



2024-25

Utah Teacher Merit Award Guidebook

Version 3.0



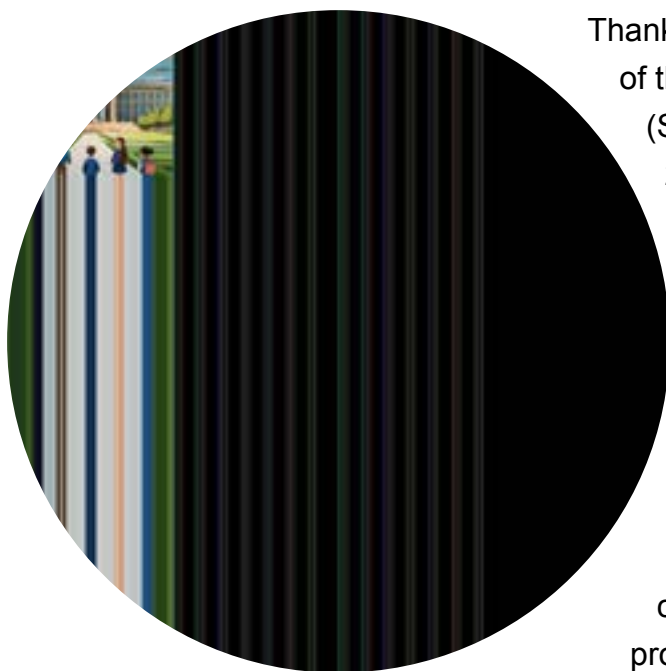
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Introduction

The Utah Teacher Merit Award (TMA) was created by the Utah Legislature in 2024 to increase teacher retention in the classroom, especially in high-poverty schools, and simultaneously increase the recruitment of new teachers into the system. The Utah State Legislature and the Utah State Board of Education heard many hours of testimony from district superintendents, school leaders, charter school leaders, deans of colleges and schools of education in Utah, and scores of education advocates, policy experts, and other interested stakeholders. After months of research, discussion, and deliberation, the Utah State Legislature chose to enact the Utah Teacher Merit Award pilot study to investigate the value of a new method for recognizing and remunerating highly effective classroom teachers by moving teacher compensation toward six figures.



Thanks to bipartisan efforts between the members of the Utah House and Senate, Senate Bill 173 (SB173) was passed by the Utah Legislature in 2024 and signed by Governor Spencer Cox. In 2025, SB99 was issued to improve the TMA system. This sweeping and historic teacher merit award bill provides funding for monetary awards for those teachers who are highly effective, especially those working in high-poverty schools and districts. As such, SB99 has the potential to transform education by incentivizing teachers to remain in the classroom and to choose teaching as a life-time professional commitment.

What Is the Utah Teacher Merit Award?



The Teacher Merit Award (TMA) was established with the goal of providing a mechanism for identifying Utah’s highest performing 25% of teachers and rewarding them financially. The TMA program and its funding began July 1, 2024, and is administered by the Center for the School of the Future (CSF) at Utah State University (USU). To learn more about Center for the School of the Future, visit their website: [Center for the School of the Future | CEHS | USU](#).

The TMA is not a grant. TMA is a statutory funding provision authorized in [Senate Bill 99](#). Local Education Agency (LEA) participation in this bill is entirely voluntary. Those LEAs who opt to participate develop a TMA identification system(s), allowing them to identify their top 25% of teachers, using single or multiple years of data, as candidates for potential TMA recognition at the state level. TMA funding is distributed by the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) to LEAs employing State TMA awardees for monetary awards (see *Title 63J, Chapter 1, Budgetary Procedures 305 Act of S.B. 173*).

SB99 is a five-year pilot program. During the first two years of the pilot program (2024-2026), participating LEAs develop an application outlining their TMA identification system, which must align with the CSF guidelines embodied in this guidebook. When submitted, CSF reviews and approves the application, and then LEAs implement their TMA identification system. If an application requires refinements to be approved, CSF will provide timely feedback so the LEA can revise their application to address the identified revisions. TMA funds are dispersed in years three through five of the pilot program (2026-2029). The TMA pilot provides a one-time, three-year period of recognition in terms of merit award performance level and level of monetary compensation.



What Purposes Does the TMA Guidebook Serve and Who is its Audience?

Generally, this Utah TMA Guidebook is a comprehensive guide for LEAs who elect to participate in the voluntary Utah Teacher Merit Award (TMA) pilot study as authorized by Utah's SB173. This guide provides LEAs with processes, policies, timelines, and answers to frequently asked questions about the design of their LEA TMA identification system. LEA TMA systems allow LEAs to identify the top-performing 25% of their teachers and nominate those identified for inclusion in the State TMA recognition pool. SB173 provides for the recognition of the top-performing 25% of teachers in the State of Utah. There are three levels of statewide TMA performance recognition: recognized teacher, exemplary teacher, and master teacher. Each performance level receives a monetary merit award associated with the performance level.

Additionally, the Utah TMA Guidebook serves three purposes:

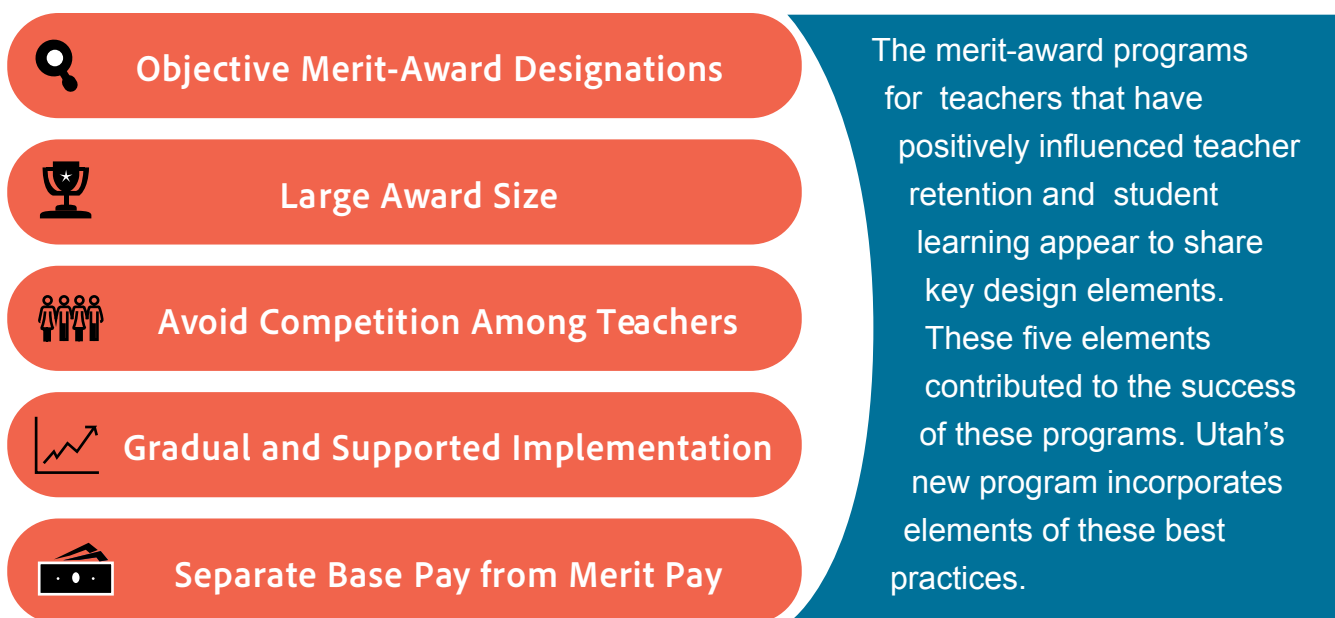
- 1** Supplies LEAs with sufficient information to determine whether or not to participate in the SB99 pilot.
- 2** Provides LEAs with clear steps to develop an LEA TMA identification system.
- 3** Communicates to participating LEAs about unanticipated changes to TMA as part of the pilot, that would enhance processes and activities to maximize the achievements of TMA in relation to its stated purposes (i.e., recruit teachers, retain high-performing teachers, and encourage high-performing teachers to remain in, or move to high-poverty schools).

