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## Utah's school funding 'paradox' questioned

Public schools: Utah Foundation released eight groups' views on problem of taxes, budget

**Salt Lake Tribune**

Foundation forum scheduled

The Utah Foundation's forum on education finance and reform will be Sept. 7 from 8 to 10 a.m. at the Hilton Salt Lake City Center at 225 S. West Temple in Salt Lake City. The cost is \$25 for Utah Foundation members; \$35 for others. Details about the event and the position papers are available at <http://www.utahfoundation.org>.

By Celia R. Baker  
The Salt Lake Tribune

Ideas for funding public education in Utah are not scarce - even if dollars are. The Utah Foundation on Monday released position papers from eight groups involved in the struggle over how to pay for educating Utah's many children. The proposed solutions echo the fable of the blind men and the elephant - each stakeholder sees a part of the problem, but from its own perspective.

The position papers' release precedes a public forum centered on education finance and reform to be held in September.

The Utah Foundation, a public policy research group, last April released a study showing how changes in taxing and budget policies have caused a decline over the past decade in the proportion of Utahns' personal incomes that goes toward funding public education. As a result, Utah's well-known disparity between high taxpayer investment and low per-pupil funding no longer exists, it said.

Now, instead of high tax effort yielding low funding, Utah simply has low funding with a

below-average effort, according to the report, meaning the "Utah paradox" has given way to what the Foundation terms "paradox lost."

Stephen Kroes, executive director of the Utah Foundation, said his group aimed to gather many perspectives, ensuring that conservative voices such as Utah Taxpayer Association and Parents for Choice in Education would be heard, along with representatives of the education community like the Utah Education Association.

"We don't have any skin in the game," Kroes said. "We're not advocating any particular solution. We just want to be sure a good robust conversation on education funding occurs . . . We'd like to have some sort of solution come out of the process that began with us highlighting this issue."

Here are some proposals for addressing public education funding woes in Utah:

1 **The Utah State Board of Education** wants a voter referendum on increasing and protecting revenues for public and higher education.

1 **The Utah Taxpayers Association** suggests expanding the number of charter schools and providing private school vouchers for low income students and merit pay for top-performing teachers.

1 **The Utah Education Association** advocates avoidance of tax cuts and opposes enactment of laws that would allow state funding to help pay for private school tuition.

1 **The Utah Association of Public Charter Schools** calls for funds to fully follow each student to whichever school his or her parents choose and for development of a new model for charter school facility financing.

1 **Commissioner of High Education Richard Kendall** urges greater investment in English and math literacy, smaller class sizes and better-trained teachers. He opposes stronger earmarking of revenue for K-12 schools.

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