Utah State Board of Education (State Board). As a subdivision of the Board, USDB is part of the governance and financial structure of the State Board administrative office. Beginning in FY 2026, the Financial Operations division of the State Board directly oversees the finances of USDB.

This statutory change answers one of the major questions raised over the past several years, namely, how should oversight change to better integrate USDB into the state budget? Other questions include:

- What is the role of the State Board in the governance of USDB?

- How is the Advisory Council selected and what is its role?
- Should the State Superintendent as the executive officer of the State Board have a more formal role in budgetary oversight of USDB?
- While the Board and Legislature have placed the Utah State Instructional Materials Access Center (USIMAC) at USDB, what relationship does this division have with the other functions of USDB? Is USDB leadership responsible for the operations and finances of USIMAC?

Recommendations

Amend statute to strengthen governance of USDB and its role in the statewide public education system to include the following:

1. Amend statute to require the State Board to maintain a standing committee focused on the operations and finances of USDB, receive recommendations from the Advisory Council, and report to the full board.
2. Amend statute to provide that the State Board appoint an administrator for the USDB upon recommendation of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and include that individual in the reporting hierarchy of the State Superintendent as determined by the board. Maintain current statutory language designating individual deputy administrators for the School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind.
3. Clarify statutory language governing the Advisory Council [53E-8-204] to provide a structure and purpose for the council, including:
 - a. Make recommendations to the State Board and USDB Administrator on the educational needs of deaf, blind, and deaf-blind students,
 - b. Provide feedback to the State Board and USDB on the education policy and operations as directed by the State Board; and
 - c. Act as the school-community council in directing the use of various trust funds received by the schools (i.e. School LAND Trust, School for the Blind Trust, School for the Deaf Trust).
4. Designate in statute that the Utah State Instructional Materials Access Center (USIMAC) as an integrated function of USDB and strengthen the oversight provisions of USIMAC within USDB operations.

B. Role in the Public Education System

The USDB operates under a dual mission by providing a statewide support structure for the education of students who are deaf, blind, or deafblind and provides direct instruction and support to students. A large portion of USDB operations support the statewide structure like a state agency. The School of the Deaf and the School of the Blind function more like schools.

This structure has led to questions about how USDB fits into the state public education system, specifically:

- Is the primary role of USDB to function as a service provider to students through their LEA or a direct education provider to students?
- What criteria should govern direct “in-house” services to students?
- Do State Board and Legislative policy makers have a uniform understanding of the mission and role of USDB in the public education system and the services it provides statewide and through direct in-house instruction?

While this question will likely remain, the following recommendations may help to address some of the confusion around the mission and role of USDB.

Recommendations

Provide a statutory purpose for USDB that provides direction to the State Board on statewide mission and role in the broader education system.

1. Include a statutory role and purpose for USDB to include:
 - a. USDB provides a statewide infrastructure for the education of students who are deaf, blind, or deafblind and to build technical knowledge and support infrastructure in the state to support the instruction of qualifying students.
 - b. The USDB structure is to first support the education of students who are deaf, blind, or deafblind as designated through the Individual Education Program (IEP) process in coordination with the student’s local education agency through outreach services or a USDB operated self-contained classroom in an LEA facility. USDB may be designated as a student’s full-time LEA on a minimal basis as warranted by the student’s IEP.
 - c. Stress the statewide role of supporting student education through the resident LEA.
2. Due to higher costs, exclude the option in statute for a student without an IEP detailing specific deaf, blind, or deafblind instructional requirements from attendance at USDB.

C. Finance, Data, & Resident LEA Responsibility

Funding for students attending USDB programs, classrooms, and schools is not consistent across the organization. Some students receive weighted pupil unit (WPU) funding through their resident LEA and other students are not included in WPU funding mechanisms. The difference is based on which entity is responsible for the student IEP. Lack of consistent student funding mechanisms may be one reason student participation data at USDB has remained inconsistent and unreliable.

