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Contact: Ryan Bartlett, director of communications

605-201-7950 • ryan.bartlett@schools.utah.gov

Utah Recognized in New National Study Examining the Future of High School

SALT LAKE CITY – A new 50-state analysis examining how well high school policies prepare students for college, careers, and life after graduation highlights Utah as a state making meaningful progress in aligning education with the opportunities students will encounter after they leave the classroom.

The report, *The Future Is High School: A Strategy for State Leaders to Accelerate Learning, Work, and American Renewal*, was released by XQ Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization focused on rethinking high school education.

As expectations for graduates continue to evolve, states are increasingly focused on ensuring that high school experiences connect academic learning with real-world opportunity. Utah has taken steps to support that goal by maintaining high standards while providing schools and communities flexibility in how students demonstrate readiness for life after graduation.

“Our students deserve a high school diploma with a redefined value proposition. That means aligning public education, higher education, and industry so every graduate leaves with real skills, real opportunity, and a clear path forward,” said Governor Spencer J. Cox. “Utah is making that strategic choice to lead the nation, and we will keep pushing to ensure every student is prepared to succeed in the world they’re stepping into.”

The study points to several areas where Utah has established supportive conditions for student success, including:

- **Expanding opportunities for personalized learning**, allowing students to demonstrate mastery and earn credit through competency-based approaches.
- **Strengthening postsecondary pathways**, including direct admissions initiatives that connect graduates with Utah's public institutions of higher education.
- **Increasing access to college-level coursework** through the Statewide Online Education Program.
- **Supporting real-world learning**, such as work-based experiences and youth apprenticeships that help students connect classroom learning to career exploration.

“Utah’s success in preparing students for the future is rooted in our commitment to academic rigor and strong partnerships with families and local industry,” said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Molly Hart. “We are focused on empowering every student to graduate with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to reach their full potential and thrive in whatever endeavor they choose next.”

While policy provides the framework, the report underscores that true success depends on continued collaboration between educators, families, and community partners. This collective effort ensures that innovative approaches result in expanded opportunities and clear pathways forward for every learner.

“States have more opportunity, responsibility, and authority over public education than at any time in recent memory, and Utah is showing the entire country what's possible when leaders focus on high school,” said Russlynn Ali, CEO of XQ Institute. “With 232,000 job openings to fill each year, Utah isn't waiting around to unlock new opportunities for students—because they've realized that high school is the future of everything.”

XQ Institute plans to release this analysis biennially to track how states continue to evolve their approach to preparing students for the future. The state report for Utah can be accessed at: <https://policyactions.xqinstitute.org/state-progress/utah>.

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