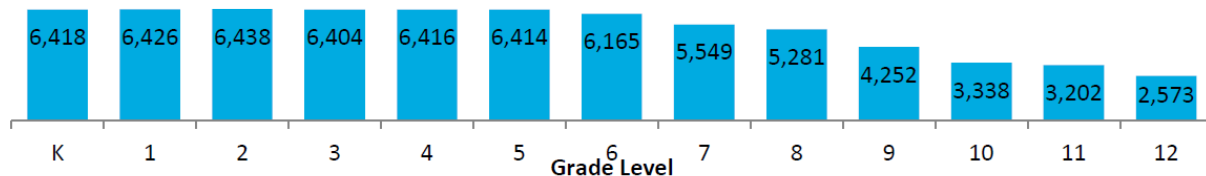


Charter Schools

With the US Department of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos promoting charter schools, and the recent closure of Utah charter schools Alianza Academy, Wasatch Institute of Technology and Kairos Academy, I'd like to provide the public with some additional information relating to charter schools. Charter schools began in Utah in 1999 and are considered public schools funded with taxpayer's dollars. Charter schools have their own governing boards, which are usually appointed, operate independently from local school districts, and are governed by the Utah State Board of Education and the State Charter School Board. With the separation in governance from school district, charters have their own curriculum, staffing, organization, and budgets, which allows them to teach curriculum specific to a particular school which many times includes a focus in a specific area such as math, science, art or other specialized subjects. A charter school you may be familiar with is Tuacahn High School, which has focus on performing arts. During the 2016-2017 school year there were 127 charter schools operating in 22 districts and enroll approximately 71,494 students. The following graph represents student enrollments by grade in Utah charter schools during the 2016-2017 school year.

2016-17 Charter School Enrollment by Grade Level



Source: (Utah's Public Charter School Report, 2017).

You will notice the number of charter school students encompass mainly the elementary school grades K-6 at which point many of these students transition back into district schools to receive their high school diplomas. When students enroll in charter schools, the funding follows the student from the district to the charters and has been tied to students place of residence. For example, if a student claimed residency in Kanab, and attended Tuacahn, the state funding for this student is diverted from Kane District and is distributed to the Charter. Additionally, charters have been funded differently than district schools have been, which has created controversies between the two organizations. In order to address the funding discrepancies, the Utah Legislature recently passed legislation to fund both district schools and charters in the same way, which created a line item on tax roles. Utah code 53A-1a-513 states, "Beginning with the taxable year beginning on January 1, 2017, the state shall annually impose a charter school levy...the charter school levy shall be separately stated on a tax notice". Because of this legislative change, all districts including Kane County property owners will see a line item on their taxes titled Charter School Levy where the rate has been set by the State Tax Commission.