The state provides a student’s home LEA weighted pupil unit (WPU) funding for a student receiving educational services from USDB and funds USDB for these services through a separate appropriation. The LEA receives both base funding (K-12 WPUs), special education funding (Special Education Add-on WPUs), and funding distributions from other categorical programs in the Minimum School Program for most resident students receiving USDB outreach and classroom services. Students that attend USDB full-time are not counted in their resident LEA for WPU purposes. Students engage with USDB in primarily three ways:

- Outreach Services – Educational services for qualifying students on a part-time basis in their home LEA. The student’s resident LEA is responsible for the IEP and the LEA generates both a base WPU and a Special Education Add-on WPU for each student.
- USDB Operated Self-Contained Classrooms – These students attend a fully functioning classroom operated by USDB within an LEA school. USDB provides most educational services and the LEA provides the facility and students participate in other functions of the school. While State Board rules indicate that these students should only generate a base WPU and not a Special Education Add-on WPU, analysis found that participating students are included in both WPU distribution formulas.
- USDB as Designated LEA – Students attend USDB classrooms in state owned or contracted facilities full-time and USDB is responsible for the student’s IEP. Qualifying students are not included in either WPU distribution formulas or generate WPUs for USDB.

Since 2022, Legislators have raised questions about the reliability of student data reported by USDB, including inconsistencies in the numbers reported for each of the categories listed above. These questions started as Legislators were evaluating capital facility requests submitted by USDB during the 2022 General Session. Specific questions include:

- How has the number of self-contained students served by USDB changed over the past ten years?
- Why are estimated new facility costs so high when compared to the number of students served?
- Why does USDB enrollment continue to increase when the general student population is decreasing?

The State Board audit found the following:

- “Monthly and annual reports [provided by USDB] reflect maximum student and service numbers rather than average daily or monthly student and service numbers.” (Pg 37)
- “USDB does not retain documentation to support personnel data (i.e. teachers, related service providers, support staff, administration, and student-teacher ratio) and other information included in the annual report.” (Pg 52)

Recommendations

The following recommendations will standardize student funding across LEAs and within USDB programs. With standardization, student data reporting should become more consistent and reliable. These recommendations will also address potential double-funding issues occurring in the current framework:

1. Provide a statewide standard for student funding based on the type of services required by the student’s IEP and USDB’s role in implementing the IEP. These changes will have an impact on how WPUs are generated by enrolled students and cost sharing with the student’s resident LEA:
 - a. Outreach Services – Amend statute to provide that a qualifying student is counted in the regular K-12 WPU, Special Education Add-on WPU, and other qualifying programs of the resident LEA.

