



# The GEA Observer

September 2019

Vol. XLXVII Issue 37

## President's Reflections



Is it just my hopeful imagination, or was there a hint of cooling in the air the other day? Fall is upon us. As we settle in to our new routines with our new students, some things don't change. Additionally, every fall, we all must re-enroll in Granite District's insurance. If you have not completed your biometric screening, you can get it done at one of the October benefits fairs. On page 8 you'll find a flyer with scheduled dates, times, and locations. Also, watch for the email from the Benefits office that tells you how to schedule an appointment. The other ways to get this done are to take the form to your physician when you get a checkup, or to make an appointment at the District wellness center.

On page 6 of this issue, there is information about immunizations, which employees can get at the clinic for free. And the AdvoCats column on page 7 addresses the need to call ahead for an appointment.

Also in the AdvoCats— information on the dreaded fall surplus. This is on the (long) list of things you don't want to navigate by yourself. Call GEA if you are affected.

The article on page 5 is a useful and fun list of practical strategies for creating positive relationships in the classroom. It's perfect for this time of year, as we get to know a new group of students.

In last month's Observer, you will recall an article about the Legislature's Tax Reform Tax Force. We wanted to make you aware that there was a discussion underway about Utah's tax structure. This matters to schools because the bulk of our funding comes from the state. You can see in the graphic on page 2 that the state income tax is dedicated to the education fund. It is the only constitutionally guaranteed source for funding K-12 public schools, and it is used to help fund higher ed as well. This constitutional guarantee is a promise to the children of Utah, and should not be changed lightly.

We always say "tell your story" when you talk to your legislators about funding. Archer Birrell, Granite's 2018 Teacher of the Year, has given us a great example of a story that connects our underfunding of Utah schools with a particular student. Take some time to read about Archer's niece, and think about the stories of the kids you know, and how much potential they have. And then let's ask ourselves, as a state, how much potential we are leaving on the table in order to preserve our place as the state with the very lowest per-pupil funding in the nation.

Thank you again, GEA members, for all you do for the students in your class, and for the profession of education.

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### Dates to Remember:

—Tues., Sept. 17, 5:00 p.m., GSD School Board Study Session

—Tues. October 1, 7:00 p.m. GSD School Board Meeting

—Wed., October 9, 4:30 p.m. GEA AR Meeting

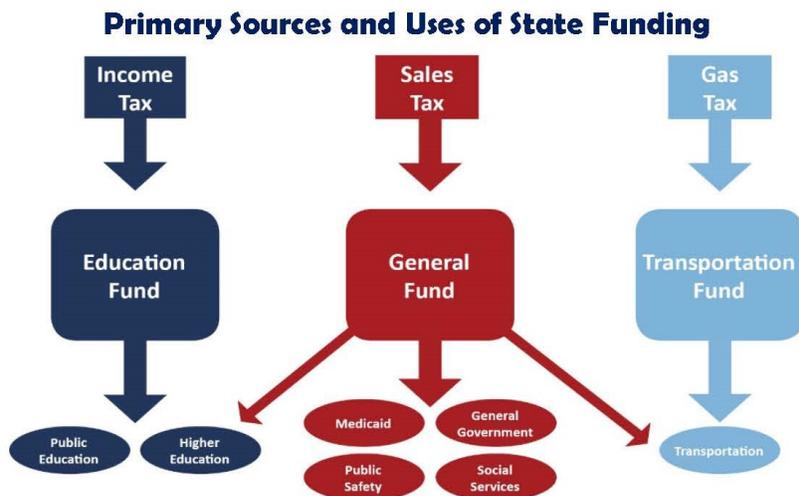
—(See last page for GSD Benefit Pair dates in October).

# Constitutional Guarantee to Fund Public Education

## Did You Know...

**Utah's Constitution guarantees 100% of the state's income tax goes to K-12 and higher education?**

The Utah State Constitution contains a guarantee made by the people of Utah to support the education of future generations of children.



Eliminating this constitutional guarantee, as some have proposed, would put K-12 resources at risk. Without the guarantee, our schoolchildren would be forced to compete for funding with all state expenditures, like social services, transportation and law enforcement, and also projects such as moving the Utah State Prison, the Lake Powell pipeline and the Inland Port.

### **Tax Reform Matters!**

The educators of UEA remain committed to ensuring student equity and opportunity in today's classrooms and for future generations. The Utah State Legislature is currently discussing major changes to the way it collects revenue and pays for state services, such as education. These changes will likely impact generations of students, so we must get this right.