Though no significant updates are expected for the Utah TMA guidebook, due to the nature of pilot studies in general and the collaborative actions directed by SB99 between LEAs and CSF, the TMA program may evolve, and therefore, the TMA Guidebook may likewise evolve. Over the course of the pilot, CSF will keep the TMA guidebook current.

What Practices are Associated with Successful Merit-Award Programs?

Utah's Office of the Legislative Auditor General recently conducted and reported on its nationwide review of teacher merit award programs. Included in their report are five practices associated with successful, merit-based award programs that have positively influenced teacher retention and student learning (see Figure 1). Utah's TMA program incorporates all the elements of these programs as well as some unique elements particular to Utah's TMA system as required by SB99.

Figure 1
Successful Merit Award Practices



Who Can Participate in Utah's TMA Program?

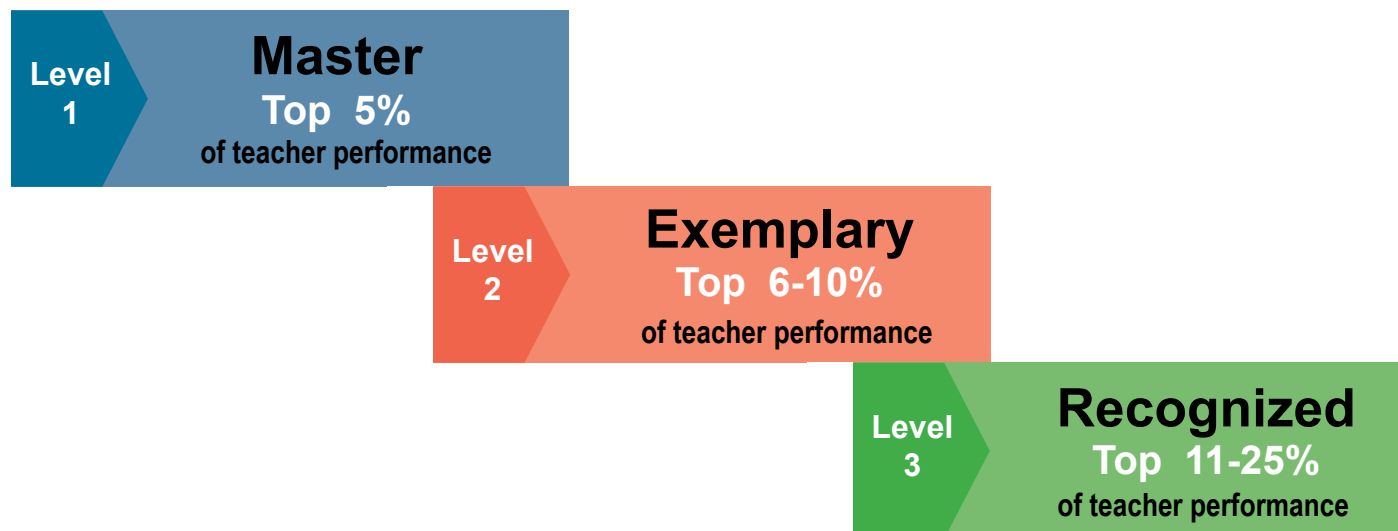
All publicly funded LEAs in Utah are eligible to participate in and design an LEA TMA identification system.

An LEA is defined in SB99 as:

- A school district
- A charter school
- A regional education service agency (SESC, SEDC, CUES, NUES)
- Utah School for the Deaf and the Blind

What Are the Merit Award Performance Levels?

Utah TMA merit award performance levels differentially recognize and reward high-performing teachers. An LEA TMA identification system recognizes its highest performing 25% of teachers at three levels of performance:



LEAs will receive a funding allotment for each State TMA-identified teacher they employ. TMA funding allotments are based on the teacher’s identified performance merit award level, with enhanced funding for awardees who teach in high-poverty schools (Section 53F-2-5-513-1c). TMA funds incentivize TMA-identified teachers to remain in the classroom and prioritize teaching in or transferring to teach in high-poverty schools.

What Are the Award Amounts for the Three Performance Merit Award Levels?

Figure 2 displays the award amounts for each of the three performance levels and also displays the doubling of merit awards for teachers working in high-poverty schools (as identified in Section 53F-2-5-513-1c). “High-poverty school” means a public school in which, during the previous school year, based on the October 1 enrollment as of the year-end data submission, more than 20% of the enrolled students are classified as children affected by intergenerational poverty (as identified in Section 35A-9-102) or 70% or more of the enrolled students qualify for free or reduced lunch. “Intergenerational poverty” means poverty in which two or more successive generations of a family continue in the cycle of poverty and government dependance. “Cycle of poverty” or “poverty cycle” means the set of factors or events by which the long-term poverty of a person is likely to continue and be experienced by each child of the person when the child becomes an adult, unless there is outside intervention.