- i. Include intent language in the final Public Education budget bill of the 2026 General Session to direct the State Board to develop a fee-for-service plan for implementation in FY 2028 that recovers all costs for outreach services provided by USDB from the student's resident LEA and report the plan to the Public Education Appropriations Committee during their October 2026 meeting.
 - b. USDB Operated Self-Contained Classrooms – Amend statute to provide that the qualifying student is counted in the regular K-12 WPU, Special Education Add-on WPU, and other qualifying programs of the resident LEA. Further, require the resident LEA to remit the Special Education Add-on WPU generated by each student enrolled in the classroom to USDB. The LEA retains the base WPU and other related distributions to support costs related to providing the classroom and other educational services related to attending the school.
 - c. USDB as Designated LEA – Amend statute that beginning in FY 2028, include students where USDB is their designated LEA in the regular K-12 WPU and Special Education Add-on WPU programs and provide associated funding to USDB.
 - i. Assuming approximately 325 full-time equivalent students, this change may increase WPU costs by \$4.0 million. While this is not enough funding to support USDB in-house operations, it will provide a stable funding base that changes over time with growth and inflation.
 - ii. Include intent language in the final Public Education budget bill of the 2026 General Session to direct the State Board to develop procedures to ensure USDB designated students are included in the annual October census of enrolled students and WPU funding programs like other LEAs and report to the Public Education Appropriations Subcommittee during their August 2026 meeting.
2. Include intent language in the final Public Education budget bill of the 2026 General Session directing the State Board to maintain separate accounting for the three trust fund distributions received by USDB, including the School LAND Trust distribution from the Minimum School Program, the School for the Blind Trust, and the School for the Deaf Trust. Further, include that the Legislature intends that the State Board develop procedures to ensure that the final expenditures from the trust funds are approved by the Board upon recommendation of the Advisory Council.
3. In the final Public Education budget bill of the 2026 General Session, separate transportation funding for USDB from the To & From School Pupil Transportation program in the Minimum School Program and appropriate the funds directly to the USDB line item for FY 2026 and ongoing for FY 2027. This will make the USDB portion of Pupil Transportation funding more transparent, allow USDB to control transportation costs, and the Legislature to review cost increases and program funding.
4. Include intent language in the final Public Education budget bill of the 2026 General Session directing the State Board to establish student and personnel data standards that address audit findings and provide comparability of data with similar data points in the broader public education system and report to the Public Education Appropriations Subcommittee during their August 2026 meeting.

D. Provision of Capital Facilities

During the 2022 General Session, USDB requested two new buildings from the Legislature. The request included a high-school building on the Salt Lake County campus and a general school building (all grades) in Washington County. The Legislature appropriated \$30.0 million one-time from the Public Education Economic Stabilization Restricted Account to support capital facilities at USDB.

Given unknown costs, scope, and growing questions from policymakers about student needs, high cost compared to students served, and the efficient use of tax dollars, the Legislature set aside the funding in a capital projects account with the Division of Facilities Construction and Management (DFCM) where the funds remain today.

Multiple reports and audits provide more information on potential facility improvements for USDB. These are found in the reports mentioned on Page 1. The Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind Audit released in September 2025 by the State Board addresses how data issues found at USDB may impact these studies.

The outcomes of two independent facilities studies commissioned by DFCM “used USDB student and service data as a basis for some of the analyses completed. Given the projections in these reports were made prior to the USDB generating a reliable system to track student and service data, the projections and recommendations based on that information in the reports may be questionable.” (Pg 54)

Additional questions that impact the provision of facilities at USDB include:

- Should the state continue using a multi-campus model for USDB?
- Should USDB provide a comprehensive high school experience “in-house”? If so, should secondary services be offered at every campus? How can district facilities be leveraged to provide secondary education programs?

Recommendations

Though more expensive, the multi-campus model operated by USDB is the preferred delivery method for educational services to students. In the past, USDB has committed the state to increased costs through actions not approved by the State Board or the Legislature. To avoid this in the future, the Legislature should consider amending statute to include the following:

1. Amend statute to provide that the State Board first try to partner with area LEAs/Schools to meet USDB space requirements, including specialized educational and activity space, before requesting additional state-owned space for USDB.
2. Amend statute to require the State Board to review and approve any changes that impact facility use and make recommendations to the Legislature on changes that increase/decrease cost, including:
 - a. Provision of services and maintenance of contracted and state-owned facilities,
 - b. Entering, exiting, or declining shared space in and LEA facility, and

- c. Increasing course offerings or educational services provided to students that require specialized space.
- 3. Include intent language in the final Public Education budget bill of the 2026 General Session to limit comprehensive high school services to the Salt Lake County campus and hold further development of programs or the expansion to other campuses until the State Board can further study the issue and provide recommendations and cost estimates to the Legislature.
- 4. Include statutory provisions that recognize that the most efficient model for providing a comprehensive high school experience to students includes coordination with LEA high schools in the provision of education and facilities.
- 5. Continue to hold constructing new or replacement facilities until the State Board can address the financial, data, and scope of service changes addressed in recent audits and this report.