**It is critical educator voices are heard!**

Learn more at  
[myUEA.org/TaxReform](http://myUEA.org/TaxReform)  
Complete the school checklist at  
[MySchoolMyVoice.nea.org](http://MySchoolMyVoice.nea.org)



# Educator Commentary

*Past Time to Increase Per-Pupil Funding to Support Students with Autism: One Student's Experience of Support in a Utah and Virginia School.*



Archer Birrell; Educator at Hillside Elementary, GEA Leader, and 2018 Granite District Teacher of the Year

In a recent conversation with my sister, Katy Adams, she compared her daughter's school experiences in Utah and Virginia: her daughter is on the Autism spectrum. As a Utah educator, that conversation left me feeling further concerned about our history of underfunding public schools in Utah, and asking **which children pay the greatest price for that reality in one of the most financially stable and profitable states in America.**

With my sister's permission, I now share some of her daughter's schooling experiences in Utah and Virginia. I write to illustrate the contrast between levels of student support in both states. These levels matter, because my sister left Utah last year to return to Virginia after growing weary of fighting for the sorts of systemic support that was already in place in Virginia, but missing in Utah's education system.

Katy discovered that her daughter would need development support when she was two years old. When contacting her local elementary school, Katy was pleased to discover that social and academic programs for special needs children were available for pre-kindergarten students. Not only were the programs easy to access, the level of skilled support and personal warmth from administration and faculty gave Katy confidence that her daughter would receive the best education possible for her needs.



Katy & Saidee Adams

There was a real sense of commitment to every child, regardless of their needs, and the use of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) was effective in making data driven decisions about what was best for her daughter's changing social and academic needs.

Back here in Utah, our state contributes generous amounts of funding for students; however, we are often among the lowest in per-pupil funding. That means some programs will be underfunded and some students will struggle to get what they need at school. My niece was among those who encountered a school system underprepared and underfunded to help her succeed in the classroom: my sister moved from Virginia to Utah in 2017.

When Katy enrolled her daughter in her local Utah school, she was informed that the school couldn't provide the same accommodations as her former IEP--such as providing the same individual aide time available in her Virginia school.

Soon into the school year, Katy noticed concerning problems with my niece at school that she had not encountered in Virginia. She watched as my niece slowly pulled into herself and became increasingly unhappy with each passing day. Without the same level of support she had in Virginia, her daughter could not keep up with her classroom expectations and academic

requirements. My sister recalled how her daughter would often stare into space, overwhelmed, and unable to complete the work in front of her. Already petite in size, she quickly lost ten pounds as she fell into a downward spiral of despair.

I asked Katy to explain more about the differences that led to this downward spiral. She shared three poignant reasons, including:

- My niece's school in Virginia capped classes to 21 students. Her teacher was able to give more attention and time to each child. Utah's class sizes are not capped, and teachers are often overwhelmed with large class sizes. It's not uncommon to see over 30 students in a classroom.
- My niece had three special education teachers for a school population of around 500 students. Each teacher focused on a specialty: autism, intellectual disabilities, or learning disabilities. The specialized support in autism and smaller special education class also helped my niece meet her schooling and learning needs.
- Katy also recalled about 15 aides working for the school's special education team in Virginia. My niece had a full day aide that worked with her and only two other students. Without this level of support in Utah, she was quickly falling further behind.

...(Continued Page 4)

# Educator Commentary: continued

*Past Time to Increase Per-Pupil Funding to Support Students with Autism: One Student's Experience of Support in a Utah and Virginia School.*

My sister is a dutiful parent and a true advocate for her child, and others with special needs. She has paid the price to know her rights and offer her support at school, too. She is a true advocate, parent volunteer, and champion of public education. She does her part, and expects the schools to do their part, equally well. After fighting for changes and support for her daughter in Utah and realizing that the system was not going to be responsive to her needs, she moved her family back to Virginia where her daughter could get the best support possible.

Since their return to Virginia schools, their daughter is once again blossoming and maturing, and succeeding at schooling and learning. The system there welcomed her by listening to her expertise and history and providing the necessary levels of support that have proven to work well with her daughter—something that did not happen in Utah.

Katy is kind, and quick to compliment the teachers she worked with in Utah. They truly cared, but simply had too many students and not enough options for addressing their work requirements. There is only so much one teacher can do, and where the needs are greatest the resources

must be equal to those needs, or teachers, children, and families suffer. Utah teachers need more support, including programs and personnel to meet the needs of all learners. This is old news; but still a present-day problem.



