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November 16, 2021

Dear Education Community,

As we celebrate this season of giving thanks, I want to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to you, the education heroes of Utah public schools. In the spring of 2020, we shuttered our doors to in person learning, and we looked to the future with uncertainty. However, I was certain about one thing; you would all continue caring for our most precious asset, our children. Here we are, 18 months later and still facing uncertainties. Many of you may feel like you are in the first year of your job all over again with so many changes and challenges. We are learning many lessons from the pandemic, and you all continue to lean in and do whatever it takes to keep education happening.

As we strive to forge a new future for public education, I am buoyed up by the collaboration and support you continue to provide one another on behalf of improving outcomes and opportunities for all students. I love visiting schools and classrooms. It is always apparent that it takes every adult in the school system to provide a quality experience for our students. I have had the opportunity this fall to sit in on powerful learning communities, listen to students talk about their evaluating their own work for improvement, witness the excitement of students with disabilities engaging in athletic competitions with nondisabled peers, and watch students create and perform beautifully in the arts. Our students have many opportunities to unlock their gifts and talents in our Utah public schools. Thank you!

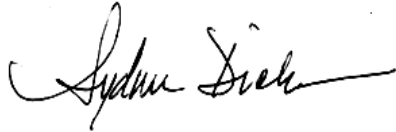
I am also mindful and appreciative of your efforts to address the safety and mental wellness of our students. Many factors contribute to the challenges of mental wellbeing and the additional stress brought on by the pandemic has exacerbated these needs. Creating safe and caring spaces for all students, regardless of demographics and circumstances, is key to their success. Emotional safety and physical safety are foundational in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Thank you for all you are doing to help students feel safe and cared for.

We continue to ask much of you as public educators to help all students have opportunities to succeed. I am mindful of what this means for your own mental and physical wellness. We must do better with working conditions to ensure you have the time, resources, and support needed to help you do your best work. I am committed to working with education leaders and policy makers to continue our focus on these issues. I am also committed to the tenets of our Utah Portrait of a Graduate and a more personalized approach to learning including flexibility and opportunities for the adults who serve our students.

Letter of Gratitude to Educators  
November 16, 2021  
Page 2

I am proud of you, our Utah public education community. I am proud to advocate for you and represent you. I am forever grateful to be a Utah educator and look forward to positive days ahead. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for your continuing efforts during these challenging times.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sydnee Dickson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sydnee Dickson, Ed.D.  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Utah State Board of Education