

Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra
Prepared remarks for the Senate Education Committee
Monday, January 15, 2018

Chairman Mortimer and members of the committee, and folks in the audience—

For the record, I am Sherri Ybarra, State Superintendent of Public Instruction--- and I am thrilled that the Senate Committee has asked for an update on how my department is enhancing student growth and achievement.

Why? Because I cannot think of anything more important in our state than having our nearly 300,000 children well educated, so that once they leave our schools, we have some assurance they will be successful ... regardless of the college or career path they choose.

Before I begin-- I want to take a minute to give a huge thank you to Idaho's teachers, who work hard every day to ensure our students grow in academic achievement – they are the folks who really make a difference --- and the ones who really do the boots on the ground work — so thank you to Idaho's teachers-- as we begin to see increases in achievement across our state.

Next to the parent and the teacher, there is nothing that affects academic growth and achievement more than our principals, superintendents, and administrators.

And when I was elected as our State Superintendent, one of my first actions was to recognize this very reality --- if we want to impact student growth and achievement — these folks are the gateway to that —so the department's mission and my staff— needed to focus on: “supporting schools and students to achieve” which as you know is our vision and mission statement.

And we've worked hard to foster a culture of “how can we help?” so let me start with two programs that are continuing—that Idaho is taking the lead on--and both are getting national attention:

The first is Advanced Opportunities: this program is where students can earn college credit while still in high school—it saves our families thousands of dollars in college costs-and students love it—I should know—my own son is taking advantage of this program this year.

Next is the Mastery Based Program: Idaho is taking the lead in the Nation -- on Mastery Based Education, matter of fact—West Virginia is planning to copy Idaho's legislation -- to begin the program in their state. And simply put: this program is letting students take charge of their own learning— it's personalized learning at its best....and with the personalized learning conversation this would be a great Segway into what is new for growth and achievement in my department:

IRI

For our youngest students in Idaho: Let's start with "staying the course" with our state plan to improve early literacy, and ensure every child in Idaho is on grade level for reading by the third grade — because we all know what the research says about closing the gap by the third grade.

So — my team is working with teachers from across Idaho — and there was thoughtful due diligence and teacher input to identify a high quality, research-based replacement for our 20 year old assessment — affectionately known as the Legacy IRI—so this year, about sixty schools are test driving this NEW computerized assessment.

I've visited the sites and talked with teachers. They are excited and — Here's feedback from our pilot sites :

"I love the different graphs and the specific information so we can work on what kids need"

"Teachers are really impressed because it is so user friendly"

This new test is allowing teachers to fine tune instruction to fit their student's needs.....(personalized learning at its best) and

I want to share with you a quick story that relates to this subject: Our own Governor shared with me in a public meeting — he shouted at me — where's Sherri — did you know I moved 12 times during my educational career — and he stated it was hard on his academics — our students still endure these same challenges in the 21st century — maybe even more — because we are now in a highly mobile society because of technology — but with your support — we can have an up-to-date test that detects reading difficulties early — before it affects growth and achievement — even if a child (like our Governor) moves 12 times.

SMARTY ANTS

This next topic we may never agree upon....but I tell parents all the time — learning actually starts before you child enters public school....

I don't know how many of you remember the Andy Griffith Show?? Barney Fife use to say: "We have to Nip it in the Bud" highlights support for early learning for our 4-year-olds in Idaho.

State Board President-- Linda Clark and I—are exploring an opportunity to provide a free quality research-based early literacy program called Smarty Ants to our Idaho 4-year olds.

I want to be clear, this isn't a brick-and-mortar state-required preschool program, it's not in the budget, and it doesn't require policy changes.

But it is a support we can provide parents who speak either English or Spanish – to build literacy skills and helps to “nip it in the bud” before the gap starts.

It also should give us data to inform the conversation about early learning in Idaho — and if you have seen the recent data—about 80% of Idahoans support the concept of early learning in Idaho — and our districts are concerned – as am I — that we are seeing a continued drop in children “at grade level” as they enter kindergarten.

RED TAPE COMMITTEE

And I'm pleased to say that I saw many of you at the legislative breakfasts — or at regional meetings — as I met with superintendents and many of us heard concerns from about every region-- about the increased burden in reporting and paperwork — as federal deregulation is starting — our old regulation and rules remain.

Therefore, I sought volunteers from across the state to form the Red Tape Committee to help identify what we can fix — so they can have more time to focus on their main job — which is to improving learning and achievement. The group met with my staff and staff from the Charter School Commission, the Office of the State Board of Education, and Career Technical Education last week and began identify areas for improvement.

I look forward to their continue work.

STAT TEAM

You folks know we are getting ready to roll out a new accountability model through our ESSA plan, and within that plan we have to address our schools that are in “comprehensive improvement status.”

Well, we will do it through the STAT team, or “Statewide Assistance Team” and as its name implies — just like in an emergency room —this will be assistance “STAT” — for our schools that need it.

I want to be sure you know that we are not waiting until our plan is finalized before we provide supports, so STAT is working with volunteer schools right now — across Idaho — to test drive this research-based system. This Phase I effort is going very well. Our approach isn't to hammer a school.. that's already been tried.....and proven....it doesn't work ... instead we will work with principals and teacher leaders to provide training and support by helping them to analyze data and identify research-based strategies for improvement. At the heart of this research-based approach — are our professional development opportunities the department provides as well — these trainings help local administrators lead big change in their schools and districts.

These trainings include: Idaho Superintendents Network, Idaho Principals Network, and the Idaho Principal Mentoring Network, to name a few. ...—because as I stated earlier --Professional Development is the GATEWAY to achievement and growth.

EDUCATOR SHORTAGE

I've also heard as I've traveled the concerns about a shortage of educators-- and now we have the data to support those stories.

Later this month, I'll provide you a report prepared by Education Northwest looking at the teaching landscape—specific to Idaho. This report along with the companion report from the Teacher Pipeline Committee paint a compelling picture for action. I've said before: addressing the teacher shortage will take many strategies.

I want to put a plug in that folks in districts are thankful for the investment in the Career Ladder-- because pay is important. And my team is working to support job fairs in communities and ensure our certification and background process are streamlined.

And earlier this year, we launched a “Be an Educator” campaign to promote the profession, but this crisis will take many more strategies and possible legislation to address it properly, it's the kids that are the real victims here, so my department stands ready to assist you, should you be interested in employing any legislation or statutes to address this issue.

There are so many other developments the Department has been working on, such as bullying and harassment (which members of this very committee have attended meetings on), the new PAC (parental advisory council); the new FACE (family and community engagement group) but I am limited in time so I want to talk about just one more item, and I hope you can predict what I'm about to say:

RURAL SCHOOLS SUPPORT

Folks you've heard me talk about this before, and as I traveled this state this past weekend, I had several stakeholders ask about what we are doing to support our rural communities—so I will ask again—for you to consider this modest proposal to support our local districts to collaborate and connect to get resources out to our students.

This ask — in the budget and the legislation — gives respect to the culture of our great state — if you think about Idaho being mostly rural , and about 70% of our districts are rural....that could be about 210,000 students who could benefit from these rural networks. And, I will end with a quote from the business community: “This is the fiscally responsible business approach in education we have been looking for....it's just plain common sense.”

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you again, at this time, I want to take a minute to thank my team—who is here with me today—because they do the

boots on the ground work to carry out the vision --they do all of the the hard work you have heard about here today, that the department does on behalf of Idaho's children. With that, my team and I will stand for any questions that you may have.