



MEMO

TO: Board President Paul Widdison and WSD Board Members
FROM: Superintendent Gina Butters
Alicia Mitchell Curriculum & Instruction Director
Dr. Bryan Becherini Assessment & School Improvement Director
DATE: January 26, 2026
SUBJECT: Weber School District Literacy Overview

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to provide context for our upcoming presentation on district literacy progress. Recently, a narrative has surfaced among state leaders suggesting that Utah's education system—specifically in literacy—is underperforming relative to national peers. This presentation will utilize current data and relevant information to clarify Utah's standing and highlight how Weber School District's efforts align with our state's historical excellence.

Context: Weber's Elevate²⁸ vs. The "Mississippi Miracle"

While the "Mississippi Miracle" is frequently cited by state leaders as a model for Utah, a closer look at the **National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)** data reveals a more nuanced story:

- **Catching Up vs. Leading:** Mississippi's gains are commendable, but they primarily represent a state "catching up" to Utah. Utah has consistently ranked in the **top ten nationally** for 4th-grade reading for decades.
- **Long-Term Coherence:** While Mississippi's K–3 reforms have shown results, their 8th-grade scores remain near the bottom nationally. This reinforces Weber's commitment to a system-wide approach that ensures literacy growth carries through to secondary graduation.
- **U.S. News & World Report:** Utah is currently ranked as the **best state in the nation overall**. Education is the most heavily weighted factor in this methodology, and our district's performance is a key driver of that state-level success.
- **Utah's Per Pupil Spending:** Utah currently maintains a 2nd to last position in the allocation of per pupil spending. Utah is sitting at \$9,977 per student. Whereas the nationwide average for per pupil spending is \$17,192.

Exceptional ROI: High Outcomes, Low Spending

Utah continues to be the most fiscally efficient education system in the country. Data indicates that Utah produces **top-tier academic outcomes** while maintaining the lowest per-pupil spending in the nation. Weber School District remains a model of this "fiscally frugal, highly effective" approach, maximizing recent state investments to benefit our students.

Implementation of Senate Bill 127 (2022)

It is vital to recognize the timeline of the literacy reforms initiated by Senate Bill 127 (2022). Meaningful systemic change takes time:

- **Professional Learning:** We have moved aggressively to train our elementary educators and administrators in the Science of Reading (LETRS).
- **Curricular Investment:** Weber has dedicated significant resources and training to ensure our curriculum aligns with evidence-based practices.
- **Timeline:** Since these reforms are in their early years of implementation, the full impact on 4th-grade NAEP scores will emerge over the coming years as our current K–2 students matriculate. As shown through the Mississippi initiative between 2013 and 2022 that resulted in what is being dubbed the “Mississippi Miracle”, the state of Utah has had 3 years of implementation in Senate Bill 127 whereas Mississippi in year 14 of implementation.

Understanding “Reading on Grade Level”

Utah state legislature set the standard of Reading on Grade Level as measured by 3rd grade end-of-year Acadience at a score of 405 (Above Benchmark), which is a high standard and equates to about a 750 Lexile level. Translated into a percentile, this expectation places our 3rd grade reading scores near the 68th percentile if we were to utilize national norms. With the state expecting 70% of 3rd graders Reading on Grade Level, that is an extremely high standard which we are making gains towards meeting. As of the 24-25SY, 47% of 3rd graders met this expectation meaning that nearly half of our students are in the 68th percentile or higher based on national norms.

Moreover, a student not Reading on Grade Level, does not equate to the student being illiterate as recent rhetoric among Utah media outlets may have the average reader expect. In fact, Utah students are more literate than they were prior to the implementation of the Science of Reading, and the fruits of this labor will have a positive impact on our students.

Local Impact in Weber School District

Our district’s data reflects a positive trajectory. Through the combination of legislative support and local expertise, specifically in **Science of Reading training**, and due to the **expansion of full-day kindergarten** we are seeing measurable differences in student proficiency. Our foundation is strong, and our narrative should be one of continued improvement.

To put this into context lets compare 2022SY (Pre-LETRS) & 2025SY data for Weber School District:

	Well Below Benchmark		Below Benchmark		At Benchmark		Above Benchmark	
Grade	2022SY	2025SY	2022SY	2025SY	2022SY	2025SY	2022SY	2025SY
Kinder	14%	7%	20%	10%	30%	23%	37%	60%
1st	32%	25%	12%	10%	18%	15%	38%	50%
2nd	26%	24%	14%	11%	19%	18%	40%	47%
3rd	22%	22%	11%	10%	24%	21%	44%	47%

As you can see there have been significant gains, specifically in Kindergarten and 1st grade where our focus has been since the Fall of 2024. We fully anticipate to see these trends continue into our upper grades as cohorts of students who need less intensive literacy intervention move up. Based on 2026 Middle of Year data we are on track to see record high numbers of students in K-3 Reading on Grade Level, which again is a Utah set standard that is higher than other states.

Key Takeaway: The data does not support a narrative of underperformance. Weber School District continues to make educational gains, and maintain high standards even as we navigate new statewide instructional shifts.