

MINUTES
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Tuesday, January 18, 2022

TIME: 3:00 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW55

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Thayn, Vice Chairman Lent, Senators Den Hartog, Crabtree, Woodward, Cook, Ward-Engelking, and Nelson

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Senator Blair (Johnson)

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 3:01 p.m.

PRESENTATION: **Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER). Marilyn Whitney**, Deputy Superintendent for Communications and Policy, Idaho State Department of Education (SDE), introduced herself to the Committee. **Ms. Whitney** introduced Karen Seay, Director, Federal Programs, SDE to present information about the SDE budget request and federal pandemic relief funds. **Ms. Seay** explained the various federal funding sources, including amounts received and expended by SDE. She stated that schools used grant funding for facility upgrades, technology and internet access, personal protective equipment, staff stipends for extra hours and duties, additional support staff, and curriculum updates. (See Attachment 1).

Ms. Seay observed that the performance period for some grants does not end until 2024 or 2025. Superintendents are strategically planning to ensure funding lasts to the end of the performance period, she said. **Ms. Seay** noted that the federal government encourages schools to use grant funding to address unfinished learning and preexisting challenges that could impede recovery from the pandemic.

DISCUSSION: In response to Committee questions about the use of funds and strategic spending plans, **Ms. Seay** responded that some schools used grant funds to upgrade old curriculum or purchase curriculum to fill in gaps. She stated that the SDE does not collect information on school proposals for specific grants, but most of the expenditures have been for facility upgrades. **Ms. Seay** noted that the SDE is now undertaking a rigorous process to review strategic spending plans to ensure the proposed spending meets federal requirements. She added that most of the planned spending is for capital expenditures and staff positions. **Ms. Seay** advised that the spending plans for the homeless youth grant have not been completed yet. She said that the schools are conservative and strategic about spending one-time funds.

PRESENTATION: **Ms. Seay** continued her presentation by describing amounts and uses of federal grants for homeless children and youth and stated the performance period ends on September 30, 2024. She reported that Idaho recently received an additional grant of nearly \$22 million for nonpublic schools, and SDE is presently soliciting funding applications from eligible schools.

Ms. Whitney pointed out that the SDE budget request includes funding to administer the various grants. She explained the nonpublic school grant has been particularly challenging because the State is responsible for all goods and services purchased with grant funding. **Ms. Whitney** added that it has been difficult for schools to implement plans to serve the homeless population. (See Attachment 2)

DISCUSSION: In response to questions from **Senator Den Hartog** about strategies to address learning loss, **Ms. Whitney** replied that there is a statewide plan to address learning loss, and the SDE is providing assistance to districts to implement the plan. She said some districts are extending learning time and upgrading facilities and equipment to increase sanitation and social distancing, **Ms. Whitney** reported that data gathered by the SDE shows that districts using grant funds for summer or other programs experienced impressive gains.

PRESENTATION: **Overview of Education Budget.** **Julie Oberlin**, Chief Financial Officer for Public Schools, SDE introduced herself to the Committee. **Ms. Oberlin** provided a handout comparing fiscal year (FY) 2022 public school appropriations to the SDE's FY 2023 budget request and the Governor's budget recommendation (see Attachment B). She explained the major spending categories with significant increases. **Ms. Oberlin** reviewed in detail a spreadsheet documenting the percentage changes in the FY 2023 budget request line items (see Attachment C). She explained the reasons for increases and decreases in various categories and provided the assumptions upon which the SDE based its estimates. **Ms. Oberlin** provided a comparison between the Governor's budget recommendation and the Superintendent of Public Instruction's budget request.

DISCUSSION: In response to questions from **Senator Cook** about line item increases, **Ms. Whitney** answered that an inflationary increase is requested every year, although it has not been approved recently. She reported that the SDE requested additional funding for Adobe, Microsoft, and cybersecurity certification programs for high school students and two pilot programs for middle school students.

Senator Ward-Engelking asked if the SDE is able to attract employees with salaries at an average of \$39,000 per year. **Ms. Oberlin** clarified that figure is the base salary for school district administrative staff.

In response to questions from **Chairman Thayne** about numbers of students and support units, **Ms. Oberlin** said there are approximately 313,000 students based on 2021 fall enrollment. She noted that support units increased from 16,146 to 16,512.

In response to questions from **Senator Den Hartog** about changes in the funding formula, **Ms. Oberlin** explained that school funding increased due to using full time equivalent enrollment numbers rather than average daily attendance. She said that the SDE will have information on the amount of the increase in February.

In response to Committee questions about at risk kindergarten students, **Ms. Oberlin** responded that a kindergarten student is considered at risk if they were not reading at grade level in the fall, or if they were economically disadvantaged. **Ms. Whitney** advised that a proposed kindergarten screener would identify the students most at risk and determine whether a child could attend the optional full day kindergarten.

RS 29152 **Idaho Parental Freedom in Education Act.** **Brandon Durst**, former Idaho Senator, introduced himself to the Committee to present the RS. **Mr. Durst** explained he drafted the legislation to address the concerns of parents who are frustrated with a lack of respect for their parental rights.

- DISCUSSION:** There was much discussion regarding the requirement for a school district to provide alternative assignments if a parent withdraws the child from course material, the civil penalty provision, and the ability of the school to monitor parents entering school buildings in the event of custody disputes.
- MOTION:** **Senator Den Hartog** moved to send **RS 29152** to print. **Senator Cook** seconded the motion.
- DISCUSSION:** **Senator Cook** commented he is willing to send the RS to print because he agrees there is some value in the conversation.
- Senator Lent** remarked that he intends to support some parental rights legislation, but he is concerned about the civil penalty provision and the adversarial tone in this RS.
- ROLL CALL VOTE:** **Chairman Thayn** announced a roll call vote. **Vice Chairman Lent, Senators Den Hartog, Cook, and Chairman Thayn** voted aye. **Senators Crabtree, Woodward, Ward-Engelking, and Nelson** voted nay. The motion failed.
- ADJOURNED:** There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Thayn** adjourned the meeting at 4:27 p.m.

Senator Thayn
Chair

Katy Morden
Secretary

Jeanne Jackson-Heim
Assistant Secretary