



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

Article: Education Wins this Legislative Session

By Kurt Liebich, President, Idaho State Board of Education

Idaho's public education system scored several wins during the 2022 legislative session concluded this week. As president of the Idaho State Board of Education, I'd like to thank the legislators and Idaho Governor Brad Little for making historic investments in our students, our schools and institutions and in the dedicated educators throughout our state who keep our system running while dealing with tremendous challenges, especially these past two years.

K-12

Idaho's public schools budget will increase overall by 6.7% next year including an historic 12.5% increase in state funding. The budget includes \$47 million in added literacy dollars to help young students learn to read by the 3rd grade. These literacy funds will be used by schools to pay for extended time literacy intervention programs such as optional full-time kindergarten to provide literacy intervention to struggling students.

Other noteworthy education legislation that became law include:

- \$105 million in ongoing funding for school districts and charters to use to improve health insurance plans for teachers and their families while lowering out-of-pocket costs resulting in higher take home pay. Educators will also receive \$1,000 bonuses in recognition of their extraordinary efforts since the pandemic began.

- One-time funding for instructional staff and pupil services staff equal to the estimated amount that would have been distributed through the career ladder for one additional year of service and an approximate 7% increase to the salary-based apportionment for school administrators and classified staff.
- Dyslexia screening and training for teachers who work with students identified as having characteristics of dyslexia. House Bill 731 will have a positive impact on thousands of Idaho students affected by dyslexia, by identifying characteristics early so that they can receive appropriate interventions to help them learn to read.
- A rural educator incentive program designed to encourage new teachers to work in rural districts by offering funds to help pay student loans or reimburse them for additional education costs such as earning credits to qualify for additional content area teaching endorsements or high level degrees.

Higher Education

Our public four-year higher education institutions will see an 8% increase in state funding next year as part of an overall higher education budget that includes funding to cover employee salary increases. As a result, for the third year in a row, our college and universities will not request tuition increases when the Board meets next month in Moscow. This is a certainly positive development both for our students and our institutions.

Community Colleges

Idaho's four community colleges will see nearly 10% in new state funding, which I see as a critical investment given the role the community colleges have in career technical education and meeting the statewide private sector demand for a skilled workforce.

Medical Residency Programs

This year the legislature made historic investments in expanding physician training residency programs – from Coeur d'Alene to Pocatello. As of the year 2020, Idaho ranked 50th in the nation for the total number of active physicians per 100,000 population, and more than 30% of these physicians are age 60 or over. Absent aggressive intervention, Idaho is facing a severe physician shortage exacerbated by rapid population growth. National data show that a majority of physicians practice

medicine in the states where they did their residencies, which is why expanding residency programs in Idaho is a good return on investment.

Campus Infrastructure

State leaders made another a huge investment in higher education this year – allocating nearly \$220 million in capital projects and for addressing deferred maintenance paid by the Permanent Building Fund. That’s about five times the average amount of Permanent Building Fund dollars that higher education received over the last five years.

Here’s a breakdown of the capital projects:

- **College of Southern Idaho:** \$10 million to build an automotive and agricultural diesel mechanics facility
- **North Idaho College:** \$3.3 million to remodel a diesel mechanics bay and build an aerospace training laboratory
- **College of Western Idaho:** \$10 million to construct a health science building and \$5 million to build a horticulture building
- **Colleges of Eastern Idaho:** \$13 million for its Future Tech facility
- **Idaho State University:** \$3 million for a pedestrian railway crossing at ISU’s Idaho Falls campus and \$3.4 million to build the Leonard Hall Pharmacy building
- **University of Idaho:** \$900,000 to improve the McCall Outdoor Science School campus
- **Deferred maintenance at all institutions:** approximately \$170 million

I cannot emphasize enough how important these Permanent Building Fund dollars are to help us provide first class learning facilities for our students and address a massive backlog of maintenance issues at all of our campuses. The citizens of Idaho have hundreds of millions of dollars invested in our campuses and the funding made available this year will go a long way in helping us keep our higher education assets functioning.

With a record-setting state surplus and an infusion of federal American Rescue Plan dollars, our elected leaders seized an opportunity and made a real difference for public education at all levels. During this legislative session, Governor Little and the majority of legislators demonstrated their commitment to our students and our educators and I commend them for it.

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