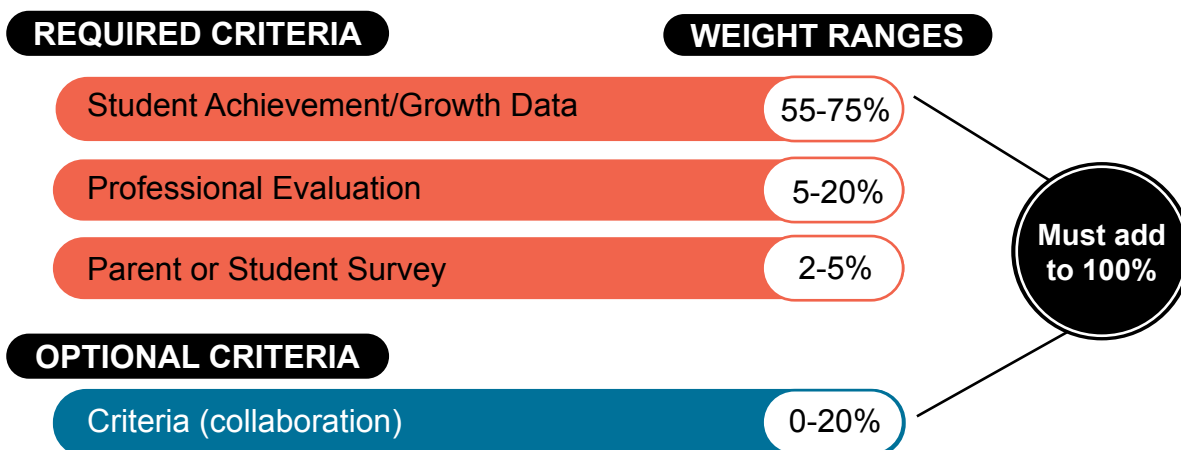
Figure 2
Three Performance Levels and Merit Award

Performance Level	Merit Award 3 payouts (one per year)	High-Poverty School Merit Award 3 payouts (one per year)
MASTER Teacher Top 5%	\$10,000	\$20,000
EXEMPLARY Teacher Top 6% - 10%	\$5,000	\$10,000
RECOGNIZED Teacher Top 11% - 25%	\$2,000	\$4,000

What TMA Criteria Are Required to Identify High-Performing Teachers at the LEA Level?

Figure 3 clarifies that approved LEA TMA identification systems must include three criteria to identify high-performing teachers (i.e., student achievement and growth, professional evaluation, and parent or student surveys) and may include a fourth, optional “other criteria.” Each criterion must be assessed using valid and reliable measures. SB173 allows LEAs to use “other criteria,” which CSF must approve. Currently, CSF’s listening and informational tour with LEAs resulted in two common areas of interest in the “other criteria,” (i.e., teacher collaboration and student surveys). LEAs expressed that teacher collaboration is a valued characteristic of a high-performing teacher and that criterion should be allowable for inclusion by participating LEAs. Additionally, LEAs and research reviews indicate that student surveys were an important criterion for identifying high-performing teachers. Again, these “other criteria” are optional.

Figure 3
TMA Required Criteria



What Is the Purpose of Recommended TMA Weight Ranges for Required Criteria Used to Identify High-Performing Teachers?

SB99 directs that LEA TMA identification systems use multiple criteria for recognizing high-performing teachers. Collectively, these criteria form an acceptably robust system for identifying high-performing teachers drawn from a national review of research about effective merit award systems. A teacher's weighted score for each criterion eventually forms a composite score so the teacher's score can be placed among other teachers' scores, ranked highest to lowest, to allow identification of the top 25% of teachers.

Because the desired outcome of high-performing teaching is high levels of student achievement/growth, as based on reviews of associated research literature and from LEA feedback during listening tours, CSF established a weight range (see Figure 3) from which a TMA system may select its final determined weight for student achievement/growth (an SB99 required criteria). For example, an LEA may choose to set the weight for student achievement and growth at 64%, which falls within the guidelines (i.e., 55-75%).

We acknowledge that there are many aspects of excellent teaching that are not captured by student growth alone. Professional evaluations weight ranges between 5-20% of a TMA's total system. This range is notably less due to the power of professional evaluations to predict student learning. The weight range for parent or student surveys was further reduced, due to their comparatively low power to predict student learning. Finally, the portion of total weight directed to "other criteria" is 0-20% of the total weight. Selected TMA criteria weights must total 100%.

What is the Utah TMA System and What are Its Primary Components?

The Utah TMA is a single integrated system composed of two sequential stages (see Figure 4). The first stage is the LEA TMA identification system, and the second stage is the State TMA identification system. Each of the components is described below.

Because the LEA and state TMAs are in the overarching Utah TMA system, it is important for readers to understand both stages before developing their system. Note that development of an LEA TMA identification systems will be supported by this Guidebook and also by an online tool with fillable fields that LEAs will use to complete their plan before submitting it to CSF for review and approval.

Utah's TMA system's two sequential stages are described below and are followed by a short description.

Stage 1: LEA TMA Identification System – Short Description

- 1** Each LEA develops a TMA identification system aligned with Utah's TMA Guidebook. This includes selecting weights within the ranges identified in the Guidebook. The TMA identification system also includes plans and procedures for conducting professional evaluations, parent surveys or student surveys, and other criteria, if desired.
- 2** Each LEA TMA identification system has the option to include "other criteria." If an LEA chooses to do so, the selected constructs and associated measures must receive approval from the CSF. These selections, including the weights assigned within the specified ranges for the required criteria, reflect the LEAs values regarding what constitutes a "high-performing teacher." All data from "other criteria" need to be adjusted to a 5-point scale. Once approved by CSF, each LEA deploys their TMA identification system.
- 3** Deployment of the LEA TMA system produces composite scores for all participating teacher categories (see discussion below about participating teacher categories).
- 4** Composite scores are calculated and ordered from highest to lowest. Cut marks are inserted for the Master (top 5%), Exemplary (top 6-10%) and Recognized merit award performance levels (top 11-25%).

- 5** The product of this stage is an LEA TMA-supplied list of teachers, itemized by merit award performance levels (i.e., Master [top 5%]; Exemplary [6-10%] and Recognized [11-25%]), which expresses what the respective LEA perceives a top performing teacher to be. The only constraints to an LEA's TMA view of a top-performing teacher are the limits of the weight ranges offered in the TMA Guidebook and CSF's approval of "other criteria."
- 6** The LEA will need to provide CSF with professional evaluation data on a 5-point scale. CSF does not expect you to change your evaluation tool, but to convert the results of your tool to a 5-point scale. CSF will have on its website an AI tool to complete this conversion for you. The LEA will also need to supply the parent survey data for each teacher participating in the pilot. These data will likewise need to be on a 5-point scale. If included in their TMA identification system, the LEA will also provide their teacher collaboration data and student survey data, which must be on a 5-point scale.
- 7** At this point, the LEA TMA identification system has done its work. It has produced a categorical list of the LEA's top-performing 25% of teachers and will have provided CSF with the teacher data needed in the State TMA system.

