



Our Kids, Idaho's Future

Final Report and Recommendations
November 2019

OUR KIDS, IDAHO'S FUTURE**Task Force Members:**

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Executive Summary:

The membership of *Our Kids, Idaho's Future* was announced on May 15, 2019 and the first meeting took place on June 3, 2019.

The mission of *Our Kids, Idaho's Future* was to work collaboratively on a five-year plan for education improvement and investment, focused on student achievement and accountability, aligning policy and budget priorities with these goals and delivering greater fiscal stability. This charge focused on developing recommendations on improving performance and accountability around two student achievement goals: early literacy and English Language Arts (ELA), and college and career readiness.

The task force was organized into four subcommittees, supported by additional education stakeholders, and business and industry representatives. These four subcommittees were the Educator Pipeline, Rural and Underserved Schools, School Facilities and School Safety, and K-12 Budget Stability

The task force and its subcommittees met 28 times over five months.

On October 1, 2019, the task force reviewed the recommendations from the subcommittees and narrowed the recommendations to five for final consideration and adoption. The subcommittees provided final reports on their work, their analyses and findings, and recommendations to the task force (see appendices 1 through 4 of this final report).

On October 23, the task force discussed, finalized, and adopted the language of the five final recommendations.

The task force voted on and approved the five final recommendations at its final meeting on November 4, 2019. These included:

- Statewide Accountability Framework around K-3 Literacy
- Greater All-Day Kindergarten Opportunities to Support K-3 Literacy and Future Student Achievement
- Building Out and Updating the Career Ladder to Elevate the Profession, and Retain Effective Educators
- Addressing Social and Emotional Issues to Support Student Learning and School Safety
- Strategic Alignment and Increased Flexibility in Public Schools Budget

Mission Statement:

Our Kids, Idaho's Future will work collaboratively on the next five-year plan for education improvement and investment, focusing on student achievement and accountability, aligning policy and budget priorities with these goals, and delivering greater fiscal stability.

Scope and Deliverables:

- Focus on two main student achievement goals for both primary and secondary education in Idaho— Where do we want these to be in five years?
 - Early literacy and English Language Arts.
 - College and Career Readiness.
- Develop strategies for accomplishing these goals, relying on recommendations from subcommittees.
- Focus on existing accountability framework that will help move student achievement on these goals.
 - Review of existing K-12 accountability system.
 - Review of how other states are implementing accountability.
 - Discuss what options might work for Idaho, particularly those tied to Idaho's K-12 budget.
- Review first task force (2013) recommendations and determine ways to improve those recommendations around the two student achievement goals and increased accountability.
- Recommendations on strategies for accomplishing the two key student achievement goals and increasing accountability in next five years.
- Review subcommittee recommendations and prioritize those most important for consideration.
- No more than 5 to 6 total recommendations.

Introduction:

In recognition of the importance of education to the state of Idaho, on his first day on the job, Governor Brad Little announced the formation of *Our Kids, Idaho's Future*, a broad-based task force with the charge “to look at our education system holistically and prioritize where we should invest the next available dollar” providing “Idaho's next five-year blueprint for education investment and reform.”

The 2013 task force recommendations provided the blueprint for this work. During his State of the State address, the Governor recognized the accomplishments of the 2013 K-12 task force, declaring that it “has been the force behind an unprecedented, sustained effort to improve Idaho education.” The collaboration, hard work, and commitment of the Idaho Legislature, working with Governor Otter, the State Board of Education, and a broad range of stakeholders delivered the last five years of sustained investment and reform.

The Legislature increased the K-12 education budget general fund appropriation over \$500 million in the past six years. This commitment in additional investments, however, occurred at a time of rapid student growth and backfill from recessionary cuts during 2009 and 2010. While this sustained investment and collaborative work is to be praised, K-12 education appropriations in Idaho, measured by per-pupil funding, only returned to 2009 levels in fiscal year 2017. Nevertheless, the past five years have provided a solid model for collaboration, incremental reform, and responsible investment in Idaho's K-12 system.

Our Kids, Idaho's Future's work and objectives come at a different time than the 2013 K-12 task force. While there was distrust and a lack of partnership between education stakeholders and policymakers six years ago, there has been an ongoing willingness for these groups to talk and work together during this sustained period of growth. Because of this strong foundation, *Our Kids, Idaho's Future's* efforts have been focused on being evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, complementary to the progress of the past five years. There are still many areas for improvement and much work to be done.

