

Second Annual Utah LEARNS Conference Held at USU for Elementary Teachers Throughout the State

07/09/2025



Dr. Joey Kozlowski, a second-grade teacher at Edith Bowen Laboratory School, discusses the importance of foundational math concepts at the LEARNS conference.

The Utah Learning for Educators and Researchers through Networked Systems (LEARNS) conference kicked off its second year at the Edith Bowen Laboratory School. Edith Bowen, a K-6 charter school housed within the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services on the USU Logan campus, received a \$50,000 three-year innovation grant from the Utah State Charter School Board to help fund the conference. It also received a \$50,000 two-year teacher leadership grant from the Utah State Board of Education to grow the Utah LEARNS network.

“The second Utah LEARNS Conference was a resounding success,” said Nate Justis, conference founder and principal of Edith Bowen Laboratory School. “Participants gathered to exchange ideas and learn from master teachers in a collaborative and inspiring environment.” He noted that attendees had the opportunity to earn relicensure credit and rated the experience an average of 9.4 out of 10.

The conference aims to connect elementary educators throughout Utah so they can share expertise and access research to improve professional practice. Justis explained nearly 75% of surveyed attendees expressed interest in continuing collaboration during the school year through professional learning teams and classroom observation

days in model schools. “We are enthusiastic about expanding this professional network beyond the annual conference.”

The one-day event featured keynote speaker Debbie Silver, Ed.D., a lifelong educator and former Louisiana Teacher of the Year. Silver spoke about the impact teachers make during a child’s formative years. “I realized something the very first day I stepped into the classroom,” Silver said. “For these kids, I am the single most important person in their lives—at least sometimes. Educators are the heroes in their students’ lives.”

Other presenters included faculty from Edith Bowen, Utah State University, and nonprofit educational partnerships. Attendees also participated in field studies, including canoeing on the Cutler Marsh, visiting a beaver pond in Logan Canyon, and other outdoor learning experiences.

“It was outstanding. I wish more educators from my district and school had participated,” said one attendee. “I’m going to spread the word and let my team, district, and principal know what an outstanding opportunity it was. I have practical, ready-to-use strategies for my classroom.”

Paul Richins, senior director of community advocacy for the Cook Center Foundation, emphasized the importance of supporting mental health in schools. “The LEARNS Conference provides the opportunity to help educators support parents in understanding the value of mental health providers in elementary settings,” he said. The Cook Center Foundation focuses on suicide prevention among children and teens and offers resources on resilience, well-being, and strengthening school-family relationships.

Mental health and wellness workshops were a key part of the event. Tami Curtis, MSW, an assistant professor in Utah State’s Department of Social Work, said, “I believe in the power of prevention. If we want to change the world, we need to start with children. There’s no better way than working directly with educators at Utah LEARNS.”

“Teachers’ influence is of the utmost importance as students navigate the vulnerabilities of learning and the stresses of daily life,” Curtis added. “How we interact, communicate, and build relationships with students makes an impact. Teachers are prevention—and they’re doing amazing, impactful work every day.”

The LEARNS Conference will continue to be an annual conference held every June at the Edith Bowen Laboratory School with the intent to reach a statewide audience. “I hope we fill the state with conferences in other locations,

identify the high-performing schools throughout Utah, and that this model can become a hub for Utah LEARNS,” concluded Justis. “I also want to bring in teachers from throughout the state and create connections. I hope to find or develop a web-based platform where teachers can connect and share their resources.”

For more information, visit the [Utah LEARNS](#).