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**For Immediate Release**

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## **Coronavirus-related Challenges for Education**

By Debbie Critchfield, President, Idaho State Board of Education

Idaho's public education system is responsible for almost 400,000 students from kindergarten through graduate-level college, along with thousands of teachers, professors and staff. In the wake of the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, decisions have been made over the past few days throughout our state to bring most parts of this enormous enterprise either to a temporary halt, or to change the ways in which we deliver instruction. This is an unsettling and unpredictable time for all.

Speaking for everyone involved in administering our public schools, and colleges and universities, there is absolutely nothing more important than doing all we can to assure the health and safety of our students, our employees and their families. Closing schools creates complications and hardships for some. Local school boards and administrators understand that, but given the rapidly changing scenario that we find ourselves in, they are taking actions they feel are best for their communities, based on what they are hearing from parents and staff, their own circumstances, resources and risk factors. These are incredibly difficult decisions with rippling implications.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra and her State Department of Education staff are working with local school administrators to answer a myriad of questions raised by this unprecedented event. They are communicating with public health and federal education officials, sharing guidance and other information

needed to make good decisions now, in order to be prepared for classes to begin again.

Our college and university presidents and their faculties are putting in long hours moving instruction from the classroom to what are called “distance learning” options including classes taught online or by video or teleconference. It is a huge undertaking that began last week. All eight of our community colleges and four-year institutions are coordinating efforts and sharing information. They expect to be delivering distance learning options for students by the end of the month. Decisions about whether to conduct commencement ceremonies and other events later this year are being made and communicated by institutions daily.

We are taking many of our cues from Governor Brad Little’s Coronavirus Working Group, which includes state health officials and others charged with managing Idaho’s response to this health crisis. Governor Little has established a website with the latest state information and guidance on the outbreak:

<https://coronavirus.idaho.gov/>

I encourage you to monitor this website and follow guidelines recommended for social distancing and other measures to help arrest the spread of this virus. This health crisis is unprecedented in our lifetimes, and it seems to change by the hour. Despite the uncertainty, schools and in-person college instruction will eventually resume and our public system will be prepared when it does. For now, it is important that we focus on taking care of our families, helping our friends and neighbors, particularly those who are elderly, and of course, ourselves.

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