



Salt Lake City School District

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September 9, 2003

TO: Kim R. Burningham, Chair, Utah State Board of Education
Steven O. Laing, Utah State Superintendent of Public Instruction

FROM: Cliff Higbee, President, Salt Lake City School District Board of Education
McKell Withers, Superintendent, Salt Lake City School District

SUBJECT: Concerns About the Current Performance Plus Proposal (Blue Version)

We appreciate and support the changes made in the current USBE/USOE Performance Plus Proposal (blue version) from the earlier draft (purple version). The introduction of a thoughtful and purposeful approach to creating exit competencies for our students is a welcome opportunity to better serve our young people.

Our major remaining concern, in addition to having adequate resources to meet this challenge, is the inappropriate use of CRT scores to award course units. These exams were not designed nor validated for this purpose. Comparing current student performance data with this proposal, it is evident that there is a compounding effect of misusing CRT scores across multiple subjects, while also requiring a C grade or better in those same subjects, that identifies fewer than fifty percent of our students as eligible for graduation. It is unclear to us how this approach will help us reach our common goal of increased student competency.

The proposed minimum passing grade of C is currently defined as “average” student performance. While restructuring the current grading system may be time well spent, the impact on current GPA accountability systems will need to be considered. Expecting all students to be average or above in all subjects, with all teachers, in all circumstances, is an unattainable standard that is contrary to the goal of more thoughtfully measuring competency. We are concerned that among the unintended consequences of this proposal, a drastic increase in the high school dropout rate will occur. Even with the best and most comprehensive assistance possible, many students will still be unable to graduate, not because of their ability, motivation, or effort, but because we are using the wrong tools to measure and assist them.

While there are many other questions and concerns about the current proposal, we are confident that the USBE/USOE will work with local school districts to answer those questions and to provide the best possible options for the children of Utah. As one of forty local school districts which look to the State Board of Education for guidance and advocacy, we hope that the final version of the Performance Plus proposal will take these problems into account. We need all of our young people to be educated and competent to help build a brighter future for Utah.