Although there are models and pockets of success throughout Idaho, student achievement across the kindergarten through grade 12 has not improved at the rate we would like to see. The entire work of *Our Kids, Idaho's Future*— across the task force and subcommittees, directly and indirectly— was focused on improved achievement and accountability around literacy and college and career readiness.

Through the state's constitutional and statutory role in accountability and transparency, it became clear that the state needs to provide simplified student achievement goals, and offer local districts, charters schools, and their governing boards the assistance, resources, and necessary flexibility to deliver on these goals.

Although the duty for maintaining “a general, uniform and thorough system of public, free common schools,” rests with Idaho's elected state representatives, the success of our students is dependent on parents, communities, and locally elected trustees. In deliberating statewide accountability efforts, the task force recognized this reality. In order to have ongoing improvement in student achievement, schools must have a culture of continuous improvement.

Another clear assumption underlying the necessary work to improve K-12 education in Idaho is the scarcity of resources, recognizing that a majority of Idaho schools are rural and remote communities. Investments must be sustainable and strategically aligned with our student achievement goals. Legislators, taxpayers, and parents expect to see these investments in our students pay off in the form of greater student achievement. The task force discussed these components and the critical importance of having the right culture in our schools, which begins with leadership and placing accountability at the right level.

Governor Little looks at education issues through the lens of our state's constitutional and moral responsibilities. In his inaugural address, he outlined this duty:

“Our state's commitment to education goes back to our constitution. Since statehood, every Idaho child has been promised a uniform, thorough, and free public education. And each generation has worked to better fulfill this constitutional responsibility, but, more importantly, the moral obligation we have to our children. [...] As Governor, I will work to live up to the promise we made at statehood.”

The recommendations within this report reflect that commitment to future generations of Idahoans.

Below is the work product of 28 meetings over the course of five months. While not exhaustive, this report and recommendations display the perspectives and good faith efforts of many different stakeholders working together on behalf of all Idaho students. It is a strategic blueprint for the next five years to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for students across Idaho.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS:**RECOMMENDATION 1: Statewide Accountability: Focusing Our Efforts on K-3 Literacy**

We recommend focusing our statewide accountability efforts on the following components:

- K-3 literacy as foundational;
- Providing boards, communities, and school leadership additional state guidance; and
- A framework for schools to achieve specific literacy growth targets based on similar cohorts of students.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Greater All-Day K Opportunities to Support K-3 Literacy and Future Student Achievement

We recommend additional statewide funding for all-day Kindergarten, creating greater uniformity statewide and recognizing that enrolling students in Kindergarten is optional for the parent.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Building Out and Updating the Career Ladder to Elevate the Profession, and Retain Effective Educators

We recommend expanding and building out the career ladder, with base appropriations starting at \$40,000, \$50,000, and \$60,000 at full implementation with consideration of additional performance criteria for this build out.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Addressing Social and Emotional Issues to Support Student Learning

We recommend the state provide standard professional development and access to additional resources around identifying and better serving students facing social and emotional challenges, including trauma and mental illness.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Strategic Alignment and Increased Flexibility in K-12 Funding Formula

We recommend retaining line-item funding for college and career advisors, Advanced Opportunities, and literacy intervention line-items in the K-12 budget, with the aim of making important updates to improve their effectiveness and accountability; and

We recommend collapsing some line-items in the public schools budget and providing more financial flexibility for local school districts and charter schools.

SECONDARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Additionally, the task force chose to highlight several subcommittee recommendations that were considered with the final recommendations, which they believe deserve additional consideration in the coming years.

From the subcommittee on the educator pipeline—recruiting and retaining effective educators in Idaho classrooms:

- Continuing to grow statewide professional development efforts for educators, ensuring all educators are able to grow professionally, feel supported, and have the necessary expertise to improve student achievement.
 - Feedback from the field and research confirms that teachers who receive strong mentorship and professional development are more likely to remain in the profession and drive student achievement.
 - Professional development and mentoring is important for our new educators, especially with the increase in alternatively certificated educators who may have deep content knowledge but need added support for pedagogy and classroom management.
 - Professional development is critical for experienced educators to grow and succeed in the profession.
 - Support could consist of:
 - Strengthening mentoring and coaching that is aligned with goals of increasing student achievement.
 - Increasing non-instructional contract days allowing for planning, collaboration time, job-embedded professional development tied to educator's instructional area, professional learning communities, and the sharing of best practices.
 - Increase in general professional development opportunities targeting student proficiency in literacy at all grade levels.
- Exploring additional, funded opportunities for more work time for personalized professional development, planning, and mentoring.

