

The Salt Lake Tribune

Singapore math bill gets go-ahead

SB 159 Some oppose method because of cost



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Some lawmakers want Utah to follow the lead of a tiny Asian country when it comes to teaching math.

A senate committee Friday morning approved a bill, SB 159, that would allow districts and charter schools to apply for grants to use the Singapore method to teach math. Singapore is one of the highest scoring countries on international math tests.

In Singapore, math students are encouraged to think visually and develop mental strategies to solve problems. They're discouraged from using paper to compute math problems.

"We seek to create a school system that will produce a significant percentage of the scientists and engineers needed by our country," said Sen. Howard Stephenson, R-Draper, who is sponsoring the bill.

SB 159 would offer competitive grants to districts that come up with plans for teaching Singapore math in kindergarten through sixth grade and some secondary school classes. The bill would also require districts to train teachers in Singapore math and offer grants to colleges and other groups to train mathematicians to be teachers.

"I believe this will raise the math abilities of everyone in the state," said Aaron Bertram, chairman of the University of Utah mathematics department.

The bill passed 5-0 despite opposition from Steven Peterson with the Utah School Boards Association and Utah School Districts Association. He opposed the bill because of its cost: \$1.75 million.

Lawmakers are already considering cuts of up to 15 percent for education next school year to deal with low state revenues.

"We feel like whatever money we have should go to help the deficit," Peterson said. "This isn't the time for new programs."

Stephenson, however, said a budget deficit shouldn't mean a halt to educational progress in Utah. Hugo Rossi, a retired University of Utah math professor, said Utah has a chance to become a leader in math with a program like Singapore math. Betram and Rossi were part of a group that spent months last year looking at ways to improve math instruction in Utah. That group's ideas led in large part to the bill.

"Even though we're in rather dark economic times and we're talking about an appropriation of money, we have to keep in mind that dark periods also present opportunities," Rossi said.

The bill will next head to the Senate floor.



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