

MINUTES  
**SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

- DATE:** Tuesday, January 19, 2021
- TIME:** 3:00 P.M.
- PLACE:** Room WW55
- MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Thayn, Vice Chairman Crabtree, Senators Den Hartog, Woodward, Lent, Johnson, Cook, Ward-Engelking, and Nelson
- ABSENT/ EXCUSED:** None
- NOTE:** The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.
- CONVENED:** **Chairman Thayn** called the meeting of the Senate Education Committee (Committee) to order at 3:00 p.m.
- DISCUSSION:** **Chairman Thayn** directed the Committee members to the handout found in their folders from the Idaho State Department of Education titled "Career Ladder Allocations." This handout was for their information only (see Attachment 1).
- PRESENTATION:** **Debbie Critchfield**, President of the Idaho State Board of Education spoke to the Committee about at risk students. **Ms. Critchfield** shared that the Board considers every student to be at risk during this COVID pandemic. Schools are reporting that more students are getting Ds and Fs. Many students have not logged on to their computers and grade point averages (GPAs) are falling. These outcomes come from a lack of motivation, and the behavioral and emotional health of the students. English language arts and specifically math, is a challenging part of online learning.
- DISCUSSION:** **Senator Ward-Engelking** asked how districts are addressing older students who are not engaging online. **Ms. Critchfield** stated that districts are working to address this issue.
- Senator Den Hartog** asked why the Board is placing stress on summer intervention and not starting to fix the issues now. **Ms. Critchfield** said districts are trying to address issues now and hope to help those students who are still behind in the summer.
- Chairman Thayn** asked if legislation needed to be added to help the districts. **Ms. Critchfield** said she was not aware of any possible legislative remedies but that a lack of resources was the issue in getting more students assisted. **Chairman Thayn** asked how students who are not logging on are being tracked. **Ms. Critchfield** said there is no system in place to track or find students who are not engaging online, as the districts do not have the manpower to go door-to-door to track students.
- Senator Nelson** asked what measures were being used to help those students who were considered at risk before the pandemic. **Ms. Critchfield** said the schools were assessing how the students are doing.
- Senator Den Hartog** asked how much money was received from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act in total. **Greg Wilson**, Senior Advisor for Education, Office of the Governor, said the figure was between \$350-\$400 million. **Senator Den Hartog** then stressed the need for benchmarks for expectations on how the districts used the money.

**PRESENTATION:** Ms. Critchfield turned the podium over to **Kurt Liebich**, Secretary, Institution, Research and Student Affairs (IRSA) Chair, Idaho State Board of Education. **Mr. Liebich** said that at the height of the pandemic 300,000 K-12 students were participating in school online. Of those, 180,000 needed computers. Of that number, 28,000-45,000 had either no internet access or inadequate access. To allocate money to the school districts the districts were tasked with creating a plan for how to spend the money and based on that plan the money was awarded.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Cook** asked if there was still a shortage of computers for students. **Mr. Liebich** was not aware of any students still in need.

**PRESENTATION:** **Sherri Ybarra**, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Idaho State Department of Education, gave a presentation on the Idaho Reading Initiative (IRI) results (see Attachment 2). There being no questions from the Committee, **Chairman Thayn** welcomed the next presenter to the podium.

**PRESENTATION:** **Greg Wilson**, Senior Policy Advisor for Education, Office of the Governor, spoke about the Governor's initiative Strong Family / Strong Students. **Mr. Wilson** outlined the Governor's financial commitment made to schools and students. To that end, each eligible family received \$1,500 per student, up to a max award of \$3,500 per family. The money was used for purchasing computer hardware, internet services, tutoring services, and instructional materials. This program allowed 18,500 families to receive funding.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Den Hartog** asked for a report showing the number of families who applied but did not get funding. **Mr. Wilson** is starting to gather data on the program's outcomes and will forward that information when available.

**Senator Cook** said his constituents were concerned about opening the boxes of equipment because they had not been reimbursed yet. **Tracie Bent**, Chief Planning and Policy Officer, Idaho State Board of Education, took the podium and said the Board received over 30,000 requests for reimbursement and had 13,000 requests left to process. They are doing 1,000 reimbursement requests a day and hope to be finished processing the requests soon.

**ADJOURNMENT:** There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Thayn** adjourned the meeting at 4:14 p.m.

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Senator Thayn  
Chair

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Florence Lince  
Secretary