From the subcommittee on K-12 budget review— stability and strategic alignment:

- Strengthening the Public Education Stabilization Fund (PESF) by replenishing withdrawals from the prior fiscal year, minimizing the impacts of future transfers, and increasing the overall fund balance.
 - This could be a statutorily set transfer into the PESF, similar to the statutory Budget Stabilization Fund transfer.

From the subcommittee on opportunities in rural and underserved schools:

- Rewarding and incentivizing collaboration for rural, remote, and underserved schools to improve student opportunities and outcomes.
 - Rural and remote school districts across the state should more effectively collaborate and network to leverage resources to provide greater opportunities for students and accomplish greater economies of scale.

- The focus will be on the areas of career and technical education, college and career advising, pupil support staff (e.g., technology, school psychologists), and special education.
- The implementation of this recommendation must develop the right incentives to build these networks with associated state support to help districts collaborate.
- Increasing access and equity for industry-aligned career and technical education in rural and remote Idaho school districts.
 - Supporting the development and increased access to CTE pathways and clusters through online delivery while using creativity to leverage existing district resources (including non-CTE resources) for the leadership components of the program.
 - Addressing availability of teachers to teach CTE courses— this includes credentialing requirements.
 - Providing flexibility within the Division's CTE pathway framework to provide opportunities for small scale, industry-aligned programs that don't directly connect to traditional postsecondary programs and approval of CTE pathways based on program outcomes rather than the credential held by the instructor.
 - Considering additional resources to support these initiatives.

From the subcommittee on school facilities and school safety:

- Adopting minimum statewide protocols for school safety and security. This would include the following:
 - Use of a standardized common language for school safety and security, consistent with Idaho Standard Command Response for Schools (ISCRS), where first responders that serve the district also utilize ISCRS.
 - Investigate ways LEAs can communicate with parents and patrons on school safety and security issues, including staff training and alignment with Office of School Safety and Security (OSS) domains.
 - Provide minimal training for all School Resource Officers (SRO) on the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) standards or other specific LEA needs. The subcommittee recognizes this recommendation and additional SRO support requires additional resources.
- In the course of its work, the subcommittee reviewed different components of state support for school facilities, including the school facilities maintenance matching funds, school facilities funding from the lottery, public schools facility cooperative funding program, bond levy equalization, and public charter school facilities support.

Last year, SCR 111 (2019) was put forward to review the existing methodology for school construction and maintenance in Idaho, and to identify any inadequacies in that formula. The Legislature did not end up establishing the proposed interim committee.

While this subcommittee made recommendations regarding school security and student safety, the subcommittee believes additional study and proposed updates to the methodology for school facilities funding should occur in the Legislature. It recommends creating an interim committee during the next session, in line with the language of SCR 111 (2019).

Analysis and Findings:

The first and underlying recommendation from *Our Kid's Idaho's Future* is a statewide accountability framework around K-3 literacy. Literacy is foundational to all student learning and deserves increased attention in order to improve Idaho's entire K-12 system. As has been stated many times, students who cannot read by the third grade are our most at-risk students, unlikely to catch up to their peers and less likely to graduate from high school. Nationally an estimated 23 percent of students reading below basic level in third grade do not graduate from high school by the age of 19; 9 percent of students reading just below grade level, that statistic drops to 9 percent; 96 percent of students reading proficiently by the end of third grade graduate from high school by the age of 19.

Momentum currently exists for K-3 literacy in districts and charters across Idaho. Last year, which was the first year of the new Idaho Reading Indicator (IRI) Assessment, scores came out for approximately 90,000 Kindergarten through third graders. The new IRI is a powerful tool allowing educators a view to the whole picture of a child's literacy skills. This data can be used to drive instruction. Last year, the Legislature approved the doubling of literacy intervention dollars to schools in the state. With these commitments, district and school leaders across Idaho are working to achieve significant growth to proficiency on this important foundation for our students' future learning opportunities. This focus on K-3 literacy means the state can target limited resources and positively impact student outcomes throughout our students' educational careers.

In order to achieve this necessary growth, the task force recognizes the critical role leadership plays in creating a culture in our schools around continuous improvement, and recommends that the state provide local school boards of trustees orientation or training. This training would give boards information on our statewide goals and the tools available to them, and would help community leaders work effectively with school leadership to set goals and growth targets.

