
UTAH EDUCATOR SERVICES SUITE (ESS)

Digital Government: Government to Government (G to G)

State of Utah

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B. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Utah State Office of Education Educator Services Suite (ESS) <http://www.utah.gov/teachers/> allows Utah teachers to manage their teaching license entirely online. Through the system, Utah educators can renew their Utah educator license, register or renew a background check, print a duplicate license, apply for a student teacher license, and pay for a university recommendation.

Prior to the launch of this system, the entire process of renewing a license took weeks to be processed. Now, teachers can complete the entire renewal process including recommendations and background check instantly online and print their renewed certificate directly from their computer rather than waiting weeks for a paper copy to be mailed to them. Teachers can pay for all of the services online through a secure payment processing.

Educator license renewal and the related suite of services dramatically reduces the time and paper work required for license renewal, saving local and state government time and money. It also streamlines the process of state government working with federal government when completing an educator background check.

Teachers and schools have expressed satisfaction with the ease and accessibility of the system, and local and government is pleased with the efficiency of the applications. The savings to the state are tremendous.

C. DESCRIPTION OF THE BUSINESS PROBLEM

The Utah State Office of Education (USOE) launched the Educator Services Suite (ESS) in January 2007. Prior to its launch it was an entirely paper process. A license renewal had to be mailed to the Office where it was submitted and checked manually and then the renewal information was entered manually. After it was processed, a paper certificate was mailed to the educator. This process was burdensome for both the educator submitting the application and USOE employees who processed the renewals.

The original concept was to make license renewal available online, however, it quickly became apparent that it would streamline the process even further if educators were able to complete background checks online as well as recommendations. There are now seven services available through ESS. When designing and developing ESS, the goal was to create a simple, functional application that could be easily integrated into institutions' existing systems.

Solution Description

At the onset, Utah educators were consulted for the development of ESS, thereby ensuring the final product would serve the education community effectively. The application is an easy to use solution and requires no training. An educator simply enters a few required fields and pays for their transaction, be it an online renewal, a background check or any of the other services. Teachers are able to complete the process in an estimated 5 to 6 minutes.

In order to best serve educators, the project was developed with an intuitive layout. From the applications main page, users can follow links to one of the following services:

- Background Check
- License Renewal
- Student Licenses
- University Recommendations
- Upgrade to Level 2
- Print Duplicate License
- Expired License

The suite of services layout makes it easier for educators to use and find the service they need. Once they have selected the process they wish to complete, educators follow a few simple steps in order to finish the application.

Because at no time is any personal information released through the system, teachers can feel secure using the system.

License Renewal: The online license renewal system is available to current Level 2 and Level 3 Utah Professional Educator License holders. The process is very simple. Educators fill out a few fields. The information is automatically checked against the USOE database, and the educator is allowed to continue with the renewal. The information is then gathered, and they can pay for the license renewal online. Payment is processed instantaneously, and the educator is able to print a license document as well as save an electronic file of this document on their own computer.

Background Checks: Utah Code (53A-1a-512.5) requires that each applicant for a Utah Educator License must satisfactorily complete a background check. To complete the background check, an applicant must submit fingerprints for review by the Utah Bureau of Criminal Investigation and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. ESS Background Checks gives the user the innovative option of submitting a LiveScan electronic fingerprint submission.

Student Licenses: As part of a university teacher preparation program, a student teacher is required to complete a student teaching program requiring a student license. To complete your Student licensing, a student completes the online form, pays the fees online and as with the license renewal is able to print a copy of their license as well as save an electronic copy.

University Recommendations: This process is for those whose Utah university/college has recommended them for a teaching license having completed a teacher preparation program in Utah.

Duplicate Licenses: This online service allows Utah educators to request and print a duplicate copy of their license. It is available to all level 1, 2, and 3 educators with an active Utah license.

Upgrade to a Level 2: This process is for educators whose employing Utah School District/Charter School has recommended them for a Level 2 educator license based upon their completion of all federal and state requirements.

The previous three services listed were added to the system within the last year. The Utah Office of Education continually seeks out opportunities to put additional services online. The USOE continues to incorporate suggestions provided by the educators in the feedback survey at the end of the process. The feedback form gives educators the opportunity to improve usability.

The ESS is managed and maintained by State employees. The ESS site was given a complete security review and analysis prior to deployment. ESS is deployed in an open source application server and database environment.

Length of Time in Operation

The Utah State Office of Education (USOE) launched the Educator Services Suite (ESS) in January 2007 and has been using it continuously since then.

D. SIGNIFICANCE TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE OPERATION OF GOVERNMENT

The paper process was a burdensome process for all parties involved, the local government, the State government as well as universities and school districts. And to complicate matters further, the federal government was required for the background checks. With each level of government required for a different piece of the application, it was a lengthy process. Now all levels of the government can work together via the online suite of services.

ESS serves over 35,000 educators in the state. In 2008, the percentage of online transactions reached 93 percent. That is 93 percent of all of the license transactions processed by the Office of Education. The cumulative percentage of online transaction for the year was 86 percent of all transactions.

Because the USOE no longer has to complete the manual paper process for the majority of these educators, the system saves the USOE at minimum 1 full-time employee (FTE.)

E. BENEFIT OF THE PROJECT

As of January 9, 2009 the Office of Education had processed 20,000 renewals online. The adoption rate of the application continues to increase as the Office of Education adds more services. As of January 2009 over 20,000 online license renewals had been completed. Additionally, USOE processes thousands of other transactions for the six other services.

The benefit of the project can be seen through out all levels of government. On the federal level, the background check and fingerprint process is streamlined. On the state level, USOE is more efficient as noted above. What used to take employees several minutes to manually check is now verified against the database instantly online. State employees are able to redirect their efforts towards other projects because they no longer have to devote time to processing the burdensome paper applications. State employees are more efficient and more productive.

Also, on the local level the system saves teachers, and in return, school districts time and money. The process now takes teachers an estimated 5 to 6 minutes per renewal..

As evidenced by the high adoption rates, teachers are pleased to use the ESS. It is simple, straightforward and easy to use and it saves teachers valuable time.

After completing one of the four services available through ESS, users are asked to complete an online survey regarding the system. When asked, "Did you find this service easy to use?" 95 percent of respondents answered "Yes". When asked, "Did the service offer all of the options/ features that you needed?" Again 95 percent of respondents answered "Yes". In addition, feedback included the following quotes:

"This was easy, easy, easy. Thanks."

"Great system, very easy and quick!"

"No suggestions for improvement, great!"

Teachers are incredibly satisfied with this program and the USOE is pleased with the simplification and time saved from the Educator Services Suite.