

LAWMAKERS VOW TO SUPPORT LEAVITT'S CENTENNIAL SCHOOLS

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Will Gov. Mike Leavitt get the education reform package he outlined Monday night in his first state-of-the-state address?

``Yes," says House Majority Leader Marty Stephens, R-Farr West. ``Simply, yes." ``He will," says Senate Minority Leader Scott Howell, D-Sandy. ``We Democrats will cheerlead for him. If he has a problem, it will be from his party's conservative right wing."

Keeping a promise he made during his successful 1992 campaign for governor, Leavitt said in his televised speech that he'll put aside \$2.5 million for 120 ``Centennial Schools" next year - schools where parents, teachers and administrators will decide the education plan for the students.

Last fall, Leavitt said he wanted maybe 20 or 30 of such experimental schools this coming year. He's upped the ante considerably. That's because since his November election Leavitt has found that the number of schools volunteering for such a program would be larger and the ability to fund them greater.

School leaders hailed the reform as a continuation of efforts already being made to move education governance to the school level.

``I think this can be a really positive thing," said state School Superintendent Scott W. Bean. ``The difficulty will be for local boards and school communities to determine how to delegate authority." He expressed concern that the schools chosen for the Centennial project would be those already doing innovative management, while less-favored schools are more in need.

Site-based management in some other places, including England and Chicago, hasn't worked, said Bean. Utah should work to avoid the pitfalls that thwarted the concept in those places. The state already has some models in the nine schools involved in the high school restructuring effort, he said.

He also was pleased with Leavitt's emphasis on vocational/technical education and envisioned a larger role for the state's five applied technology centers.

However, he said, deep reform will require more funding. Leavitt's attachment of about \$2.5 million to the Centennial Schools project seems to be tacit agreement that more money is necessary if schools are expected to do more for their children, he suggested.

``We won't oppose (\$2.5 million for school reform)," said Howell. ``That's pocket change in a \$4.2 billion budget."

Leavitt has said all along that education is his No. 1 priority, and most of his half-hour speech dealt with public and higher education - and what he calls the offshoot of such training - good, high-paying jobs.

The new governor, who turns 42 next month, said his Centennial Schools program will change education in Utah forever by ``recasting our system from valuing the process (how much time a child spends in a classroom) to measuring the outcome (how much he has really learned)."

By 1996 - the 100-year celebration of Utah's statehood - Leavitt said he wants every child in the state to have the opportunity to attend a Centennial School.

If legislators agree, by next fall as many as 120 schools could apply to be a Centennial School. Parents, teachers and principals will decide how their school will operate.

One school may choose to spend more of its money on computers, doing away with some

extracurricular activities to pay for them. Another may decide on flexible scheduling or evening classes so qualified students can attend college, vocational classes or accommodate apprenticeship programs.

He said Centennial Schools are just part of his overall education spending/reform package - with the budget numbers of his proposal being unveiled Wednesday when he presents his recommended 1993-94 budget to law-makers. Part of that is moving a new Tax Commission building to a bonding list, freeing \$10 million for school computers.

As public education must change, so must the state's public colleges and universities. Leavitt said he wants the Education Strategic Planning Committee - the committee Leavitt served on as a citizen last year that drew up the public education reform plan he now endorses - to now switch its studies to higher education, developing a master plan for community colleges, universities and vocational training centers.

With 30,000 additional students coming into higher education by the year 2000, it will take more than just doing the same job better - it will take a change in the mind-set of Utahns that "a four-year degree is the only avenue of success." "All of our students do not need four-year degrees - but they do need training."

Commissioner of Higher Education Wm. Rolfe Kerr said, "We applaud the governor's interest and that of the Legislature in strategic planning for higher education and welcome public involvement in addressing the tremendous challenge of enrollment facing Utah higher education."

He also said the governor is correct in focusing on the need to streamline and improve the delivery of post-high school vocational training. "Utah colleges and universities now serve more than 30,000 students in noncredit vocational training programs, and those numbers are likely to increase dramatically in the years ahead. We look forward to working with Utah business and industry in both credit and noncredit applied training programs," the commissioner said.

Turning toward economic and job development, Leavitt said he's proposing the creation of a Capital Foundation Task Force to create an action plan for attracting investment for small business.