Another component of this recommendation is a framework of student growth and achievement targets for K-3 literacy, which would focus on comparing school buildings and LEAs with similar student populations. Using similar cohorts of students, for comparison purposes, allows parents, education stakeholders, and state policymakers to compare the success of our schools and measure continuous improvement in a fair and unbiased manner. It also provides opportunities for similar schools to share best practices. By focusing on growth toward proficiency, we recognize the efforts of educators, regardless of the proficiency level of the student when they enter school. Progress would be demonstrated through a publicly available dashboard that is easy to understand, allows users to make comparison based on student and school characteristics, and includes data visualization tools showing progress toward the school and district annual growth targets.

Closely tied to the K-3 literacy achievement and accountability recommendation is the recommendation for additional statewide funding for optional all-day Kindergarten, creating greater uniformity in opportunity for all day Kindergarten access.

The task force and the rural and underserved subcommittee (which put forward this recommendation) discussed the ongoing challenges of school readiness and decreasing scores on the Fall IRI for incoming Kindergarteners for the past three-plus years. Earlier this year, with the increase in literacy intervention funds, many districts and charters chose to use their additional funds for all-day Kindergarten opportunities to address this challenge and get students on the right track to read proficiently by the end of the third grade. Districts have chosen to

provide these opportunities to their students in recognition of the positive impact all-day Kindergarten has for all students' educational readiness. Currently, only some districts are able to provide this all-day K opportunity to subgroups of students that are the most at-risk and not reading at grade level when they enter Kindergarten.

With the current state support, many districts are only able to provide opportunities for all-day Kindergarten by cobbling together funds from multiple sources or limiting the students who can participate. The lack of uniformity across the state creates a discrepancy in opportunities available to students based on geography. Many families are limited in their ability to move to communities that offer all-day Kindergarten, thereby limiting the option for all-day Kindergarten for our economically disadvantaged students.

There is a fundamental instability when a program is dependent on multiple funding sources and is time-limited. When those funds are discontinued, it may cause the entire program to be ended. As an example, when a school district is dependent on levy funds to provide all-day Kindergarten to its students, the loss of a supplemental levy could cause the discontinuance of the entire program. This has an adverse impact for those families who have chosen to participate in all-day K and are left with few options when the program is shut down, particularly families where both parents work or are living below the poverty level. These children often have limited high-quality learning opportunities moving forward.

Districts who currently offer all-day Kindergarten shared the positive impact their programs have made in K-3 reading scores. There are numerous studies that identify early interventions as being more effective and having a greater impact over interventions in the later grades. Early interventions that bring students up to grade level by the end of the first grade reduce the need for the same level of interventions in third grade and beyond. Additionally, all-day Kindergarten provides school districts and charters more time with the student, allowing them to identify learning disabilities earlier in their education and provide early, more effective and often less costly interventions. These expanded opportunities for all-day Kindergarten should include providing the resources to expand the curriculum and ensure that full-day opportunities are of a high quality.

The task force recognized the need moving forward that more analysis is required on the full extent of all-day Kindergarten offerings in each LEA. The results reported by school districts who have implemented all-day Kindergarten so far have identified the positive impacts it has had on student achievement. More details are in the final report from the rural and underserved subcommittee. Additionally, states who offer early education opportunities and full-day Kindergarten have shown significant improvement in their students reading at grade level by the end of third grade. Approximately 80 out of 115 of Idaho's school districts offer some form of all-day kindergarten, and around 16 charter schools offer all-day kindergarten options. However, both surveys from Idaho Education News and the State Department of Education are incomplete. The task force identified the importance of keeping these opportunities optional for students and families across the state, while emphasizing the importance of having the option for every student.

Studies have shown that dedicated, high-quality, professional educators are the number one factor within a school for students' long-term success and achievement. With that recognition, one of the task force subcommittees focused on Idaho's teacher pipeline, and the recruitment, development, and retention of high-quality educators. The subcommittees main recommendation was for building out and updating the career ladder in order to elevate the profession and retain effective educators.

The Legislature has shown a strong commitment to our educators by funding the career ladder through implementation and investing in educator professional development over the past five years. Despite this investment, Idaho is not recruiting and retaining the number of teachers we need to serve our students, particularly in rural and border communities across the state. The most recent data shows some improvement in retention that corresponds with the implementation of the career ladder. However, the improvement has not been enough to meet our state needs and highlights the need for expansion of the career ladder to retain our more experienced educators. More details are in the pipeline subcommittee final report.