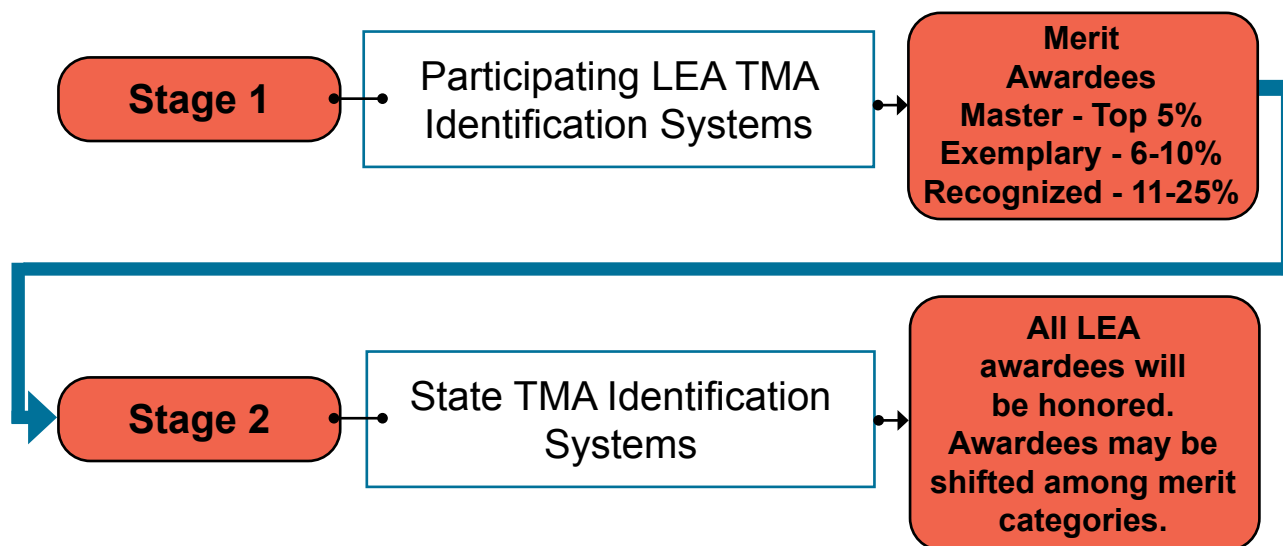
Stage 2: State TMA Identification System – Short Description

- 1** The State developed a TMA identification system that is driven by data drawn from the LEA TMA identification systems.
- 2** The State TMA identification system averages all participating LEAs' weightings for each of the high-performing teacher merit award criteria (i.e., achievement/ growth, professional evaluation, parent survey or student survey) to produce a State TMA weighting for each respective criterion. For example, if 5 LEAs' achievement/growth weight selections were LEA 1 = 55%, LEA 2 = 60%, LEA 3 = 58%, LEA 4 = 74%, and LEA 5 = 56%, the average would be 60.6%, which would be rounded up to 61%. Therefore, the State TMA weight for achievement/growth would be 61%, leaving 39% of the weight for other criteria. The product of these weights must add to 100%. If not, CSF will add equal points or fractions of points to each criterion to bring the collective weights to 100%.
- 3** The State TMA has identified a "other criteria" construct (i.e., collaboration survey). If an LEA elects to add additional constructs to the "other" criteria, they can be part of their LEA TMA but will not be factored into the State TMA identification system—only those used by all participating LEAs. CSF will meet with all participating LEAs in January 2025 to discern

whether there are any other elements the participating LEAs collectively want included in the “other criteria” and for which a psychometrically sound measure can be found.

- 4** Using the determined State TMA weights, all LEA-submitted teachers will receive new composite scores and will be ordered from highest to lowest. Cut marks will be inserted for Master, Exemplary, and Recognized levels using the performance levels ranges previously described.
- 5** LEAs will be notified of the outcomes of the state TMA identification system. State TMA- teachers will be distinguished by their performance level and the associated TMA monetary award. All LEA awardees will be honored. Though, awardees may be shifted among merit categories.

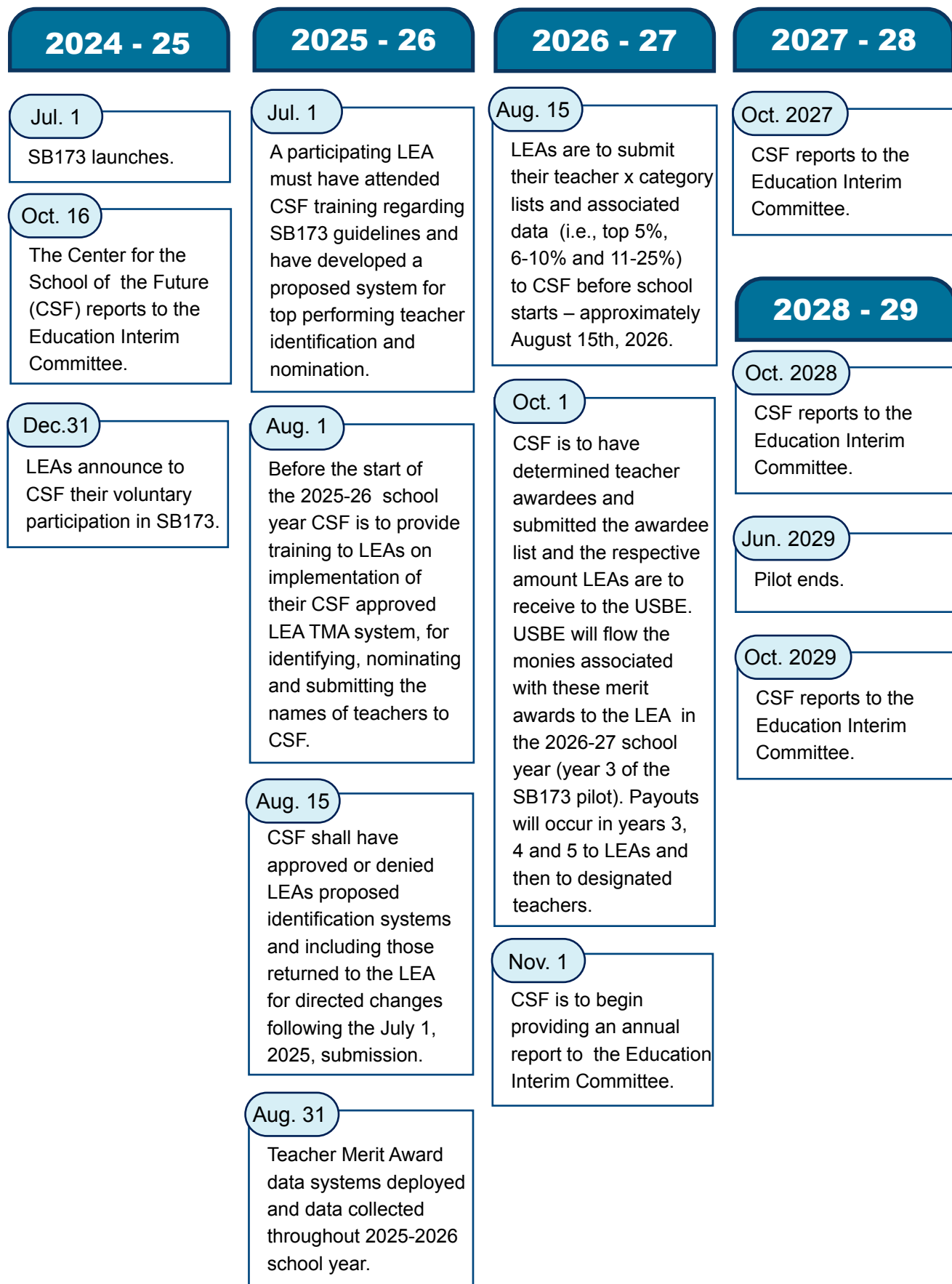
Figure 4
Teacher Merit Award – A Single System



What Is the Timeline for an LEA to Develop and Implement Their TMA System?

