

Hello, my name is Larry Bergeson, superintendent of schools for Washington County School District, and current president of the Utah School Superintendents Association. I stand here today **representing the combined voice of all 41 school district superintendents**, as well as that of the other organizations I share the podium with today.

Normally I would begin by thanking our elected officials for how they have supported public education in the past; however today, **I am dumbfounded at the deception and bullying taking place as they attempt to force through HB 215!** This process they are taking to remove the rules and safeguards and taking away opportunity for input and discussion is a violation of the trust given them by the voters of this great State; the same voters who have clearly voiced their opposition to giving public taxpayer dollars to private schools with zero accountability! These actions of those involved are more representative of a dictatorship rather than a democracy, even amongst themselves; infused with bullying and intimidation.

I must ask, what have we in public education done to deserve this?

1. We have the strongest economy of any state in the entire nation...and where did these local business leaders get their education? From Utah public schools!
2. Our students regularly out perform their counterparts from across the country on standardized tests, even though our funding is a fraction of other states.
3. Utah was recognized as the # 1 state for teachers to teach in, in recent national surveys.

Again I must ask, why a systemic overhaul of this nature to a system that has such a successful history?!

We have been told public education is a “one size fits all” system. How can this be so with such a variety of opportunities for children? **Our schools offer choices that span all learning abilities**, with advanced concurrent enrollment classes, career & technical education pathways for children, and interventionists to help every child learn at their own pace. Already our most at-risk children do not have the means to access private education, and this voucher will further distance them as they still will not have sufficient to cover the “gap” in cost, meanwhile their wealthier peers will have chances to get further ahead by using taxpayer funds to supplement their schooling.

Then, to attach a teacher compensation bill, along with a voucher bill, is clearly a tactic of bribery to those educators who work tirelessly for Utah’s students. We applaud the efforts of both the Governor and legislature to increase the pay for teachers, they are definitely most deserving, but connecting this pay increase to school vouchers is both demeaning and inappropriate to teachers and all support personnel. **They simply deserve more respect than this!**

In the end we fear similar non-transparent tactics will be used by some to remove the guaranteed constitutional earmark for public education; thereby taking away the assurance of adequate funding for Utah's children through public taxpayer dollars. We have a long-standing relationship of trust and cooperation between educational groups and the legislature, but that relationship has taken a **HUGE** hit with the recent actions taken on Jan. 13. Our children...YOUR children deserve better than this.

We do recognize and appreciate the few elected officials who have spoken against this unethical process happening. They are the few who have visited our schools and recognize the positive things taking place in the classroom. We encourage more of our legislators to stand up for Utah's voters and please represent us with integrity and character. **Utah, you deserve better from your elected officials** and we call on all citizens from throughout the state to contact their legislators and voice your concerns over HB 215.