Superhero Saidee

In these matters, Utah has far to grow. The money is there; thus, it is the will to dedicate funding to these needs that require our commitments, beyond the special interests of law makers, lobbyists, entrepreneurs, and such. The schooling and learning demands of special needs children should not be sacrificed at the altars of special interests. We can do better than that. We have to. Our good economy may bring people to Utah, but our schools should not be the reason they leave.



*Do you have a story or commentary you would like to share? Please submit your letters to:*

*[cindy.formeller@myuea.org](mailto:cindy.formeller@myuea.org)*

# How to be Relational with Students—Safely

Following are strategies new and veteran teachers can use to strengthen an appropriate connection with students:

- ◇ Set responsible behavior limits for everyone and be fair when you enforce these limits.
- ◇ Agree with your students as often as you can.
- ◇ Use a kind voice when you speak with your students.
- ◇ Listen to all your students. Don't assume that your students are at fault when there is a problem.
- ◇ Make sure to say each student's name at least once in a class period.
- ◇ Take the time to get to know your students as people.
- ◇ Stress the things that you and your students have in common: likes/dislikes, goals, dreams, etc.
- ◇ When a student speaks to you, stop and listen.
- ◇ If your students are playing a sport or performing in a concert, go and show your appreciation for their hard work.
- ◇ Focus on your students' strong points and not on their weaknesses.
- ◇ Use good manners when you deal with your students and insist that they do the same.

- ◇ When students confide in you, follow up. For example, if students have told you that they were worried about a test in another class, take the time to ask about how they did.
- ◇ Be very clear with your students that you want to help them achieve their dreams.
- ◇ Ask about a student's family. If you know that someone is ill, show your concern.
- ◇ Create opportunities for success every day.
- ◇ Give your students plenty of opportunities to share their ideas and opinions with you.
- ◇ Show your sense of humor. Laugh when really funny things happen in class—particularly when they happen to you.

- ◇ Speak to every student every day. Leave no one out of class discussions.
- ◇ Write notes to your students. Use plenty of stickers and write positive comments on their papers.
- ◇ Be generous and tactful in your praise.
- ◇ Pay attention to your students' health. Be prompt about homebound work.
- ◇ Use this sentence to convey your concern: "What can I do to help you?"
- ◇ Talk with students when you notice a change in their behavior. For example, if normally serious students seem to be neglecting their work, find out why.
- ◇ Talk about trust with your students. Make it part of the conversations in your classroom.



Thompson, J.G. (2002) *First-year teacher's survival kit. Ready-to-use strategies, tools & activities for meeting the challenges of each school day*. Center of Applied Research in Education. Paramus, N.J.

# Healthy Lifestyles: Granite District Wellness Clinic



**Schedule an Appointment:**  
Download the My Premise Health app or visit [mypremisehealth.com](http://mypremisehealth.com) or call 801-964-WELL (9355)

**Address:**  
4163 S. 3200 West  
West Valley City, UT 84119

**Hours of Operation:**  
Monday – Friday, 7 a.m. – 7 p.m.  
Saturday, 8 a.m. – 1 p.m.

**Topic: Immunizations**

In 2016 outbreaks of preventable diseases were spreading across the nation. Utah was not immune to increased outbreaks of measles, mumps, and whooping cough in public schools. The Salt Lake County Board of Health created a regulation requiring all public school employees to be vaccinated against preventable communicable diseases. Granite School District created an [immunization policy](#) outlining state requirements.

All employees are to maintain proof of immunization for MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella), Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, and acellular pertussis, and Varicella (chickenpox). You can find your immunization records from your doctor, pharmacy, or health department where you received the vaccine. If you were born before 1957, it is important to have the MMR vaccine again as immunity lessens over the years.

The Salt Lake County Board of Health has [exemption forms](#) available for those who wish to apply for a medical, personal, or religious exemption to vaccinations.

Should an outbreak occur in your school, you may be requested to provide immunization records. If you do not have current records, you will be excused from work until the SL Board of Health approves your return. If you are excluded from entering the school during a communicable disease outbreak, you will be able to utilize leave benefits you have accumulated.

**Please note:** employees who are enrolled in one of the District’s insurance plans may visit the Granite District Wellness Center for free immunizations. Call ahead for an appointment.

## GEA Members Speak Out

“It is a frightening time to be an educator. Individuals are being proposed to lead education, both nationally and locally, that are a threat to public education. What is so disappointing about this, is that public education is what America relies on to make America the “Land of Opportunity.” If we take away support from public education, we have effectively taken away our future. That’s a very scary prospect.”

