

Thanks for Talking!

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Written by: Maurice F. Hickey



Everyone at Voices for Utah Children would like to express our gratitude to everyone

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that met with us on the “Talking Kid’s Tour 2019”. We shared information from our KIDS COUNT County data pages with everyone and reminded them about the upcoming 2020 Census and how an undercount could affect their communities. We received so much informative and insightful feedback.

We had the opportunity to meet with local elected officials, school district leadership, health departments, Head Start programs and community organizations that I want to share some of the key takeaways we have learned to date.

- Mental Health is a major issue facing our youth population. We are seeing an increase of trauma statewide and we do not have an adequate number of providers in any county. We heard stories of children as young as four being in crisis.
- Addiction is having a major impact on our youth. We confirmed that opioids are still an issue, but that meth was back in a large number of communities. The impact on the children and communities is devastating.
- Childcare is a major issue. There is a clear lack of affordable and accessible space statewide. A year of childcare for children 0-3 currently costs more than an average year of college in Utah.
- Insurance coverage for our youth is a problem on a number of fronts. Our current Medicaid coverage does not guarantee continuous coverage and the average child is only enrolled for 11 months annually. We also saw a 22% increase in the overall number of uninsured children in Utah.
- Communities are funding Pre-K programs with a combination of grant funds and local financial supports. Many communities would like to expand their programs but do not have the resources.
- There is a growing demand for Optional Extended Day Kindergarten. This is being driven by both educators and the economy. There are more families where both adults are working and the need for an extended day is critical.
- The majority of the counties expressed serious concerns regarding Tax Reform. They are worried that there will be an increased burden placed on local school boards to make up funding gaps, which they really cannot afford. There is also a concern that the increased gas and grocery tax will hurt those most in need. They acknowledge that the credits help, but they are more concerned about the immediate impact of the increased costs.
- We learned of so much great work being done locally to meet the challenges outlined. There are tremendous partnerships being formed in many counties and regions. We felt privileged to be able to spend time and learn from these leaders

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- Many innovative programs being piloted are transferrable and we are in the process of connecting some of the groups. A few examples are having dental and diabetic screenings at local food banks, bringing health care directly to Title One schools that qualify, and Identifying grants and funding sources for Early Childhood Education.

We have been to 25 Counties and are planning to continue holding meetings into the New Year . It has been invaluable to go directly into the local communities and meet so many wonderful people. The work being done on the ground has been truly inspirational and motivating. I was asked at a gathering- "What is the good news"- to which I replied that the people in the room were the good news.

Our state is fortunate to have so many good people trying to do good work on behalf of our children. We are thankful to have spent time with them and look forward to continuing to be their VOICE!

Thanks,

Moe Hickey

CEO

Voices for Utah Children