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**BOARD TO REQUEST CARES ACT FUNDS TO IMPROVE
“BLENDED LEARNING”**

The Idaho State Board of Education today approved a plan to request \$34 million CARES Act funding to help close the digital divide in Idaho’s public schools and improve “blended learning” throughout the public education system.

The request will be made to Governor Brad Little’s Coronavirus Financial Advisory Committee (CFAC), which is deciding how federal CARES Act funding is used in Idaho.

- \$30 million would be used to purchase devices for students and improve connectivity in areas where students lack access to the internet.
- \$4 million would be directed to create a higher education “digital campus” enabling students in remote areas to take college classes online.

Blended learning includes both in-person and online or distance learning instruction when needed.

The Board also approved use of \$4.8 million in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds for grants to school districts and charter schools. Grants could be used for expenses related to a learning management system,

devices, internet connectivity and professional development to support the delivery of blended learning. Additionally, funding may be used for professional development to provide social/emotional health supports to students remotely.

“From my perspective, the most important thing we can do is to get schools open in the fall,” Board Member Kurt Liebich said. “The second thing we need to do is to position districts to be able to deliver a blended learning solution more effectively than they were forced to do this past spring. Each of these investments are supporting districts to be able to better deliver blended learning this fall.”

Other action items include:

- Approved three-year contract extensions for Lewis-Clark State College President Cynthia Pemberton and Idaho State University President Kevin Satterlee. The institution presidents will not receive pay increases this year.
- Approved institution operating budgets for FY2021 with a caveat that the approved budgets may be adjusted when fall enrollment numbers become clearer and the Governor’s latest 5 percent holdback is factored in.
- Approved the University of Idaho’s request to create an online Master’s level teaching program.
- Approved the University of Idaho’s request to discontinue its Materials Science and Metallurgical Engineering program. The proposal includes a plan enabling students currently enrolled in the program to complete their studies. The U of I estimates discontinuation of the program will result in \$800,000 in cost savings.
- Approved the University of Idaho’s request to begin the planning and design phase of its Idaho Center for Plan and Soil Health in Parma. The budget for planning and design is not to exceed \$780,000.
- Approved institution and agency four-year (FY2021-25) strategic plans.
- Waived the Board’s college entrance exam admissions requirement for the 2020-21 academic year due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the work session portion of the meeting, the Board discussed the assessment currently used by the state for accountability at the high school level

and state graduation requirements. The Board will consider these further and is expected to take action in these areas at future meetings over the next year.

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