

PTA Involvement in Trust Lands: A History

- 1989—Sandra Skossen of Monticello, UT passed a resolution through the May 1989 State PTA convention to look into school trust lands and the revenue they should be generating for schools. Utah PTA adopted a position statement that trust lands should be more productive. The Utah PTA began educating members on trust lands through classes at convention and publications.
- 1990—Utah PTA, under the leadership of President Joyce Muhlestein and Legislative Vice President Karen Rupp, and with the assistance of the Utah State Office of Education, pushed through legislation setting up a legislative task force to study the issue of school trust lands. House members assigned to this task force included Representatives Mel Brown and Kevin Garn.
- 1991—The passage of H.B. 15 allowed an additional year of study by the Legislative Task Force; it was supported by the Utah PTA and others in the education family.
- 1992—Governor Michael Leavitt formed a citizen advisory committee to study the school trust lands for one more year, resulting in the creation of SITLA two years later. Additionally, Governor Leavitt appointed Utah PTA Legislative VP Karen Rupp to serve with John Harja of the Governor’s Office, Ruland Gill of the Land Board, Jim Davis of Pruitt Gushee, and Texas attorneys to try to craft federal legislation addressing hundreds of thousands of acres of in-holdings (trust lands captured in National Parks, Monuments, and Forests, and Native American reservations like the Navajo and the Goshute). When the legislation finally passed, it only provided for a process. The schools had spent \$5 million on appraisals in their efforts to get the school trust lands out. Ultimately, these appraisals formed the basis for the Grand Staircase exchange/purchase that also encompassed the sale of the captured lands for \$50 million.
- 1993—Utah PTA, along with others, worked for the passage of a bill to move toward wiser investment of the permanent State School Fund and removing the requirement for liquidity of the fund. (H.B. 416)
- 1994—H.B. 250 - The Trust Lands Management Act, sponsored by Representative Mel Brown, passed; creating SITLA and reaffirming the trust principles. (see Utah Code 53C)
- 1995—Utah PTA appointed J. Kimo Esplin to serve on the Investment Advisory Committee at its inception. Mr. Esplin is an Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of Huntsman International. Before his employment with Huntsman, Mr. Esplin served as a Vice President of the Investment Banking Division of Bankers Trust Company. He is the longest serving member of the IAC and continues to serve today, playing an integral role in the effective investment growth of the Permanent State School Fund.
- June 1997—Utah PTA Legislative Vice President Paula Plant testified in Washington, D.C. in favor of S. 2146, the Utah School Trust Land Exchange, which provided a mechanism for a trade of 377,000 acres out of federally controlled areas, including the then recently created Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument. Utah PTA vocally opposed the creation of the monument.
- January 1999—School Trust Land Exchange Act is signed by President Bill Clinton, which provided for the country’s largest land exchange ever.

- July 2000—Paula Plant, then Utah PTA Presidential Appointee on Trust Lands, testified in Washington, D.C. in favor of S. 2754, the Utah West Desert Land Exchange Act, and its House counterpart, H.R. 4579.
- 2004—During the 2004 General Session, Representative David Clark ran H.B. 213 - Changes to Investment Advisory Committee. Utah PTA worked with Representative Clark to ensure passage of this important legislation, which required the committee to meet quarterly and gave SITLA the authority to appoint a member of the committee. Utah PTA continued to have the authority to appoint a member. At the Utah PTA State Convention, a resolution was passed supporting School Trust Lands.
- 2006—During the 2006 General Session, Representative David Clark ran H.B. 78 - Investment of Land Grant Trust Funds. Utah PTA worked with Representative Clark to ensure passage of this important legislation, which exempted the Permanent State School Fund from the restrictions of the Money Management Act, held the State Treasurer to the Prudent Investor rule in the investments of the Permanent School Fund, repealed the old statute regarding the investment advisory committee, and created a new Investment Advisory Committee with greater authority to review investments and report to the beneficiary. Utah PTA retained the authority to appoint a member to this newly codified committee.
- 2006—Utah PTA spoke in favor of a resolution on School Trust Lands and Funds at the annual National PTA Convention to raise awareness of and advocate in behalf of the school children in all states with remaining school trust lands, so that this precious resource nationwide is well managed for the benefit of all children. Utah continued to set the standard for all states as to how to effectively manage their trust lands and acts as a resource to all states. The individuals mentioned throughout this history, Paula Plant, Karen Rupp and Margaret Bird, created the non-profit corporation Children’s Land Alliance Supporting Schools (CLASS). Organized in 2001, it serves as a nationwide resource helping states by conducting research, and by providing information, training and support services to educational organizations across the country regarding Trust Lands.
- 2009—Utah PTA educated its members about H.R. 1925 “America’s Red Rock Wilderness Act of 2009”, sponsored by Rep. Hinchey of New York, which would have captured one million acres of school trust lands in Utah.
- January 2009—Utah PTA was asked by the Legislative Auditor General to give information for the Performance Audit of the School Children’s Trust Section of the USOE.
- February 2010—Utah PTA testified against HB 323, a bill which would have used millions of dollars of Trust Land money for purposes that violate the basic principles of the trust.
- 2011—Utah PTA passed a resolution at state convention recognizing and supporting School Community Councils.
- 2014—During the 2014 Legislative Session, Utah PTA worked with Representative Mel Brown to ensure passage of HB168 School and Institutional Trust Lands and Funds Management Provisions. This bill moves the management of the Permanent State School Fund from the State Treasurer’s Office to the newly created School and Institutional Trust Fund Office. A Board of Trustees, chaired by the State Treasurer, hires the director of the office and sets investment policy.