

Utah Policy Proposal: Menstrual Products in Public + Charter School Bathrooms

October 1, 2021

Contact: Emily Bell McCormick
804.267.0217
emily@thepolicyproject.org

BACKGROUND

Similar to a spontaneous bloody nose, menstruation is an uncontrolled monthly physical occurrence for every female--approximately half of the population of Utah--that disrupts school, work and all activity if unmanaged.

Periods must be managed with specific products, like tampons and pads, if a girl or woman hopes to maintain a regular activity level.

ISSUE

The average child starts a period at age 12--around 6th grade. But for [10-15 percent of girls, menstruation begins at age 7](#)--1st or 2nd grade. The age of onset is trending younger--and for children who experience more difficult living circumstances--especially those linked to [poverty, stress and race](#)--periods start at a much earlier age.

School-age girls are at the highest risk for mis- or under-managed menstruation as almost ALL begin their periods before they are able to legally work ([90 percent menstruate by age 13](#)), and they rarely have control over family finances or the ability to drive to a store to purchase period products.

Almost [7 out of 10 girls \(68 percent\), in the U.S., have missed school](#) due to a lack of access to products. And [1 in 5 teens cannot afford period products](#) at all.

For children experiencing “period poverty” (the lack of access to menstrual products), the results lead to lowered confidence and continuous disruptions in their education. Period products are as necessary to menstruating children as toilet paper.

PROPOSAL

The Utah Legislature should implement legislation and appropriate funds to increase access to free, safe and good quality menstrual products in Utah’s public and charter schools. Menstrual products should be placed in school bathrooms to ensure accessibility and privacy. The result will immediately and positively address issues of education, public health, and medical privacy for a large number of Utah children. Legislation outlining a plan for administration could include annual reporting to the Legislature on performance measures and metrics. To minimize waste or misuse, best outcomes are when there is a secure wall-mounted dispenser and a minimal educational outreach campaign. Some funds should be included in for one-time labor costs associated with installing dispensers.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

By providing free and easy access to safe menstrual products in public schools, we:

1. Raise educational outcomes across the state in EVERY female demographic.
2. Intervene with our most vulnerable students and allow them to learn with confidence and dignity.
3. Allow all students to learn without disruption of an uncontrolled health need.
4. De-stigmatize and de-sexualize menstruation.

5. Respect student's right to privacy in managing their period in the bathroom with the needed products readily available.
6. Encourage other entities in the state to destigmatize periods and to provide period products to increase productivity in educational settings as well as the workplace.
7. Increase productivity levels in both education and workforce.
8. Minimize public health costs by prevention versus treatment (e.g. infections from using unsafe products, etc.)
9. Create fairness by removing gender-inherent barriers to school attendance for girls and underserved communities.

COST

Range from \$3.6 million to \$4.8 million (full worksheet and methodology attached-- expected to be closer to \$3.6 million based on usage).

PRIVATE SUPPORT

Private donors have committed to cover the cost of the dispensers (approx. \$1 million) for public and charter bathrooms. Kristin Andrus (Jeremy Andrus of Traegar), working with Emily Bell McCormick, is leading the private donor portion.

IMPLEMENTATION

Product

Four bids and samples have been procured from four high-quality wholesale period product companies. We would be happy to share research and help with the RFP

process in any way. (Cost estimates in worksheet are based on higher cost items to be safe.)

Dispensers

Procured bids from several period product dispenser companies--these will be privately funded. There will need to be some coordination to ensure privately funded dispensers and publicly funded product work together. We will gladly help bridge that.

Installation and Maintenance

Ultimately the responsibility of stocking product will fall to individual school custodians. The leadership of Utah School Custodial Managers Association is supportive and wants to work collaboratively for a solution that works for all parties. Recommendation to build in some money for labor costs associated with installation.

OTHER ENTITIES ALREADY PROVIDING FREE PERIOD PRODUCTS

University of Utah, Utah State University, Salt Lake City public buildings, Disneyland, Arkansas public and charter schools and public universities, San Diego County, California public school and public universities, Illinois school districts and charter schools. Public schools in New Hampshire, New York and Australia. Free period products for all in Scotland. Other states that have passed related legislation for free menstrual products: Colorado, Delaware, Nevada, Oregon, Rhode Island and Washington. Many other states and countries have proposed legislation.

POTENTIAL CONCERN

What about waste of period products in schools?

There may be possible waste (or misuse) of menstrual products when products are newly introduced in schools. According to a study by Aunt Flow//professionals in the field, the usage returns to normal rate after a period of time “getting used” to having new product present. The study reflects similar pattern as other bathroom products like toilet paper or paper towels, where usage increased and then returned to normal after novelty faded.