

New UWLP Report Shows Mixed Progress for Women Leaders in Utah's K–12 Education System

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The [Utah Women & Leadership Project](#) (UWLP) at Utah State University released a new research and policy brief, [The Status of Women Leaders in Public Education \(K–12\): A 2026 Update](#), providing the most comprehensive look to date at women's leadership across Utah's public and charter schools.

Susan Madsen, founding director of the UWLP and sole author of the report, said it reveals modest gains in some leadership roles, declines in others, and persistent gaps that continue to shape the state's educational landscape.

"The report updates earlier UWLP reports published in 2014, 2017, and 2022, and examines whether Utah has made measurable progress in advancing women into key leadership positions," she said. "It also compares Utah's progress with national trends."

Key Findings

Women now hold a slight majority of leadership roles statewide. Across all state and district leadership categories, women comprise 51.3% of leaders—up from 50% in 2022. Yet the distribution varies significantly by role.

State-level leadership remains strong. Women hold 66.7% of seats on the Utah State Board of Education, an increase from 2022. Women also occupy 60.9% of leadership positions within the Utah State Board of Education's organizational structure.

District superintendent roles show slow improvement but remain inequitable. Women make up 18.2% of Utah's district superintendents, a 6 percentage-point increase since 2022, but far below the national rate of 35.8%.

Principal and assistant principal roles continue to rise. Women now hold 53.3% of principal and assistant principal positions statewide, up from 50.8% in 2022 and 43.2% in 2017. Growth is strongest in elementary schools, where 66.4% of principals and 75.4% of assistant principals are women.

Charter school leadership is a bright spot. Women comprise 72.1% of charter school directors and more than half of charter principals and vice principals.

"Progress has improved in some areas and slowed in others, but persistent barriers remain – including bias among school boards and self-perceptions among women regarding leadership readiness," Madsen said. "And while women make up three-quarters of K–12 teachers nationwide, only 30% of superintendents are women, up from 13.1% in 2000, but still far from equal representation."

Strengthening Utah's Leadership Pipeline

Helpful leadership development programs are available to Utah educators, including the Utah Principal Supervisors' Academy, Principal Partnership Networks, and statewide associations. There is also a broader shift in Utah's policy environment following the passage of HB 261 ("Equal Opportunity Initiatives"), which restricts diversity, equity, and inclusion programs across public institutions.

"Whether this shift has affected women's advancement in state government remains to be seen," said Madsen. "Gender-diverse leadership teams make institutions more effective, innovative, and responsive. Research continues to show that diverse and inclusive leadership teams produce more creative, innovative, productive, and effective results."

From educator burnout to rising youth mental health concerns, Madsen said Utah faces extraordinary challenges that require strong leadership.

"Finding, preparing, and supporting future educational leaders is imperative for Utah's future," she said.

The [Utah Women & Leadership Project](#) strengthens the impact of Utah girls and women through research, resources, and statewide engagement. Its premier initiative – [A Bolder Way Forward](#) – creates opportunities for Utahns to learn, collaborate, and drive meaningful change across 18 areas of focus. For more information, visit the UWLP website at utwomen.org. The UWLP is affiliated with [USU Extension](#).

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