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Huntsman, ed chief negotiate

By [Jennifer Toomer-Cook](#)

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Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. met Tuesday with the U.S. education secretary about state issues with No Child Left Behind — apparently the first of several meetings expected in the state-federal education battle that could end up in a special legislative session.

Huntsman chief of staff Jason Chaffetz reported a good discussion between the governor and U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. But he reported no specific movement on Utah's desires to loosen some NCLB strings.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Patti Harrington remains uncertain about the future of Utah's requests.

"The governor is working on a level we have not been able to access . . . so that gives me hope," Harrington said. "No new flexibility has been granted, however, and the governor feels the next three weeks (of negotiations) are going to be very important."

Harrington said she might be invited to participate in negotiations next week.

NCLB aims to have all children — regardless of race, income, English skills or disability — reading and doing math well by 2014. Utah officials say the goal is laudable, but an impossible and arbitrary standard nonetheless.

They want to use U-PASS, the state's accountability system, to meet NCLB goals. U-PASS uses the same tests as NCLB — and more — and looks at academic progress, not just whether kids earned a specific test score.

Utah also wants to be the one to decide whether its teachers and administrators are "highly qualified." The U.S. Department of Education in recent weeks let Utah's teacher licensing standards suffice, rather than send scores of elementary schoolteachers back to college. But rules for other teachers, such as special education and those teaching several different subjects in small, rural schools, remain under negotiation.

Utah lawmakers have put heat on the feds to see things their way.

Earlier this month, the Legislature put on hold a bill that gives Utah's educational goals priority over No Child Left Behind, particularly when it comes to directing resources and doing what state education leaders believe is best for students. The idea was to give more time for negotiation. But if Utah is dissatisfied with the outcome, the Senate would debate, with certain passage, HB135 in an April 20 special legislative session.

HB135 sponsoring Rep. Margaret Dayton, R-Orem, views NCLB as history's biggest federal intrusion on states rights to public education. The bill has received unanimous backing up to its final Senate hurdle.

A companion bill, HJR3, awaits Huntsman's signature. Sponsored by Rep. Kory Holdaway, R-Taylorsville, the bill would have Utah use U-PASS until the federal law is amended and adequately funded.

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