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**BOARD HEARS UPDATE ON COVID-19 SURGE IMPACT ON
PUBLIC EDUCATION**

Idaho’s deputy state epidemiologist today told the State Board of Education that the COVID-19 Delta variant surge is affecting students at all levels, setting records both in school-aged children, teenagers and young adults.

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare predicts the surge will peak in mid-November at 21,000 cases per week. “I see no indication as of today that we are heading downward, we may be heading towards a plateau, which I’ll take over continual increases,” said Dr. Kathryn Turner, of the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW).

Last week, IDHW enacted crisis standards of care at hospitals throughout the state. Dr. Turner said there is currently an average of about 45 children hospitalized with COVID-19 in Idaho.

The Board also heard how schools are struggling with fluctuating student attendance and labor shortages that are making it difficult to hire bus drivers, custodians, substitute teachers and other positions. “Currently we have three districts that are shut down, two of those are due to labor shortages and one is due to student (COVID-19 cases,” said Dr. Andy Grover, Executive Director of the

Idaho Association of School Administrators. “In the end, it’s the labor problem that is going to shut our schools down as the pandemic goes on. There just aren’t enough people to keep our schools open.”

Earlier this month, Idaho Governor Brad Little announced that \$10 million is being made available to schools to recruit and retain substitute teachers and other classroom support staff.

The Board also heard updates from each of Idaho’s four-year institutions about protocols that are in place. Current data indicates these protocols are helping to keep the COVID-19 surge manageable on campuses.

“Based on what I heard today I think out university campuses might be among the safest places to be in the state when you look at the protocols that they have in place.” Board President Kurt Liebich said. “I’d really like to thank our institutional leadership for the phenomenal job they are doing to manage through the pandemic.”

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