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Adapting Idaho's Public Education System in Unprecedented Times

By Debbie Critchfield, President, Idaho State Board of Education

What an incredibly disruptive time we find ourselves in as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are working and learning from home, watching unemployment numbers rise, checking websites that count daily virus numbers and hoping for eventual return to some form of normality.

Young people in their junior and senior years of high school are wondering what all of this will mean for their plans before and after graduation. For our soon-to-be graduates, Idaho's higher education institutions are working with high schools to answer questions as best they can and here's where things stand on some priority issues.

Dual Credit Courses

Like all other courses, college credit-bearing dual credit courses are now conducted through distance learning and as a result of the disruption, high schools may grade these courses as pass/fail rather than the standard letter grade. Because these are college level courses with college credit granted by the higher education institutions, the grading standards for dual credit courses taught in high school are the same as those taught on the college campus. All eight of our public institutions are working with high schools to identify the best way to serve these students when

it comes to grading these courses. When a student earns credit in a dual credit course, regardless of the grading methodology used, those credits will be accepted by all eight of Idaho's public institutions. If a student attends an Idaho college other than the one that awarded the dual credit, that credit will be accepted.

Advanced Placement Testing

There are many juniors and seniors who have invested countless hours preparing for Advanced Placement (AP) tests, only to see those tests postponed as a result of the health crisis. The College Board is working to administer those tests to students at home and each test will last 45 minutes. Students who score a 3 or better (the range is 1-5) will earn college credit at all Idaho public higher education institutions.

College Entrance Exams/Graduation Requirements

In Idaho, a student must take the SAT or ACT college entrance exam in order to graduate. However, the State Board of Education waived that requirement for seniors who haven't yet taken the exam this year and will be looking at an administrative rule change for juniors who could not take the exam this year due to the pandemic and will be graduating next year. SAT School Day, (when most juniors take the test) normally held this time of year statewide, has been cancelled. The State Department of Education is looking at two options for students who are juniors this year:

- Potentially schedule SAT School Day next fall;
- A testing fee waiver enabling students to choose a date to take the SAT on a date when it is administered. The College Board is planning to provide monthly SAT opportunities throughout the summer if social distance restrictions allow.

The Board also waived the Senior Project graduation requirement for this year and the spring 2020 ISAT (not a graduation requirement) has also been waived.

We are also working with our institutions to determine how scholarships will be awarded this year and how the waiver of the college entrance exam scores will affect our Direct Admissions and Apply Idaho programs. I'll keep you updated as decisions are made.

Our goal at the State Board of Education, the State Department of Education, the Division of Career Technical Education, our higher education institutions and at our high schools is to finish out this academic year while doing the best we can for

our students. This COVID-19 event will certainly produce lingering memories of a difficult time. We hope those memories will reflect well on how Idaho's public education system adapted for students and for their futures. We are striving to make that happen.

You can read more about these actions and guidance the Board developed for our K-12 system on the State Board of Education website:

<https://boardofed.idaho.gov/coronavirus-covid-19-resources/>

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