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For Immediate Release

September 17, 2020

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“Next Steps Month” Is a Perfect Opportunity to Imagine Your Higher Education Future

By Shawn Keough, member, Idaho State Board of Education

This October, teachers, counselors and education leaders across the state will be focused on a critical, collective effort: encouraging high school seniors to devote time to planning their educational and career dreams as part of Idaho’s “Next Steps Month.”

This may seem challenging for high school seniors, especially at the front-end a new school year that is unlikely to be “normal.” That said, even this very unusual academic year will fly by. Before we know it, final exams, graduation preparation and other year-end activities will demand attention. Thus, now is the perfect time for seniors to begin exploring and planning their next move.

We at the Idaho State Board of Education are not just urging the state’s 22,000 high school seniors to think and act now. We are also speaking to the thousands of young adults who earned high school diplomas last May yet postponed their enrollment in colleges or technical and trade programs.

We also want to provide encouragement and tools to young adults who find themselves out of work, poised for a career transition, and willing to consider education, training, and apprenticeship programs as part of their reinvention process, charting a different path forward than planned.

Next Steps Month activities will center on working with education leaders around the state to make learning about and applying to college or training programs easier than ever. For example, the State Board has modified the way it delivers direct admission letters to high school seniors. Now students can log into “Apply Idaho” on the state’s [Next Steps Idaho](#) website, create their own account, and open and print their personalized direct admissions notification. This letter will show all the public colleges and universities each student is pre-qualified to attend, based on their high school GPA. All students need to do is apply to one or more of the institutions to confirm their interest, which they can do for free starting on October 1.

In addition, the State Board has scheduled a series of virtual college and training and trade program fairs. We know this cannot entirely replace the experience of visiting college campuses or the in-person benefits of meeting representatives at college fairs. But this three-day virtual event, scheduled Sept. 29-Oct. 1, will provide students, graduates, and career dreamers with valuable tools, information, and resources essential to learning about the postsecondary education opportunities available here in Idaho. All eight of the state’s public colleges and universities will be represented, along with Northwest Nazarene University, the College of Idaho and BYU-Idaho. Each institution will share information about programs and degrees and have staff available to interact in chat rooms or live video feeds.

We understand the lives of high school seniors, 2020 graduates and those at a career crossroads are busy, complex, and filled with uncertainty right now. It’s for these reasons that the State Board and so many others are committed to helping our young people dream big, enabling a full exploration of the possibilities and options that are within reach, and equipping them with the tools and knowledge to turn their aspirations into reality. Students and recent grads, perhaps with the help of educators, family members, and mentors, can head to Next Steps Idaho and take meaningful steps toward shaping their futures.

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