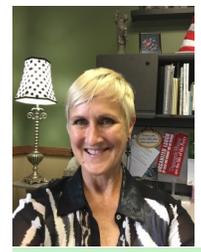
—Caitlin Thomas, GEA Member and Elementary Educator



# GEA Directors, Star Orullian and Cindy Formeller—Your “AdvoCats”



Star Orullian



Cindy Formeller



## Dear AdvoCats,

How do I use my sick leave without hurting my colleagues in a substitute shortage? I come to school too sick to teach just so that my fellow teachers don't have to cover my class because a sub canceled on them!

Signed: Caring Colleague

## Dear Caring Colleague,

Yowl! I understand your dilemma, believe me. If only substitutes were as abundant as feral cats in an open field!

One way to ensure your colleagues are supported when you need a sick day is to **call into subfinder before 6:30 a.m. of the day you are taking sick leave.** If you do this one thing, and a substitute ends up canceling, at least your colleagues covering your class will be paid a stipend. Stay home if you're ill—self care for all Cool Cats!

## Dear AdvoCats,

The District has been strongly advertising the Granite Wellness Center since last May. I was really

excited to have the option to go to the clinic and save on doctor co-pay and prescriptions, but every time I tried to go, there were no openings! Gah! What's the use of having this great benefit when we can't seem to get an appointment!

Signed: Frustrated

## Dear Frustrated,

Like all great ideas, the clinic is experiencing a good problem to have—abundant usage. Granite District, in partnership with Premise Health, is in the process of hiring another nurse practitioner, a physician, and a full-time social worker. In November there should also be a physical therapist on site. By hiring additional staff, it is hoped that this will help ease the frustration with booking an appointment.

Don't give up hope—try to plan ahead to schedule an appointment since there are only a few urgent care openings each day. The rest are scheduled ahead of time.

The District hopes to have the Wellness Center up to purr-fect order in no time!

## Dear AdvoCats,

I really hate this time of year—you know, surplus! Every year it seems, my school principal, along with all of us, hold our breath that student enrollment comes in high enough that we won't have to lose any of our beloved staff. What are my protections as a GEA member who may be facing surplus?

Signed: Worried

## Dear Worried,

Like everything education, teachers are held subject to federal, state, and local funding. October 1 is the date when all student enrollment needs to be reported to the state. Each school is given funding based on projected enrollment and principals hire teachers based on what they hope will be student enrollment. As happens, students move or leave the district, leaving too large a margin between students and hired teachers. When this happens, the District moves teachers to another school/position as enrollment settles. In the fall, in order to disrupt as few classrooms as possible, teachers at each affected grade level or program are offered the chance to volunteer to surplus, or the teachers affected are considered based on endorsements, credentials, seniority, etc.). If you have been surplus, contact GEA right away. We will help you submit your form with your top three choices for placement and work closely with Granite HR department to ensure you receive at least one of your top choices. We have had good success in partnering with Granite to ensure this move is as easy as possible.



# OPEN

# ENROLLMENT

## Sept 30 – Oct 16

### IMPORTANT INFORMATION

\$50 Late Fee will be charged to employees who fail to waive or complete their 2020 elections during open enrollment. Open Enrollment will end October 16, 5:00pm (MST).

Every employee is required to waive or re-enroll insurance benefits during the mandatory on-line open enrollment period (Sept 30 – Oct 16, 2019) to continue insurance benefits for the 2020 plan year. YOU MUST WAIVE or RE-ENROLL COVERAGE at [www.infinityhr.com](http://www.infinityhr.com).

## Benefit Fairs

**GEC – Auditorium A - 10/2/19**  
3-6pm, 2500 S. State Street

**HUNTER HIGH - 10/8/19**  
3-6pm, 4200 S. 5600 W.

**GEC – Auditorium A - 10/10/19**  
3-6pm, 2500 S. State Street

**TAYLORSVILLE HIGH - 10/14/19**  
3-7pm, 5225 S. Redwood Rd

### ROAD TO BENEFIT FAIRS

#### Services Available

- Online enrollment support
- Enrollment questions answered
- Carrier representatives will be available
- Bio-Metric Health Screenings (by appt.)
- Free Flu shot for employees
- Prize Drawings

**Mandatory Online Enrollment**



GEA\_Utah



Our page is: GEA

We also invite you to check out our website:

[WWW.GEA-UT.ORG](http://WWW.GEA-UT.ORG)