Figure 5 displays the current SB99 timeline.

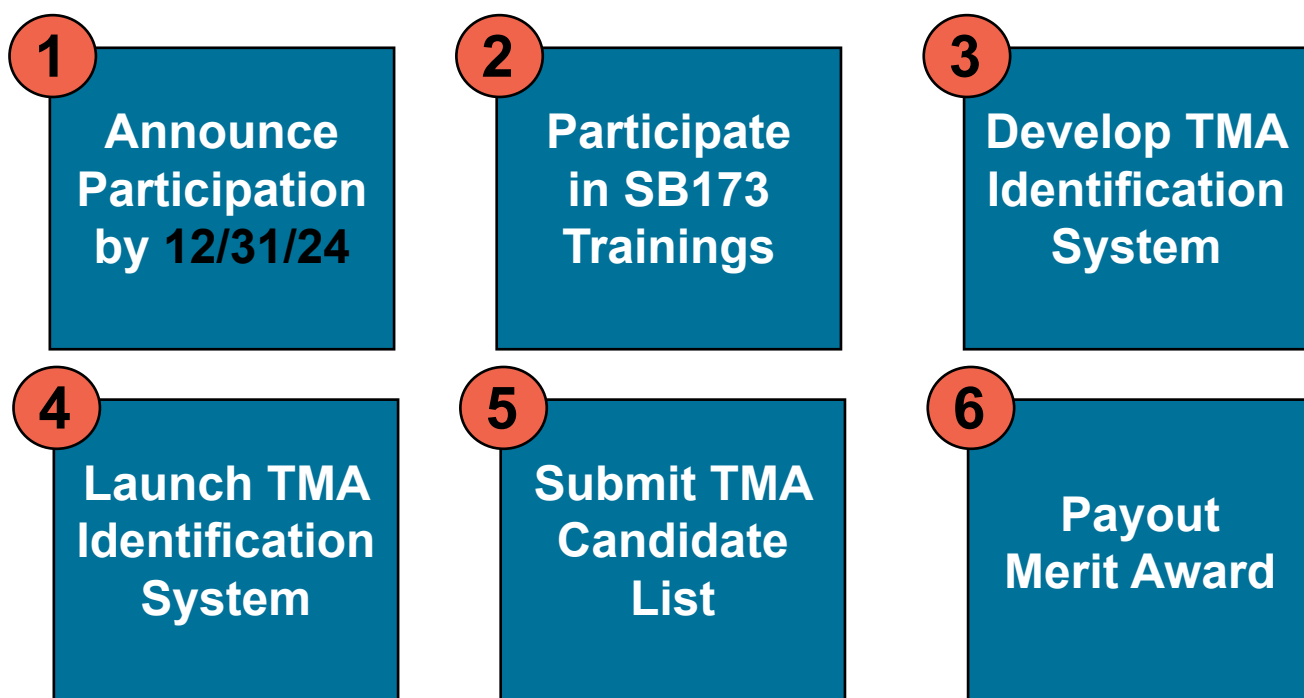
Figure 5
SB173 Pilot Implementation Timeline (School Years)



What Are the Major Tasks in Developing a LEA TMA Identification System?

There are six major tasks associated with participating in the SB99 TMA pilot. Major tasks are identified in Figure 6. Most major tasks have subtasks beneath them. The objective of this section is to provide LEA readers with sufficient information within each task so they can begin developing their LEA TMA identification system.

Figure 6
LEA TMA Major Development and Implementation Tasks



1 Task 1 – Announce Participation by 12/31/24

As stated in LEA participation in this bill is entirely voluntary. Participation requires submitting a registration form by December 31, 2024. LEAs can find the form on the CSF [website](#).

2 Task 2 – Participate in SB173 Trainings

The participating LEAs engage in two training sessions. The first training focuses on guiding LEAs in developing an (TMA) identification system. During this session, LEAs will learn about the application

process and the foundational principles and steps needed to create an effective TMA identification system that aligns with the descriptions in the TMA Guidebook. The training also provides sample cases to help participants understand the process in a practical, hands-on manner. By the end of the first training, LEAs will be equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to begin designing their LEA TMA identification system along with submission of their system to the CSF. The second training builds on the first, ensuring that LEAs are prepared for the full implementation of the TMA identification system.

3 Task 3 – Develop TMA Identification System

Initial LEA Steps

After a thorough read and review of the TMA Guidebook, LEAs designate TMA Lead(s). The TMA Lead(s) will serve as the contact person(s) with the CSF and will coordinate with various stakeholders, departments, schools, etc. as the application is developed and implemented (see Figure 6).

Recruiting a Planning Committee

Once TMA Lead(s) are established, the LEA recruits a Planning Committee. It is recommended that the Planning Committee consist of at least 50% teachers. This ensures teacher participation, and teacher support for the LEA TMA. The size of the Planning Committee may vary depending on the size of the LEA and other factors.

Planning Committee members must read and review the TMA Guidebook thoroughly. Guided by the TMA Lead(s), the Planning Committee then develops the LEA TMA identification system. The proposed system for developing the TMA identification system should be vetted by various stakeholders throughout the process.

Documenting the Process

Early in the planning stages, LEAs will need to determine where and how LEA plans and meetings are documented, shared, and stored. These plans are critical to documenting the tier performance level process LEAs go through and to provide information if and when Lead(s) and committee members change. Both digital and hard-copy plans should be kept, including meeting attendance, minutes of meetings, action plans, and decisions. LEA leadership outside of the Planning Committee should have access to these plans and processes.

Developing an LEA Teacher Merit Award Identification System

The LEA TMA Identification System is determined by:

- 1) teacher eligibility,
- 2) teacher performance data (including weights for performance levels), and
- 3) a spending plan.

Teacher Eligibility

The LEA will decide which teachers will be eligible for a TMA. LEAs have options for this pilot program. LEAs can include only teachers who teach in state-tested subjects or all teachers who teach in both assessed and non-state tested subjects (e.g. health, civics, biology, chemistry, the performance arts, etc.).

Therefore, the first step in determining teacher eligibility is to determine whether the LEA wishes to include teachers in tested and/or non-state-tested subjects. LEAs are encouraged to read carefully the process teachers will need to go through to develop reliable and valid student growth assessments in non-state tested subjects (see pp. 21-24). Best practices from other Teacher Merit programs indicate that it may be best to start in state-tested subjects only because there is more complexity and difficulty in determining student growth in non-state tested subjects. Once this has been decided, LEAs can proceed to determine which eligible teachers will be included in the LEA TMA identification system.

