

**WINTER 2026**

# **LEGACY**

**TRANSFORMATION IN ACTION**

**One Cog in a Well-Oiled Machine: UCET is Bringing Utah's EdTech Story to the World**

**Jared Covili**



UTAH COALITION FOR EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY



The Worthy Educator

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## One Cog in a Well-Oiled Machine: UCET is Bringing Utah's EdTech Story to the World



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Throughout my 24-year career in education, I've transitioned through various roles, each enriching my understanding and passion for educational technology. From a high school language arts teacher to a district administrator, these experiences have shaped my belief in the transformative power of technology in education. However, it isn't just the machines that change our classrooms. I've discovered the power of the human network that shapes the technology in our classrooms. As I've grown and developed, so has the educational technology workspace. When I first started in the 1900's, technology was a desktop for the teacher and one computer lab for the students. Now, Artificial Intelligence has transformed the technology landscape, reimagining machines to be part of our learning communities.

As a young educator just starting my career, I was incredibly fortunate to discover and attend the annual Utah Coalition for Educational Technology (UCET) conference. This introduction proved to be a pivotal moment, fundamentally shaping the trajectory of my entire educational career. The opportunity UCET provided for networking with exceptional leaders and innovative practitioners across the state of Utah was invaluable. It was through this connection that I was truly able to find my voice as a teacher and eventually take on new leadership roles, benefiting immensely from the shared knowledge and collaborative spirit of the UCET community.

I haven't been the only educator to benefit from attending the UCET annual conference. Thousands of teachers share similar stories to mine. Participating in professional learning offered by UCET has opened so many doors to educators across Utah. However, few know that UCET's impact across the state of Utah is the result of decades of work in a passionate edtech community. Utah's story is one of collaboration and shared vision. It involves partnerships including state agencies, public education, and higher education. Each of these groups has worked tirelessly to impact educational technology throughout the state and all have helped UCET make Utah a major player in the national edtech community.

### Laying the Foundation for UCET

Utah is a small state when compared to many of the large players in public education. California, Texas, and Illinois all have districts in the top ten largest across the country. Even though we may have fewer students, Utah is consistently at the front of the pack when it comes to educational technology innovation. While many districts shut down in March 2020 due to the pandemic, schools across Utah took a few days to switch from in-person to online learning. This was unheard of in many parts of the US, but Utah had built a technology infrastructure that was up to the challenge.

Part of the reason why Utah is so successful is two-pronged: the statewide network and the Digital Teaching and Learning Grant. Without these two scaffolds in place, Utah's landscape for educational technology wouldn't be as successful as it has been. One of Utah's greatest assets in digital teaching and learning is its strong statewide infrastructure. This wireless backbone, facilitated by organizations like the Utah Education Network (UEN), enables the sharing of resources and vision across all educational institutions in the state.



### The Importance of a Statewide Network

The concept of an agency like UEN was a forerunner to many of the technological innovations that came since its inception in the early 1990's. For much of my career, I was fortunate to be able to travel around the state as a professional development trainer for UEN and I recognized the role that state agencies like the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) and UEN play in bringing technology to all teachers and students across the state of Utah.

The statewide network's strength lies in its ability to connect diverse educational entities, ensuring that resources and innovations are shared efficiently and effectively. Due to this vast statewide network, UCET has been able to connect with teachers from the different regions across Utah. When you consider the vast size of the state, that allows districts to connect from over 600 miles apart.

However, UEN's value to classrooms goes beyond just fiber optics cables and internet connections. UEN has been instrumental in providing leverage for all Utah schools when it comes to professional development and software contracts. Small, rural districts have little to no purchasing power in the world of software contracts. Statewide contracts with tools like Canvas, Nearpod, Adobe, and Zoom have been negotiated by UEN to leverage our entire public education system. This is essential to help schools across Utah have equitable access to these vital classroom technologies.

