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September 25, 2017

Utah State Board of Education  
250 East 500 South  
Salt Lake City, UT 84111

RE: R277-700 The Elementary and Secondary School General Core

Dear Board Chair Huntsman and Members of the Board:

On behalf of over 18,000 Utah educators, the Utah Education Association offers these comments on R277-700 and asks the Board to reconsider this rule at the October 12 Board meeting and vote to delay implementation until the concerns listed below are addressed.

1. The rule eliminates credit units for all courses in grades 7 and 8. But, the rule does not establish any standard by which a student must now demonstrate “mastery” or “complete” a course. As required by legislation, the Board is currently conducting a pilot to identify best practices and develop a coherent framework for competency-based learning in Utah beginning in the 2018-19 school year. Elimination of credit unit requirements should not occur until the pilot is complete and the Board develops a framework for competency-based learning. Focusing on local control without ensuring that minimal standards and guidelines are in place does not protect student success and equity across the state.
2. The rule narrows the curriculum by eliminating the requirement that all students complete courses in PE, health, college and career awareness, and the arts. The rule continues to require that all students complete English, math, science and history courses. However, the Board never established any criteria or rationale to determine why some courses should be required and other courses should be optional. Further, the Board has not determined how they will ensure equitable student access to learning once many courses become optional. Finally, the Board has not sought community input on what courses are considered essential and should be required for every student in grades 7 and 8. Prior to eliminating required courses, the Board should engage in a clear decision-making process about balancing the value of required courses for all students with local flexibility and must include parents, students, educators and education stakeholders in the discussion. This process should include how any proposed changes will improve educational outcomes for students and how the impact on student learning will be determined.

The Board heard many concerns from education and community organizations, educators, parents and community members at the public hearing on September 20. Given the overwhelming concerns and questions that still exist, it is in the best interest of students and our education system to delay implementation of this rule.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Heidi Matthews".

Heidi Matthews

President, Utah Education Association

cc: Sydnee Dickson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Patty Norman, Deputy Superintendent of Student Achievement  
Roger Donohoe, UEA Vice President  
Lisa Nentl-Bloom, UEA Executive Director  
Sara Jones, UEA Director of Education Excellence and Government Relations