Each eligible teaching assignment in the local TMA identification system must be licensed by the Utah State Board of Education (see <https://schools.utah.gov/licensing/pathways>), hold a position that includes a classroom teaching assignment, and have a valid and reliable student achievement/growth measure.

LEAs may begin the teacher eligibility process by looking at student growth measures in tested subjects already available in Utah through the Utah State Board of Education's data capture and reporting of student achievement via state mandated assessments: Acadience®, RISE®, and ASPIRE®.

CSF, as per statutory eligibility requirements in SB99, limits TMA identification to teachers of record in state licensed teaching fields with a current classroom teaching assignment. LEAs may also include licensed support teachers, such as special education teachers, if they are licensed and employed as a teacher in the LEA and have a valid and reliable student growth measure available.

In the LEA Application, LEAs must confirm eligible teachers' licensing and teaching assignments. To confirm teaching licensing, we recommend using the Utah State Board of Education's list of state licensed teaching fields. This may be obtained at: <https://schools.utah.gov/licensing/pathways>.

LEAs will need to have on file evidence of their teachers' employment credentials, including a current, valid Utah teaching license. If a teacher is nominated for TMA but his or her Utah teaching license has been suspended or revoked before or after the payout date of October 1, 2026, they will not be eligible to receive a TMA.

In developing an LEA TMA identification system that includes subject area teachers as eligible teachers, a secondary school course coding system must be developed or used, if it exists. Teachers must be linked to local course codes for the courses they teach and may have more than one course code.

How Do LEAs Capture Data for Teachers in Multiple Assignments?

When a teacher instructs students in multiple content areas (e.g., ELA, Math, Science) for which a TMA-approved assessment is available, the teacher's students' value-added learning must reflect the totality of the teacher's assessed students in eligible, licensed assignments. LEAs shall combine value added learning results from all applicable TMA-approved assessments into one overall percentage of the teacher's students who experienced value-added growth, rather than selecting a single assignment, course, or tested content area. If a teacher teaches in multiple state-assessed or otherwise TMA-approved areas, all applicable results shall be included; if the teacher teaches out of license, only results from the teacher's licensed assignment(s) may be counted. For example, a third-grade teacher whose students take RISE reading and math would have both reading and math results included in one overall percentage of students experiencing value-added learning. Likewise, if a secondary teacher has multiple eligible assignments with TMA-approved assessments, the LEA must include all students attached to those approved assessments in the teacher's overall percentage

Teacher Performance Data

Teacher performance data includes:

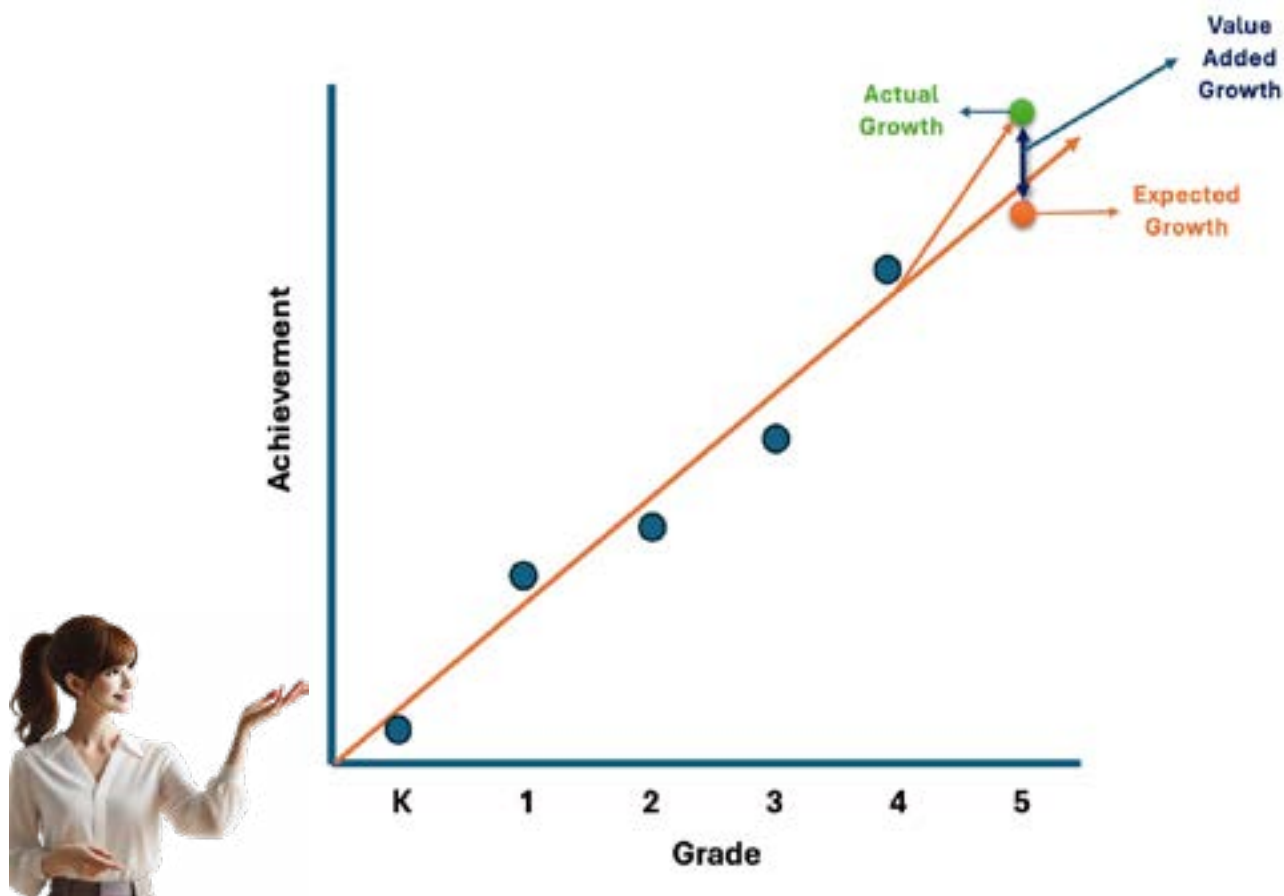
- student achievement/growth data,
- professional evaluations (teacher observation data),
- parent or student surveys, and
- other criteria (collaboration survey)

Student Growth Data

For LEA-eligible teaching assignments, LEAs must use a valid and reliable student growth measure and implement established protocols for secure administration and scoring, including use of state-approved testing windows.

During the five-year TMA pilot, LEAs must use the Value-Added Model (VAM) provided by the CSF for teachers in state-tested subject areas. Teacher performance will be reported as the percent of students who experienced above-expected growth for the year (see Figure 7).

