

TRANSCRIPT

Policy Forum Opening Remarks

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EVENT TITLE *Every Day Counts Policy Forum: Developing Utah Solutions to Increase Attendance and Improve Student Outcomes*

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for your patience for allowing a bit of a late start. We're delighted that the Lieutenant Governor was able to arrive and get here as quickly as he did, considering he was clear up in Wasatch County this morning. So we'd like to get started at this point in time. We're so happy to see so many of you here, and to welcome you to this forum today. We have from across the state ... we have a wide variety of interest groups interested in ensuring the success of our students—having attendance be a portion of that success.

My name is Ann White and I'm currently the Interim Director of Federal Programs at the Utah State Office of Education. And I'll be guiding us through today as we move through the schedule, and you will have a copy of that agenda in your folders with you.

So we have that coalition that has been brought together from across the state, and that coalition is really an important part of our work at the Utah State Office of Education. And we'll be mentioning those groups, but particularly REL West, WestEd, Voices for Utah Children, United Way, folks at the Utah State Office of Education in their various responsibilities and staff. So we appreciate those groups for coming together and helping us with the committee that has been put together that we foresee moving on in the future.

Today's events promise to be very interesting and exciting. You're going to have presentations by nationally recognized experts in this area in the field. Some of you may have attended, as I did, the forum last year on chronic absenteeism, and gave a lot of us an opportunity to hear Hedy Chang. You're going to have the opportunity to hear her again today, and this particular forum grew out of the recommendations from that meeting that we had last year, where people said, "Now we're learning about chronic absenteeism, what kinds of policies and what can be done to increase student achievement and student attendance at school?" And they actually go hand in hand, because we all know that attending school really does matter, and that, confirmed by research, if students are chronically absent early in their education—K-1, 2, 3—that their reading achievement is ... their reading scores go down a great deal if they are chronically absent and not in school. We also know that by the eighth grade, math scores are

also affected by absenteeism in school, and we're going to hear a lot more about this from speakers later today.

So we have goals that are several-fold. First of all, we want to all increase our understanding of what causes absenteeism, its prevalence, the benefits of having regular attendance in school; so one of our goals is just increasing our understanding and our knowledge. We want to learn from experts—from not only here in Utah but from around the country—who will offer strategies and policies that may help. And we're going to, in this particular forum, work together to make policy and practice recommendations that aim to boost attendance rates and increase student achievement at all of our schools.

But before we get started, I have a few housekeeping things that need to be taken into account. First of all, the idea for this particular forum, as I mentioned quite earlier, came from several sources, including the office of our governor, the state superintendent and his superintendency staff, and many of you here in the room. But I also want to note that it also grew out of that meeting that we had a year ago, and what educators and community members can do to help increase attendance. Since schools can't do it alone, we know that today's event is the next step forward, and much more geared toward policy than last year's event was, and that's why we've invited all of you here. You're a very targeted audience. We've included a lot of leaders from around the state, and as I look across the audience, many of you have been colleagues and friends of mine for a number of years, and I know your commitment to the education of our students.

Looking briefly at the agenda, you'll see that we do have a number of presenters in the morning, followed by, then, a panel presentation on policies that are working here in Utah and other states. We'll go to lunch next door, and we have a wonderful guest speaker who will be with you at that time. We'll then reconvene later this afternoon and apply what we've learned in the morning sessions and talks to move toward something that we can do for state and local policy, and moving that forward.