

Davis Education Association
2010 Utah State House of Representatives
Candidate Questionnaire

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1. Please tell us about yourself and why you have decided to run for the Utah House of Representatives. [Answer: I am running to defend and preserve those qualities that make our community and our state the very best place to raise a family. I bring to the task dedication, values in common with our community, and a lifetime of experience in the public and private sector, including six years with the Reagan Education Department in Washington working with Secretary T.H. Bell and Secretary William Bennett. For most of my college career, I worked toward becoming a teacher. My life ultimately took me a different direction, but I have a great love for education and thoroughly enjoy volunteer teaching opportunities. Find out more at \[www.jim4utah.com\]\(http://www.jim4utah.com\).](#)

2. Do you believe that public schools are adequately funded? If you do not believe they are adequately funded, what changes should be made to provide appropriate financial support for quality public schools? [Answer: I believe they are funded as well as they can be under the current financial circumstances. Changes that should be made right now include eliminating narrow state mandates to school districts for special instructional programs. The money from these programs should be put into the WPU where districts and individual schools will have more say on how it is used in the classroom. Eliminating these programs will not keep districts and individual schools from offering enrichment programs, but it should reduce administrative overhead both at individual schools and at the district. That would result in more money in the classroom to address teacher pay and classroom size. I would also recommend we think about ways to get teachers onto 12-month contracts if they desire. More on that in #4 below.](#)

3. If another voucher or tuition tax credit bill is introduced in the legislature would you support another such effort, or would you oppose it? **Answer:** I would oppose it unless it responded to the legitimate concerns raised by educators during the referendum debate. Among those legitimate objections were a concern that the program start as a pilot project, not all at once, that it be targeted only to families that otherwise have no choice, and that public schools be held harmless permanently when a student leaves, not just for five years.
4. What would you do to retain quality educators in Utah? **Answer:** Eliminating narrow state mandates as noted in my response to #2 above will allow more of state funding to find its way into the WPU and thus into the classroom. That will make modest pay increases a possibility if districts so choose. We should also look for ways to enable teachers that wish to teach year round to do so. It would require creative scheduling to make this happen but would allow teachers that wanted to work a longer contract to earn a proportionally higher salary at no additional cost to taxpayers. Such an approach would also help with teacher shortages. I've written more on this on my website. We must also work with educators to come up with a performance-based pay system everyone can agree to so that the very best teachers have an additional financial incentive to stick around. It appears there were some meaningful steps in this direction in the just-concluded legislative session.
5. What would you do to attract new teachers in Utah, considering the fact that the legislature this year significantly reduced the retirement benefit for future teachers? **Answer:** The ultimate effect of the retirement change will be that districts will spend less on benefits. School districts would be wise to put the difference into raising overall salary schedules for new teachers. Competitive salaries, more than anything, will help attract new teachers. As a legislator, I will be conscious of this fact and will work to ensure that the state does not unfairly characterize such increases as a windfall. We must give teachers more today if we do not have as rich a retirement benefit. As state lawmakers, we must recognize and support that necessity. Of course the ideas I've mentioned above about focusing state funds on the WPU and exploring 12-month contracts will also contribute to our ability to pay new (and existing) teachers a wage closer to the market for top-cadre recruits.
6. Did the legislature go far enough in enacting ethical reforms this session? If not, what is left to be done? **Answer:** No. They still need to adopt a more detailed and comprehensive code of conduct.

7. How would you evaluate the Utah State legislature's overall performance and leadership this year? Answer: In educator's terms, I would give them an A-. Cooperation on the budget was stunning. Governor Herbert didn't want any cuts in public education funding. That would have been a remarkable achievement. I suppose the final result was as good as could be hoped for under the circumstances. Clearly, a small decrease in overall funding is actually larger when you consider the added 11,000 students expected in public schools. However, the claim is that the WPU will remain the same. If we are able to make good on that promise within the appropriated funding, that is good news indeed. That would mean the basic funding in the classroom will be proportionate in 2010-11 to what it is currently. Also, the legislature made meaningful improvements in the long-term stability of funding sources for public education, moving many millions of dollars away from one-time money to ongoing funding sources. I have so far only addressed educational issues, but I would also note that the legislature made significant progress on health insurance reform, malpractice tort reform, and many other issues. In addition, both the Governor and the Legislature worked to maintain or enhance access to state school trust lands. These actions will ultimately enhance long-term public school funding. High profile scandals caused unfortunate distractions, but other than public relations black marks, work went on undeterred.