Figure 7
Value-Added Model Example



Using statistical modeling VAMs determine predicted student growth scores based on a student's previous student achievement scores across multiple years (or within a single year in kindergarten). VAM is recognized as a valid and reliable method to predict student growth and has been shown to predict which teachers produce the most learning in their students. Roster verification will be used to ensure student learning attaches to the teacher who produced it.

VAM is based on an accurate underlying statistical model that predicts future performance based on a student's past measured performance. A value-added model determines if a student experienced learning growth that exceeds what previous achievement data predicts. It compares a student's past assessments with a student's current achievement score on quality, normed assessments, such as Acadience®, RISE®, or ASPIRE®. Student value-added growth for a given teacher is calculated by looking at students' expected growth compared to actual growth. If the student exceeded expected growth, then the student experienced "value-added learning growth." The VAM process involves complex statistical analyses that are often conducted by independent researchers. CSF will publish a "Student Growth" research and policy brief to explain student growth models in more detail. This brief will be published on the CSF website by early 2025.

Professional Evaluations (Teacher Observation Data)

Professional evaluations (teaching observations) may be based on the locally-adopted teacher observation evaluation system. It is strongly recommended that teaching observations be conducted three times annually by at least two raters, a school leader and other designated administrative or coaching staff, evenly spaced throughout the academic year.

Regardless of the teaching observation system adopted at the local level, all teacher observation results must be converted to a 5-point Likert-like scale. This change will produce consistency across participating LEAs and across different teacher performance data such as parent or student surveys and other optional measures. The CSF also strongly recommends that all observers be trained in using the respective observation form before observations begin. Rater training improves consistency among raters and across observations. LEAs will need to include in their TMA system application a description of how they will ensure professional evaluations adhere to best practices and the listed recommendations above.

Parent or Student Surveys

SB99 requires either the parent or student survey, but not both, as part of the Utah TMA performance data. CSF recommends LEAs use the parent survey found in the *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education* (Peterson, Wahlquist, Brown, & Mukhopadhyay). We also recommend LEAs use the student surveys found in the *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education* (Peterson, Wahlquist, & Bone).

These surveys were developed on 5-point scales and are therefore consistent with the scale used for teacher observations. The [parent survey](#) and [student survey](#) can be found on the CSF [website](#).

If LEAs wish to use a different parent or student survey, LEAs will need to provide evidence of its sufficient psychometric properties, adapt the survey to a 5-point scale, and receive approval from CSF.

If an LEA elects to use student surveys in their LEA TMA system please review [HB182 - Student Survey Amendments](#) to understand the requirements relating to student survey use.

Other Criteria

SB99 allows LEAs to use “other” indicators of high teaching performance, such as collaboration surveys. Collaboration surveys were selected as “other criteria” because CSF conducted listening tours with Utah superintendents and principals who expressed concern about TMA systems possibly encouraging competition among teachers. CSF added a collaboration survey to encourage teachers to collaborate and to prevent teachers from viewing the TMA as a competitive award.

CSF recommends using the following 5-point survey because it provides evidence of necessary psychometric properties of validity and reliability:

- TEAM Functioning Scale (Erickson, Noonan, Carter, McGurn, & Purifoy, 2015). *This scale evaluates a team’s effective functioning levels.*

All surveys can be found on the CSF website: [SB173 | USU](#).

If LEAs wish to select alternatives to these recommended surveys, they may do so, as long as the LEA demonstrates that the alternative selected surveys possess adequate psychometric properties of reliability and validity and make use of a 5-point Likert-like scale.

Spending Plan

The TMA Lead(s) will work with the LEA business office to consult with impacted departments. Teacher spending plans often require additional support from the LEA chief financial officer (CFO), payroll department, or human resources. Prior to completing the application, the LEA must finalize decisions on the timing and mode of compensation and ensure LEA departments have the capacity to implement the spending plan. These plans must be included in the LEA application.

LEAs will need to document how the TMA award will be rolled out through their finance office. LEAs are required to make a commitment of a payout to teachers within 45 days of obtaining merit award funds from the USBE. Once the LEA's application is approved, the best practice is to communicate the spending plan to teachers and stakeholders and make it accessible.

The TMA system application requires the LEA to outline how and when they will spend the allotment, plan for contingencies when identified teachers professionally relocate, and set a timeline for school board approval.

Spending Requirements

LEAs must spend 100% of the SB99 funds on teacher awards.

SB99 indicates that up to four percent of the total bill's funds may be used to compensate participating LEAs for the development of their LEA TMA systems. LEAs will be appropriately compensated in a fair process of monetary distribution that recognizes an LEAs fixed efforts and variable efforts. LEAs will be compensated after they flow merit award funds to their recognized teachers or after the deadline for the outflow of merit award funds.

Spending Plan for Teacher Movement

LEAs will need to outline in their application how they will allot the merit award to teachers who do not remain in the LEA.

- If an identified teacher leaves the LEA and moves to a different LEA in the state, then the TMA will move with the teacher to the new LEA.
- If an identified teacher retires or leaves the state before the USBE payout date, the awards stays with the USBE.

- If an identified teacher retires or leaves the state after the payout date, the award stays with the LEA.
- If a teacher moves from a low-poverty school to a high-poverty school, the TMA award will double.
- If a teacher moves from a high-poverty school to a low-poverty school, the TMA award will be cut by half.

Utah TMA awardees are responsible for notifying CSF of changes in their teaching assignment within their current LEA, of a transfer to a new LEA, or a transfer to an out of State of Utah LEA before the annual payout. Annually, CSF will provide awardees with a system to update the location of their teaching assignment.

Non-State Tested Subjects

A decision needs to be made early in the TMA application process whether LEAs wish to include teachers in non-state-tested subjects.

Determining student growth in state-tested subjects is fairly easy since the USBE tracks students' performance in reading, math, and science in certain grades through Acadience®, RISE®, and ASPIRE®. All of these measures are standardized and have psychometric properties that determine they are reliable and valid assessments. However, LEAs may want to include teachers in non-state tested subjects in the TMA pilot program. If LEAs wish to include teachers in non-state tested subjects, the application must detail how teachers will measure student growth in their subject areas. Teachers must provide evidence of the reliability and validity of their assessments and detail how they plan to measure student growth above and beyond expected growth.

Successful TMA systems in other states have begun with teachers who teach state-tested subjects and have phased in teachers in non-state-tested subjects. This allows LEAs time to establish reliable and valid assessments and to determine how student growth will be measured in non-state-tested subjects. However, the Utah TMA is a pilot program with only one round of determining top-performing teachers. Therefore, gradual implementation allowing teachers in state-tested subjects to begin and then adding teachers in non-state-tested subjects is not possible in this pilot, but can occur if the TMA extends beyond pilot status.

If LEAs decide they want to include teachers in non-state-tested subjects, LEAs may choose from any of the following three TMA-recognized student growth measures, or a combination thereof, for each eligible teaching assignment in non-state-tested subjects.

