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Accolades for Increasing Starting Teacher Pay

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

Idaho Governor Brad Little's recent bill signing increasing minimum pay for our teachers is a major accomplishment. The new law means that by the 2020 school year, all new teachers in Idaho will make at least \$40,000 per year – a \$4,200 per year increase compared to the minimum salary new teachers are making today.

As President of the State Board of Education, I thank Governor Little and the Idaho Legislature for their leadership in making this happen. The minimum teacher salary law is an important tool that will help reduce the number of newly-certified teachers graduating from Idaho colleges and universities and leaving our state for higher paying teaching jobs in neighboring states. Additionally, it will put teaching in Idaho on par with other entry level professional jobs making education a more viable career choice for Idaho's colleges and university students.

For new teachers who do enter an Idaho classroom, we still have more work to do in order to keep them there. Research by State Board staff shows that we lose 10 percent of our public school teachers every year. Of that 10 percent, "teachers 55 years or older account for about 33 percent of Idaho's annual attrition average, with 66 percent clearly leaving for reasons other than retirement," (only one percent leave the classroom to become fulltime administrators). This translates into more than 1,500 teachers leaving classroom jobs every year, and most of the attrition occurs in the first year or two of a career, costing Idaho an estimated \$7 million annually to find replacements.

Our research shows that many of these young teachers are leaving because they feel a lack of support in the first years of their teaching experience. I began my 43-year career as a classroom teacher and principal and can attest to the difficulty and challenge of those first teaching years and to the value of strong support and mentoring in the development of outstanding career teachers. The State Board is exploring ways to strengthen and expand mentoring of our new teachers.

Idaho policy makers have done a lot over the last five years to raise teacher pay – first with the career ladder and now by increasing the minimum salary for beginning teachers. These initiatives focus on early career teachers and strongly address the K-12 Task Force’s recommendation for beginning salaries that attract quality teachers to Idaho.

I respectfully suggest that the next focus must be on our more experienced teachers and the Task Force’s second salary recommendation to retain quality teachers in Idaho’s schools. Veteran teachers are a huge asset in any school. They have certain knowledge and skills honed over many years in the classroom that benefit students collectively and individually. It is vital that we retain these experienced teachers in Idaho’s classrooms for our students and for the role they can play in helping us stem teacher attrition among their younger colleagues.

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