By building out the third rung of the career ladder, we continue efforts to retain and attract our educators as they move through their careers. This effort will help reduce attrition, which has a high cost for districts and for the state. Additionally, this effort will make teaching a more competitive profession, attracting great students and non-education professionals into education. The annual State Board of Education Educator Pipeline report provides information on the wages for educators compared with other professions requiring a bachelor's degree and considers this wage penalty, even factoring in relative pay with industries requiring year-round work.

Looking across the country, many states are grappling with the issue of teacher compensation. Utah, released a titled from *Empower Utah* detailing the need to increase starting teacher pay to \$60,000 to and maximum salaries to over \$100,000 in order to recruit and retain high-quality professionals in the future.

In addition to the connection between the improvement in retention rates with the implementation of the career ladder, additional analysis shows an increase in the average educator experience up to the point where compression on the upper end of the career ladder starts to impact allocations to school districts for their most experienced teachers. From 2013 to 2018, Idaho has seen a significant increase in the number of teachers within the system who have two to six years of teaching experience. Additionally, Idaho has seen a moderate increase in the number of Idaho teachers with 10 to 14 years of experience. The population of teachers in the initial grouping with two to six years of experience demonstrates a significant improvement in attracting and retaining new teachers into education. Preliminary contract information shows that educators are getting paid at least the career ladder allocation on average and that some school districts use local funds, when available, to offer higher salaries in order to be competitive.

The subcommittee report highlights the intrastate and regional comparisons of educator salaries, and provides examples of districts who cannot pay much beyond the career ladder allocation. What is clear is that building out the career ladder helps level the playing field for rural school districts or districts not able to pass supplemental levies so that they can increase salaries to more competitive levels, narrow the salary gaps between districts, and reduce the burden on local property taxpayers. The report also discusses the link between veteran educator salaries and supplemental levies. Dependence on time-limited funding sources for personnel costs is not sustainable and puts districts in a difficult fiscal situation over the long-term.

The task force looked at issues that directly and indirectly impact student learning. From that analysis the task force identified addressing social and emotional issues as one of the top priorities for supporting students and educators and addressing root causes of student violence in schools. The task force's fourth recommendation was for the state to provide standard professional development, and access and awareness to additional resources for identifying and better serving students facing social and emotional challenges, including trauma and mental illness.

The task force members, particularly those from school districts and charters from across Idaho, have seen greater mental health issues among their student populations. Teachers are spending more time mitigating behavioral health issues in the classroom that take away from the other students learning opportunities. Students learn best when they feel they are in a safe and secure environment. Additionally, our educators and staff need support to minimize burn out and improve their effectiveness in serving these students.

States across the country are grappling with this issue and formulating policy to address safety and security. According to a recent report from the Education Commission of the States, during 2019 legislative sessions across the 50 states, 323 bills were considered in 42 states, with 49 bills enacted in 26 states. These pieces of legislation covered school-based mental health services and resources, school staff training, and school curricula.

Finally, the K-12 budget subcommittee targeted recommendations to ensure the public schools budget is both strategically aligned and fiscally stable, focused on the task force's two overarching areas for student achievement in the next five-years— K-3 literacy and college and career readiness.

The fifth recommendation calling for increasing strategic alignment with state priorities, while increasing flexibility for school districts and charter schools, has two components:

- Retaining line-item funding for college and career advisors, Advanced Opportunities, and literacy intervention within the public schools budget. Additionally, in retaining these line-items, important updates will need to be made to improve their effectiveness and accountability.
- Collapsing line-items that are not identified as strategically aligned or having a systemwide benefit in the public schools budget, which will provide more financial flexibility for local school districts and charter schools.

In addition to identifying line-items aligned with these state strategic priorities, this final recommendation includes retaining those components of the public schools budget which support our constitutional responsibilities for a uniform and thorough public education system for all of our students. The line-items that fulfill responsibilities to thoroughness and uniformity include, but are not limited to, transportation, facilities funding, and salary-based apportionment, which includes the career ladder.

Appendices:

- Appendix 1 – Educator Pipeline Final Report (with appendices)
- Appendix 2 – Rural and Underservices School Districts Final Report (with appendices)
- Appendix 3 – School Facilities and School Safety Final Report (with appendices)
- Appendix 4 – K-12 Budget Stability Final Report (with appendices)
- Appendix 5 – Final Vote on Recommendations from November 4, 2019 Task Force Meeting
- Appendix 6 – References