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OP-ED: A GOOD SESSION FOR EDUCATION

By Dr. Linda Clark, President, Idaho State Board of Education

The 2018 legislative session is over and from my perspective as a member of the State Board of Education, it was a good, productive session for public education in Idaho – from kindergarten through college.

Our public schools budget will increase 5.9 percent next year. That's \$100 million in additional state general funds that will help us improve technology in our classrooms and continue our investments in our teacher “career ladder” designed to increase teacher pay.

Idaho's colleges and universities will see a 3.2 percent increase in ongoing state general funds, or \$9.2 million. This includes funding for creation of a new clinical master's degree program at Idaho State University to help address the need for more mental health professionals in Idaho. Lewis-Clark State College received funding for career counselors to help students align their courses and interests with a career after they graduate.

On other legislative fronts, the State Board will have more funding available for the Opportunity Scholarship program to help Idahoans pay for college including career technical certificates. Lawmakers and the Governor increased the Board's Opportunity Scholarship fund by nearly a third from \$10 million to \$13.5 million. Over 3,700 students benefited last year from the Opportunity Scholarship.

I'm very pleased that Governor Otter's legislation passed authorizing the Board to offer the Opportunity Scholarship to adults interested in returning to school to earn a certificate or a degree. The Board plans to have this scholarship for adult learners available by next fall.

Legislators also increased funding for medical residencies in Idaho as part of a ten-year plan designed to train more doctors who will hopefully practice medicine in Idaho, particularly in rural parts of our state, once they finish their residencies.

More emphasis was placed on computer science courses offered in our high schools; more financial support will be available for career technical education, including classes offered in middle school and it will be easier for college students to transfer from one Idaho college or university to another.

There were other proposals the Board both supported and opposed that did not make it through the legislature this session. We as a Board look forward to visiting with the sponsors of those bills during the interim to learn more about their proposals and to explore ways to possibly work together.

On behalf of my Board colleagues, I thank Governor Otter and the legislature for their hard work. Despite what you may hear or read, we have an excellent public education system in Idaho and progress made this legislative session helps keep the momentum going. I often remind people that education is an investment, not an expense. I am most grateful for the investments made this year, which will pay dividends in Idaho's future.

Dr. Clark's education career spanned 43 years, including 11 as Superintendent of Schools in the West Ada School District, the largest and most rapidly growing district in Idaho.

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