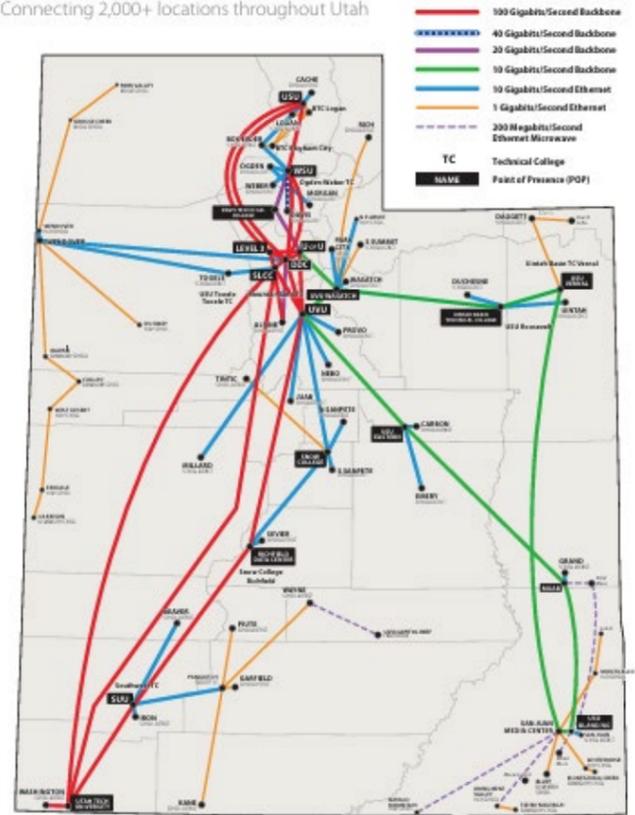
### Digital Teaching and Learning Grant Program

The Digital Teaching and Learning (DTL) Grant Program, launched in 2016, represents a significant investment in Utah's educational technology landscape. This program aims to enhance learning through technology by providing financial support to school districts and charter schools.

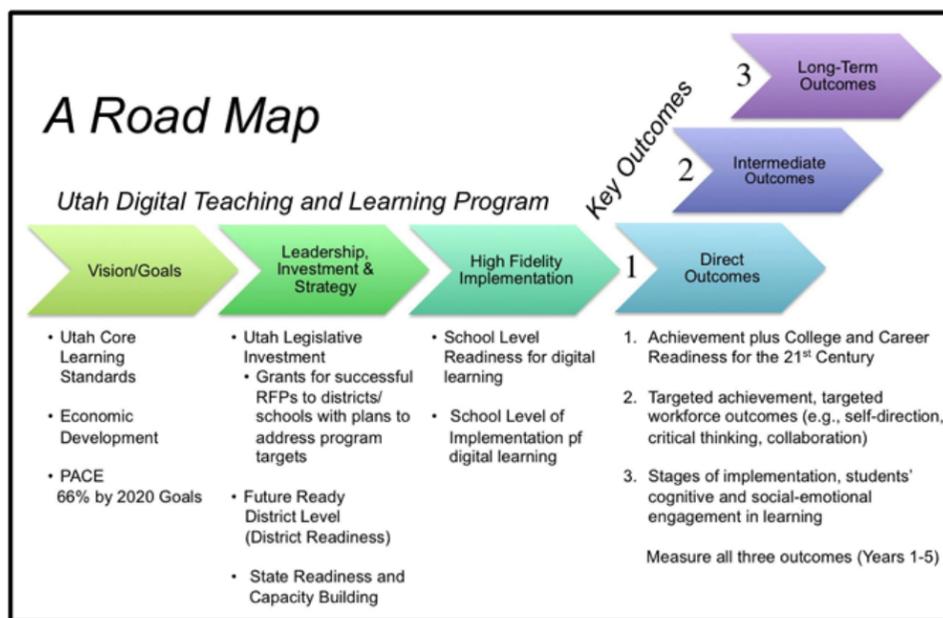
The Digital Teaching and Learning Qualifying Grant Program was created in accordance with Utah Code Section 53F-2-510 and Utah State Board of Education (USBE) Rule R277-922. Districts and charter schools are required to create a 5-year plan for Digital Teaching and Learning to be approved by USBE to qualify for the funds.

### UEN Infrastructure Map

Connecting 2,000+ locations throughout Utah



Last updated November 2, 2023



This initiative began with stakeholders from across the state including the local school systems, the Utah State Board of Education (USBE), UEN, and the Legislature creating Utah's Master Plan to best leverage the power of technology for learning. This plan articulates "Utah has a powerful opportunity to act, and to harness technology as an extraordinary tool to our benefit... To move all students to high levels of learning powered by technology, all students will need access to infrastructure, devices, and applications that can be most effectively incorporated into learning... With teachers serving as architects of learning combined with the knowledge to effectively integrate technology, schools can provide students with a pipeline to explore real world concepts, interact with real world experts, and analyze and solve real world problems." The Legislature created and charged the USBE to combine these efforts to create this program.

The Digital Teaching and Learning Program currently invests \$20 million in accelerating and deepening learning through technology in Utah's K-12 schools. The first program cohort was launched in 2016, funding grants in 65 school districts and charter schools across the state. Since then, additional districts and charter schools have joined the program.

Here's a snapshot of the DTL program:

- Program Objectives: The DTL program seeks to integrate technology into learning processes effectively. It requires participating districts to develop a 5-year plan, focusing on infrastructure, device access, and application integration to enhance teaching and learning outcomes.
- State-wide Impact: The program has already funded numerous districts and charter schools, providing them with the resources needed to implement innovative technology solutions. This funding has enabled schools to employ Ed Tech specialists who support teachers in integrating technology into their classrooms.

