



650 W. State Street • Room 307 • Boise, ID • 83702
P.O. Box 83720 • Boise, ID • 83720-0037

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Contact: Mike Keckler
208-332-1591 (office)
208-866-5734 (cell)
Mike.Keckler@osbe.idaho.gov

BOARD APPROVES LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL FOR FULL-TIME KINDERGARTEN

The Idaho State Board of Education today approved a legislative proposal to fund full-time kindergarten in Idaho public schools statewide during its meeting at Idaho State University in Pocatello. If the proposal becomes law, parents who choose to send their children to kindergarten would be able to enroll them either full-time, or half-time provided school facilities are available.

Full-time kindergarten was recommended in 2019 by Governor Brad Little’s “Our Kids, Idaho’s Future” K-12 task force. The purpose of the proposal is to better prepare young students to learn once they enter grade school. “When you have 60 percent of your children entering school without the necessary skills to succeed, they are playing catchup during their entire career in school so I think this is very important legislative proposal,” Board member Dr. Linda Clark said. Board President Kurt Liebich added, “From a strategy standpoint in terms of improving literacy going into the first grade, the Board is unanimous in its support of full-time kindergarten.” The estimated cost of statewide full-time kindergarten is estimated to be \$42 million annually.

Full-time kindergarten is one of eight legislative proposals approved today by the Board. Other proposals including changing the method for calculating public

school funding, basing it on student enrollment, rather than attendance. A change to enrollment-based funding would better account for all students in calculating funding for public schools. Another proposal would establish an educator incentive program, providing funds for teachers to use toward student loan repayment or reimbursement of current educational costs if they work in a rural or high-need school districts or charter schools. The proposal could award up to \$12,000 to teachers over four years if they stay in the program. The money could be used to pay student loans or reimburse teachers for other education-related professional costs. The Board's proposed legislation will be presented during the 2022 legislative session.

The Board also approved the first reading of Board policy delegating authority to the Board's executive director to close a four-year higher education institution or any of its buildings or campuses and to limit its programs or activities for the purpose of preventing the spread of contagious or infectious disease, and to the institution presidents to implement measures to prevent the spread of contagious or infectious diseases. Such actions by either the Board's executive director or institution presidents, would be considered by the Board at its next meeting. Final consideration of the policy amendment will occur at the Board's next regular meeting in October.

The Board heard early results of a study by Board staff on the pandemic impact on students who participated in hybrid and online learning compared to students who attended school in-person. The study compared grade point averages (GPA) of ninth grade students in March 2020, to ninth grade students March 2021. There was 0.13 decrease in student GPAs for those attending hybrid instruction (combination of in-person and online instruction) and a 0.09 decrease in GPAs students attending online. Chief Research Officer Dr. Cathleen McHugh said if these students do not improve their GPAs over next three years, it could affect their eligibility for programs such as the Opportunity Scholarship. The study also indicates that students were more likely to receive a D or F in English Language Arts and math courses in 2020-21 compared to 2018-19.

Other Board actions include:

- Approved a proposed rule to remove the college entrance exam high school graduation requirement in Idaho public schools. In June, the Board amended its policy requiring students take a college entrance exam in order to be admitted to Idaho's four year college and universities. That decision is now left up to each institution.
- The Board approved the appointment of Jeff Tucker as General Manager of Idaho Public Television. Tucker started at IPTV as a high school student intern in 1983. He has held several positions over the years including as a producer/director, production manager and most recently as director of content. Tucker replaces former GM Ron Pisaneschi, who retired earlier this year.
- Approved amendments to the State Board's ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) plan for submittal to the U.S. Department of Education. The plan will make \$146 million in ESSER funds available for various uses to help school districts keep schools operating safely and to help students who fell behind during pandemic.
- Approved Idaho State University's plan to renovate Holt Arena in partnership with Idaho Central Credit Union (ICCU). The facility opened on the Pocatello campus in 1970. The renovation includes new spectator seating, new turf, hospitality suites and ADA accessibility upgrades. ICCU will pay the cost of the renovation. ISU will dedicate \$1 million in institution reserve funds to cover possible cost overruns.
- Approved Boise State University's Institute for Advancing American Values under the office of Boise State President Marlene Tromp. The purpose of the institute is to "support and encourage conversations between opposing viewpoints, honor differences and promote mutual understanding," through public events, research and educational programming. The institute will be initially funded in part with a \$1 million donor gift over 10 years.

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