



For Immediate Release

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

BOARD HEARS UPDATE ON EMPOWERING PARENTS PROGRAM REVIEW

The Idaho State Board of Education was briefed today on a review being conducted on the Empowering Parents Program expenditures during its regular Board meeting held at Idaho State University in Pocatello.

Empowering Parents provides grants to parents to purchase eligible educational products and services for their students on the contractor-operated Empowering Parents online marketplace platform. Eligible educational expenses are defined in Idaho Code § 33-1030(3).

To date, more than 49,400 students have benefitted from the program funded by \$50 million in federal Covid relief funds

In April, the State Board staff launched a manual review of all purchases made on the platform (estimated to be approximately 50,000 total) after several expenditures were flagged over several months that either did not or may not meet eligibility requirements outlined in the statute.

Idaho Governor Brad Little earlier this week directed the Board to prepare a report and action plan moving forward. That report will be submitted to the Governor on Friday.

“It’s clear to me that this has been a highly successful program when you look at the interest the program received,” Board Member Kurt Liebich said. “Inevitably, there are going to be things we learn that we need to adjust, and I think we as a Board need to understand what the data are telling us and develop ways to improve the program moving forward.”

Jenn Thompson, the Board’s chief policy and government affairs officer said the review is about 75 percent complete and that 80 percent of the expenditures are “perfectly eligible purchases.” Seven percent she said are ineligible (examples include smart watches and cleaning supplies), but the remaining roughly 13 percent are questionable and will be put together in a package and presented at the next Empowering Parents Parent Advisory Panel meeting on July 10 for consideration.

The law allows the Panel to make eligibility recommendations to the State Board for consideration (examples of items for consideration include ballet shoes, backpacks and uniforms).

Board Member and Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield serves as chair of the Parent Advisory Panel. “The Board will see in depth recommendations on how we take what is good about this program and get it into place so that we have confidence in what is happening to help parents supplement their students’ education,” Superintendent Critchfield said.

Thompson said the staff review of expenditures will be completed by the end of June. Board staff will now create a weekly status report and submit it to the Governor, Legislators, State Board members and interested stakeholders.

“This program is a high priority for the Governor and the Legislature; therefore, it is a high priority for us,” State Board Executive Director Matt Freeman said. It was our staff of one (the Empowering Parents program manager) who flagged the purchasing irregularities. We want to make sure that this program is administered with fidelity, and we are committed to doing that.”

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