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## **KHAN ACADEMY FOUNDER'S ADVICE FOR DISTANCE LEARNING**

By Debbie Critchfield, President, Idaho State Board of Education

School is back in session. Students across Idaho are learning in-person and remotely. We are hopeful that all students will soon be back in their classrooms fulltime. Last spring, we learned the ability to adapt quickly to a new environment for learning, must be a priority. In this public health crisis, preparation is not simply helpful, it is critical.

The last seven months have been extremely challenging for everybody. We hear how stressful distance learning can be for students, parents and teachers. Earlier this week, the State Board of Education hosted a conversation with a pioneer in online education who offered useful tips for all of us.

If you have a school-aged child in Idaho, odds are you are already familiar with Khan Academy. “Last year, Idaho had the highest per capita usage of Khan Academy, I believe in the world,” said Salman “Sal” Khan, who founded Khan Academy in 2008, a nonprofit organization offering personalized learning resources for tens of millions of kids worldwide for free.

Since the pandemic, Khan Academy traffic has surged significantly, an indication that parents and educators are looking for resources as they strive to support and help children who are learning online. “If parents try to engage their student for 20 to 40 minutes and actively work with them in math, reading and writing, the child

will be just fine.” Khan said. “Sit down next to your child, have them in your lap if needed and make it a human experience.” Khan explained that should take about two hours a day at the most, which is manageable for most parents.

Sal and his wife have three young children and he says even they feel overwhelmed. It is hard for kids to sit in front of a screen all day, so it is important, he says, to make lessons as interactive as possible. “Kids need the human connection more than ever. For some kids, distance learning is their only lifeline to people outside of their family, and so if parents and teachers can think of ways to create interactive and personalized lesson plans, the better it will be for students.”

Khan suggests for instance shorter video conference sessions with smaller groups of students such as three periods of 10 minutes with ten students in each session. This will help students feel more comfortable and more likely to actively participate in a distance learning class. “If we don’t keep kids emotionally supported, we are going to lose a lot of kids. Not only will they not learn, their current skills may atrophy and they might check out,” he said.

As parents, as teachers, as administrators and as State Board of Education members, we cannot let that happen to our students. Sal recommends that teachers be allowed to try new things while teaching online with a focus being on keeping students engaged and learning at all levels. “If we can get through this year, where kids have not atrophied in math, reading and writing, ideally learning in math, reading and writing, I think it will be a huge win,” he said.

State Board member Kurt Liebich commented, “I believe that the most important advice Sal offered was for educators to look for opportunities to create personal connections with students. We can’t just translate the traditional classroom to a Zoom call. We must find ways to keep students engaged on a personal level.”

Governor Brad Little’s “Strong Families, Strong Students” initiative will make federal coronavirus relief funds available to help families buy computer hardware, other educational services and gain access to the internet. The Board will announce soon how families can access those funds. The initiative will help solve many of our remote learning technology challenges.

We do not know what the pandemic has in store, but we all need to think creatively about ways to support students in class, online and at home. Our kids are counting on us to make all instruction effective, no matter how it is delivered.

A recording of the State Board's conversation with Sal Khan is currently available for viewing on the State Board of Education's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/idsboe>

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