- Collaborative Efforts: The DTL program is a collaborative effort involving stakeholders from the Utah State Board of Education, UETN, and local school systems. This collaboration ensures that the program aligns with the state's educational goals and effectively leverages technology to improve learning outcomes.

The DTL program has been revolutionary in its impact on education across Utah. In the years leading up to the pandemic, Utah was experiencing a technological shift throughout many of our classrooms. While the first round of grant funding helped many schools reach a 1:1 student to device ratio, later rounds of DTL funding have helped build the human infrastructure required for a successful technology adoption. Districts across the state used DTL funds to hire edtech specialists that could lead professional development programs in technology adoption.

UCET has leveraged the power of both of these concrete structures to expand the power of human connections within education in Utah. One of the most powerful human networks that has significantly impacted my journey has been the Utah Coalition for Educational Technology (UCET), which is instrumental in promoting the effective use of technology in Utah's educational landscape. Over the years I've seen the educational technology space grow in our classrooms and schools. UCET has been instrumental in shaping that growth for the teachers and students in Utah.

### UCET's Mission

After attending the UCET conference, I knew that I needed to get involved so I ran for a volunteer position on the board within a few years. It's a relationship that has stuck with me ever since, even though my role on the board has evolved over time. I'm now in my 18th year on the board and can't imagine a better way to stay connected to the teachers throughout Utah.

The UCET conference may have been my gateway into the world of educational technology, but it is UCET's mission that has been my passion for the past twenty years. I truly believe that educational technology can radically transform the classrooms of tomorrow and I want to be a part of that change.

UCET plays a pivotal role in Utah's educational technology ecosystem. Its mission aims to:

“...promote the cooperative development and effective use of information technology in Utah's educational institutions.

...provide a forum for the exchange of information on technology by holding conferences, meetings, and workshops, and publishing a newsletter.

...bring together any and all parties interested in the use of technology in education for the purpose of representing their varied interests to each other and to the public”

([www.ucet.org/about/board](http://www.ucet.org/about/board)).

UCET embodies the values of education across the state of Utah and promotes the need we have for networks, not just those with fiber optic cable and broadband access. Rather, the key to Utah's success in the world of educational technology is the human network which stretches across a variety of school districts, higher education institutions, and state agencies.

### UCET Making A Difference

UCET has grown as an organization over the past 45 years. What started in 1980 with a ballroom at a local hotel has grown into a national conference that has boasted an attendance of over 2000 participants. During a time where educational conference attendance appears to be dwindling in Utah, UCET has consistently grown to the point where the 2025 conference was held at the Salt Palace Convention Center, the largest conference event center in Utah.

While there are many reasons for the maintained increase in attendance, it cannot be understated that UCET helps bring the education community together. For many, UCET feels like a family reunion because of the power of human connections. Another reason for the high level of attendance is that the edtech space is one that provides a sense of optimism about the future of education and it allows teachers growth opportunities that foster empowerment.

UCET's mission underscores the importance of not just technological networks but also human networks. The relationships and collaborations fostered by UCET contribute significantly to the success of educational technology initiatives in Utah. One of the primary ways we've been able to reach out to our people is through networking both in-person and online.



## Professional Learning to Bring Teachers Together

One of UCET's aims is to be more than an annual conference. Like many ISTE/ASCD affiliates, with volunteer boards, it can be easy to settle into the role of providing an amazing yearly conference and then provide a smaller role throughout the rest of the year. As part of my role as the ISTE/ASCD Liaison I have worked to leverage our ISTE affiliate partners to help UCET adopt a variety of training models and outreach opportunities which have helped us connect with our members.

*UCET Book Club* - We've recently developed an engaging online book club designed with two key goals in mind: to help our members connect with one another in a flexible virtual setting, and to introduce them to cutting-edge ideas and emerging technologies that are transforming education. Crucially, this book club is a foundational connection point to ISTE (the International Society for Technology in Education), a renowned, broader national network dedicated to empowering educators and improving learning worldwide. Through guided discussions of ISTE-authored texts, we are enabling Utah teachers to cultivate a strong local professional community, acquire skills to implement new learning strategies immediately, and ensure they are an integral part of the vital, national conversation about educational innovation.

In 2025, our book club chose to read, *How to Teach AI* by Rachele Dene Poth. Capitalizing on our ISTE affiliate status, we not only were able to purchase the books at

a sizable discount, but we had our capstone webinar moderated by the author herself! You cannot measure the value of being able to learn from the author in a book study. I know how much I learned from this year's book study and our UCET members who participated were richly rewarded from this experience.

