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

Statewide Goals for Public Education in Idaho

By Dr. Linda Clark, President, Idaho State Board of Education

I have been involved in public education in Idaho for over 50 years, starting as a teacher, retiring as superintendent of the state's largest school district and now I am serving my second turn as president of the Idaho State Board of Education.

I think it is important that I share with parents and taxpayers three important goals the State Board is working on with local trustees and the school administrators who oversee our school districts and charter schools.

In education, I have found that the tyranny of the urgent often distracts us from the important. That's why it is so important to set the tone and clearly establish the priorities for our schools and students, and to stay focused on those priorities.

The State Board's priority focus areas are:

- K-3rd grade literacy
- Middle grade math (grades 5 through 9)
- High school graduation and post-secondary education and training

K through 3rd grade literacy

Significantly improving K-3 literacy remains our primary goal. Data from the Idaho Reading Indicator (IRI) continues to show that more than 60 percent of Idaho students come to school without the skills necessary to be successful students.

Numerous studies show that unless these students are reading at grade level by the third grade, they almost never catch up. This puts those students at greater risk of not graduating or pursuing postsecondary education or training.

Idaho Governor Brad Little and the Idaho Legislature understand how important it is that we do more to address this problem. In addition to providing several years of significant funding specifically targeted for reading intervention, in 2022, \$47 million was appropriated for schools to use to extend their early grade reading programs through means such as optional full day kindergarten.

Middle grades math (grades 5 through 9)

A troubling trend has emerged indicating that nearly all students, even the top performers, are showing a reduction in their math skills starting in fifth grade and extending through the ninth grade.

This is making it more difficult for students to be successful in higher level math courses in high school and in college. A State Board work group is currently examining this problem and will present recommendations to the Board at its December meeting.

The work group is looking at standards, curriculum, teacher training and instructional techniques – all aspects that may affect student learning. The work group is also identifying schools and districts whose students are achieving at higher levels – seeking to identify best practices that can be shared throughout the state.

High school graduation and post-secondary education and training

Idaho's overall high school graduation rate last year was 80 percent, meaning one in five students did not graduate. The percentage rate drops even more dramatically for students who are economically disadvantaged (70-percent), disabled (57-percent), or in foster care (40-percent). Student ethnicity and gender are also factors in whether students graduate or not. We simply have to do better!

One promising approach is credit recovery, which targets the courses for which students received "F" grades. Efforts for recovery are underway led by the Idaho

Digital Learning Academy. IDLA's online approach assists students in turning failed classes into successful ones that can lead to graduation.

Under Governor Little's leadership, Idaho has invested heavily over the last five years in nearly all facets of public education. Trustees and administrators at the local and statewide levels are working to make sure resources are used for added support for students who need them. When a student drops out, our system has failed.

Finally, I want to conclude this column by talking about the State Board's goal to increase Idaho's rate of students "going on" to attain certificates and degrees beyond high school. Since the start of the pandemic, about 42 percent of our graduates are going on to college or a career technical education program immediately after high school. We must do better for the sake of our students, families, and the economy of Idaho.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield's efforts to increase career technical education opportunities in rural areas should help "prime the pump" and increase student interest in improving skills and earning certifications and degrees after high school. The Idaho Division of Career Technical Education has also received significant investments from the Governor and the Legislature for CTE programs at the secondary and postsecondary levels.

Governor Little's [Idaho LAUNCH](#) grant program, which opens October 3, makes these programs accessible for students who otherwise might not go on to get a postsecondary education or training because of concern about cost. LAUNCH grants will pay 80 percent of the cost of an education or training program that leads to an in-demand career, up to \$8,000.

The State Board's nationally recognized [Idaho Campus Choice](#) and [Apply Idaho](#) programs streamline and simplify the college admissions and application process. In addition, the State Board's [Next Steps Idaho](#) website provides robust college and career planning resources for educators, students and parents.

[Scholarship Idaho](#) makes it possible to students to apply for an Idaho LAUNCH grant, or the [Idaho Opportunity Scholarship](#) from the same platform.

I believe deeply in Idaho's public education system and have dedicated my professional life to working with parents, teachers, administrators and state leaders to continually make it better. Our schools and classrooms are places where real

action takes place, ensuring that students achieve successes that lead them and their families to bright futures in a thriving, vibrant Idaho.

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