- Third-Party or District-Developed Measures (pretests & posttests)
- Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)
- Portfolios

Third-Party or LEA-Developed Measures

Sometimes, teachers in a variety of subject areas can locate a third-party assessment (e.g. the College Board AP standards, CTE standards, etc.). These tests must be aligned with state standards and objectives set by the teacher and would need to be administered at the beginning of a year or course as a pretest and then at the end of a year or course as a post-test. Questions on the test should have an appropriate level of rigor and challenge and cover the content of the course. Student growth targets should be established *before* the course begins, and these become expected growth targets at the end of the year or course.

Alternatively, LEAs can develop their own assessments for non-state-tested subjects, but these assessments take time and effort to develop. They must be administered as a pre- and post-test to demonstrate student growth, and they must demonstrate adequate reliability and validity. Further, teachers must demonstrate how they will differentiate expected student growth from exceeded student growth. We invite you to read our [policy brief](#) on Developing Reliable and Valid Assessments.

Piloting a test is often an effective way to improve a test and to demonstrate reliability. Comparison of test items to other similar tests may demonstrate test validity. The tests must include a standardization process and protocol for their administration. They also must assign a window or time frame in which tests are administered.

If LEAs allow the development of assessments in different subject areas, CSF recommends subject-area teachers collaborate to develop, pilot, and implement these tests. LEAs are also advised to collaborate with each other to develop student growth measures for non-state tested subjects.

The reliability and validity [policy brief](#) will help LEAs as they consider whether to develop tests in untested subjects or use existing **third-party** tests. Key questions to ask when discussing and selecting student growth measures for different teaching subjects are:

- What student growth measures are best for each subject area and grade level?
- Is the LEA currently using any growth measures that are approved for TMA?

- How will the LEA set individual growth targets for each measure and track student progress?
- What role will teachers have in setting student growth goals?
- What is the current capacity for implementing different growth measures with fidelity?

If LEAs wish to use third-party or LEA-developed assessments, they need to consult CSF's policy brief [Developing Reliable and Valid Assessments](#) found on the CSF website.

Calculating Student Growth Using a Third-Party or LEA-Developed Test

To calculate the percentage of a teacher's students who met or exceeded expected growth, LEAs will need to divide the number of students who exceeded their expected growth target by the total number of students with an expected growth score who completed the final assessment.

Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)

Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) begin with a core skill or standard in a subject area drawn from the Utah Core Standards or from standards of other professional organizations. SLOs are developed by teachers and are designed to measure student growth over a period of time. Teachers use the standards to set growth targets at the beginning of the course, assess where each student is related to those targets, and collect a body of evidence of student growth in the targets over time. At least five pieces of evidence should be collected on each student. At the end of the course, teachers assess the extent to which each student has mastered the targeted skill or standard. Students who have exceeded the expected growth target are then divided by the total number of students in the class.

Developing SLOs is a lengthy and detailed process, as teachers will have to develop growth targets, assess where each student in their class falls on those growth targets at the beginning of the course, monitor each student's progress through the course, and then assess each student's progress at the end of the course. At least five pieces of evidence are needed to demonstrate student growth over the course. [TexasSLO.org](#) is a website that provides detailed instructions and guidelines for teachers wishing to use SLOs in their class. Special attention needs to be paid to guidelines for determining student growth through SLOs. LEAs who have teachers in non-state-tested subjects who wish to use SLOs should provide evidence of their use of Texas's guidelines. As with third-party or LEA-developed tests, departments, charter schools, and LEAs are encouraged to collaborate if they have teachers wishing to use SLOs in non-state-tested subjects.

Portfolios

Portfolios can be developed as an alternative to SLOs and third-party or LEA-developed assessments for performance subjects, such as dance, pottery, ceramics, art, and music. To administer a portfolio for non-state-tested performance subjects, teachers will need to first develop a skill progression rubric that charts expected student growth over the course. Student work projects should be assessed using this skill progression rubric. A minimum of five artifacts should be collected as evidence of skill progression over time. The type of artifact presented as evidence will vary, depending on the subject area. Written, oral, audio, visual, digital, or performance-based evidence can be used.

LEAs and teachers should consult websites to learn how to develop portfolios for specific performance courses. Again, LEAs, departments, and teachers in a given performance subject should collaborate with others to demonstrate their process and results are reliable and valid. Students who have exceeded the expected growth target are then divided by the total number of students in the class.

LEA TMA Application Submission

The CSF will develop an online application form housed in the CSF website [SB173 | USU](#). The LEA TMA application form will include each of the guidelines along with a box for LEAs to fill in. Applications must be completed and submitted by **July 1, 2025**. The CSF is available via email or Zoom to answer any questions LEAs have. A set of frequently asked questions and answers will also be available online at the CSF website [SB173 | USU](#).

LEA TMA Application Scoring and Resubmissions

Following initial submission, CSF will verify the extent to which the LEA applications follow the guidelines outlined in this Guidebook. LEAs will be notified if their application is accepted or not by **August 15, 2025**. LEAs must meet all guidelines for the application to be accepted. If an LEA does not pass CSF scoring, then CSF will consult with the LEA to assist them in reformulating their plans. The LEA may then submit a revised application, LEAs who have resubmitted applications will receive a formal notification if their TMA procedure is accepted or denied.

Teacher Appeals Process

LEAs will need to develop and document an appeals process and include the process in their application. The appeals process is to be used when teachers wish to appeal LEA decisions about TMA within the 25% top-performing teachers or within the TMA performance levels (i.e., Master, Exemplary, and Recognized). The appeals process must be transparent to teachers, the LEA, and CSF.

CSF will also develop an appeals process that LEAs can use to appeal decisions about teacher selection in the State TMA process. A web-based appeals form will be developed and placed on the CSF website. CSF will respond to appeals within 5-7 business days. If additional information is needed, the LEA's TMA Lead can arrange an appointment for further discussion with CSF via Zoom or phone. All LEA appeals for the state must be funneled to this person who will contact the CSF.

4 Task 4 - Launch TMA Identification System

Once the LEA application system has been approved by CSF, the LEA begins the process of TMA identification.

5 Task 5 - Submit TMA Candidate List

In this task, each participating LEA produces a list categorizes teachers based on their LEA TMA performance levels. Teachers are to be identified in three groups: Master, representing the top 5% of performers; Exemplary, for those in the top 6-10%; and Recognized, for those in the top 11-25%. This ranking reflects what each LEA considers a high-performing teacher according to their weights and scores.

6 Task 6 - Payout Merit Award

The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) will provide funding for the merit awards to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) during the 2026-27 academic year, which is the third year of the SB173 pilot program. These merit award funds will be distributed to LEAs, and from there, they will be given to the teachers who have been identified to receive the award. The payouts will happen over three years, starting in year three (2026-2027 academic year) and continuing in years four (2027-2028 academic year) and five (2028-2029 academic year) of the program. This timeline ensures that LEAs and their top-performing teachers are recognized and awarded for their achievements according to the established criteria.

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