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For Immediate Release

May 5, 2020

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Next Steps Idaho has Answers for Students

By Matt Freeman, Executive Director, Idaho State Board of Education

Byron Yankey has worked in public education in Idaho for 45 years. Never has he seen anything like what has occurred this spring. “There have been disruptive events in the past, but never as widespread as this,” he said.

As part of the State Board of Education’s Outreach Team, Yankey and other team members are focused on students graduating from high school this year and next, and how the coronavirus disruption has affected post-high school plans for thousands of young Idahoans. “We have to provide them soft-landings,” he said. “With all that has happened to disrupt the information flow, we’ve tried to provide that soft landing by asking ourselves what are the questions we are hearing most from students and how can we best provide the answers.”

The platform for those answers is the State Board of Education’s [NextStepsIdaho.gov](https://www.nextstepsidaho.gov) website. The Outreach Team worked with high school counselors and college admissions staff to put together a detailed lists of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) divided into various topic sections covering everything from college admissions requirements, to campus COVID-19 safety measures, to various college-related deadlines and information about alternatives to traditional college. “We know many young people are looking for information about other career choices, so we also have information about career technical programs, apprenticeships and workforce development programs,” he said.

The FAQs are designed for students who are already planning to “go on” to college and for those who are still on the fence. Each category includes contact information for a real person, should students need more details or just want to talk to someone. “A student can click on a topic and see a series of questions written from their point of view along with an answer from each of the institutions. We also included a feature so they can compare two institutions side-by-side,” Yankey said.

Students can tour many of those institutions too – virtually, giving them opportunities to get a sense for each campus and to schedule in-person tours later this year.

The Next Steps Idaho website is geared specifically for students, enabling them to learn about college and career options, and apply for college and financial aid. The website has grown more popular every year becoming a “go-to” place for students planning for life after high school.

The public health crisis has complicated all of that. With the addition of the FAQs, Yankey is hopeful that Next Steps Idaho will help students regain their moorings and get back on track. “With all that is going on, and the uncertainty many are feeling, it will be a challenge for us to keep young people engaged over the next four to six weeks and making decisions about going to college,” he said. “It is far easier to opt-out, than it is to opt-in and complete the process. We hope that by creating this single source for information, the Next Steps Idaho website will help alleviate some of the anxiety many students are feeling this year.”

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