## Edcamps

With our state being so large geographically, it can be difficult to gather educators from all corners of Utah. Our state-wide conference reaches many, but we need other ways to bring teachers together. Edcamps have been hugely successful in providing more local ways to help teachers build their own PLC groups. Over the past decade we've held edcamps throughout Utah - Edcamp Utah (SLC area), Edcamp CUT (central Utah), Edcamp St. George (southwestern Utah), Edcamp 4 Corners (southeastern Utah), and Edcamp WASO (Provo area).

Edcamps have helped UCET transform professional learning by providing educators with the unprecedented freedom to crowdsource the agenda and choose sessions based on their most pressing needs and curiosity. This unique, participant-driven structure encourages authentic, collaborative learning where every teacher is both a learner and a leader. Edcamps inherently foster a vibrant sense of community and professional empowerment, moving away from passive lectures toward dynamic, active discussion. This flexible environment ensures that learning is instantly relevant, allowing teachers to quickly adopt innovative strategies and build a robust, supportive network of peers to implement new ideas effectively.



*"Edcamp is what professional development should be about. Teachers coming together to discuss individual challenges and interests, while sharing resources or possible solutions based on real needs, interests, and experiences. Participating in Edcamp Utah was one of the most authentic professional development experiences I have had in years."*

-Jeremy Smith

(<https://ucet.org/about/edcamp/>)

## #UTedchat

While edchats have come and gone we'd be remiss if we don't mention the impact that educational twitter chats had across Utah. #UTedchat began in 2014 as an UCET experiment and quickly developed a loyal following. Held weekly on Wednesday nights #UTedchat routinely brought educators together from across the state. It was a forum that brought together a variety of groups including higher ed and public ed, suburban and rural, elementary and secondary to discuss the issues related to education in Utah. #UTedchat was an organic way to bring teachers together. At one point #UTedchat even

received national recognition for its engaging conversations (<https://iste.org/blog/44-education-twitter-chats-worth-your-time>).

After ten years and nearly 400 chats #UTedchat closed down as technology trends had shifted and Twitter was no longer the collaborative space it had once been for educators. Like with all technologies, it has changed with the times. Still, #UTedchat demonstrated the need that teachers have to connect with one another and UCET looked to be a leader in that space.

*"Our building has had very little PD time for tech. Twitter has been a place to grow. Being a part of these chats has changed me."*  
 (<https://ucet.org/about/utedchat/>)





*UCET Board of Directors*

## Conclusion

UCET's success truly mirrors the remarkable technological innovation that the state of Utah has achieved within its classrooms. This isn't a recent phenomenon, but a long-running narrative that began when the integration of technology into education was merely an ambitious dream, a stark contrast to the commonplace digital tools and connected environments we take for granted today.

I have been privileged to have a front-row seat for the past two decades of this incredible journey. Over that time, I've watched as ambitious visions became pilot programs, pilot programs became state-wide initiatives, and technology evolved from a novel accessory to an essential pillar of the learning experience. In my role with UCET, I see my primary responsibility as helping to bridge the gap between this foundational history—where we've been, what we've learned, and what we've built—and the rapidly evolving technological landscape that is shaping the future of education.

Ultimately, the power behind this movement is not just the hardware or the software, but the people. We are all essential cogs in the human networks that drive meaningful and effective educational technology. These networks—of teachers, coaches, administrators, and government leaders—help UCET provide the crucial support, training, and collective wisdom necessary to navigate constant change. No matter what new innovation appears on the horizon, the strength of the human network remains the most important factor in ensuring that technology serves the student.



*Jared Covili has been an educational technology leader in Utah for over twenty years. He specializes in teaching strategies for classroom integration of technology such as Google learning tools, geospatial learning, social media, and digital devices. His background is in secondary education with a Bachelors degree in English and his Masters degree in Instructional Design and Educational Technology from the [University of Utah](#). Jared currently serves as the Digital Teaching and Learning Administrator for the [Jordan, Utah School District](#), and as a [Utah Coalition for Educational Technology \(UCET\) Board Member](#) and its [ISTE/ASCD Liaison](#). [in](#) [globe](#) [envelope](#)*

Legacy is the official journal of The Worthy Educator, elevating the good work being done by leaders in education who are working to change the narrative on the profession and actively plan for impact that transforms its future to serve the needs of a diverse, decentralized, global society that is inclusive, equitable and open to all people as next generations adapt, evolve and contribute by solving problems and creating solutions that meet the needs of a world we have yet to envision.

Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis from educators who are implementing new and innovative approaches in the classroom and at the building and district levels. Information on specifications and instructions to submit can be found online at [theworthyeducator.com/journal](http://theworthyeducator.com/journal).