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For Immediate Release

October 2, 2018

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Article: Board Budget Proposals Designed to Improve Idaho's Go-On Rate

By Debbie Critchfield, vice president, Idaho State Board of Education

Last spring, I wrote about the [“summer melt” phenomenon](#) and how it occurs each year with a portion of Idaho’s newly-minted high school graduates. These are students who give every indication that they plan to attend college after graduation, only to melt away by the time fall classes begin.

State Board researchers estimate Idaho’s “go-on” rate (the percentage of high school graduates who immediately enroll in college or a career technical program) could increase five to 10 percent annually if summer melt is effectively addressed. Idaho’s go on rate has hovered at 45 percent for the last three years.

There are several factors contributing to summer melt. A lack of contact with high school seniors just before, and after they graduate stands out. This is a time of year when they are about to no longer be high school students, and they aren’t yet college students either. It is also a period when they are asked to fill out lots of forms and often aren’t sure where to go for guidance. Many students soon feel overwhelmed. When the economy is strong, as it currently is, a \$15 per hour job can be an appealing alternative, at least until that job is eliminated in the next downturn or caps out at a lower salary than jobs requiring some form of postsecondary education. By then, these summer melt students are often young adults with families and other obligations that make it even more difficult to go back and enroll in college or a career technical program.

State Board research shows that students who choose not to start college in the fall immediately after graduating high school, are unlikely to enroll later on. Less than one-quarter of students who did not go-on to college immediately, enroll in college within five years of graduation.

When the 2019 Idaho Legislature meets early next year, the Board will present a plan designed to get high school students enrolled in college or a career technical program as soon they graduate. The Board's proposed ***College Bridge Grant Program*** would create a \$2.4 million fund to provide grants covering tuition costs for high school graduates taking up to six credit hours over the summer just prior to the fall semester. Students would have to apply, and applications could be "weighted" based on financial need, at-risk populations (e.g. first generation students) or other factors which may cause students to melt away prior to the fall semester. Generally speaking, these students tend to have GPAs lower than 3.0 and have fewer scholarships and other resources available to them.

The Board is also requesting funding for a ***Parent Academy Program*** designed to help parents guide their child's education. The Parents Academy tops the list of recommendations developed by the Board's [Guided Pathways Work Group](#), which I chaired. It is based on a successful program pioneered at the University of Arizona, which provides workshops on transitioning from middle school to high school to college, the benefits of higher education, the importance of parental involvement and college planning including college admissions requirements and financial aid processes. The workshops equip parents to offer guidance and encouragement to their student and helps them understand how the parents' involvement can impact the level of education that their child can achieve.

The Board will request \$560,000 for the Parent Academy Program. If approved by lawmakers, each institution would get \$70,000 to hire a coordinator and to implement the program statewide.

In 2016, Idaho lawmakers and Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter provided more resources for college and career counseling in our high schools. The State Board's proposals are designed to complement those efforts before, and immediately after high school graduation.

Research shows that a career technical certificate or a college degree leads to better jobs and lives. If we can stop, or even slow summer melt before it begins, and help parents become more engaged throughout their child's education, we can have a

positive effect on the wellbeing of Idaho's economy and on our next generation of working adults.

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