

Hello Chairman Thayne and Committee Members. My name is Kelly Edginton, and I am the Executive Director of Idaho Virtual Academy. I am here presenting on behalf of virtual schools at the request of the chairman. Thank you, Chairman Clow, for the opportunity.

### **Virtual Schools authorized by the Idaho Public Charter School Commission**

Idaho has 8 virtual public charter schools authorized by the Idaho Public Charter School Commission. 5 of these schools include separate alternative schools. All of these schools are accredited by Cognia, which is the same agency accrediting other Idaho public schools. The first virtual schools in Idaho opened nearly 20 years ago, and the most recent opened nearly 7 years ago.

- Another Choice Virtual Charter School – LEA #476
  - Grades: K-12 / Opened in 2010
- Idaho Connects Online School (ICON) – LEA #469
  - Grades: 6-12 / Opened 2009 /includes an alternative school
- Idaho Technical Career Academy – LEA # 489
  - Grades: 9-12 / Opened 2014
- Idaho Virtual Academy – LEA #452
  - Grades: K-12 / Opened 2002 / includes an alternative school
- Inspire Connections Academy – LEA #457
  - Grades: K-12 / Opened 2005 /includes an alternative school
- iSucceed Virtual High School – LEA #466
  - Grades: 9-12 / Opened 2008 /includes an alternative school
- Kootenai Bridge Academy – LEA #470
  - Grades: 9-12 / Opened 2009
- Richard McKenna Online High School – LEA #453
  - Grades: 9-12 / Opened 2002 / includes an alternative school

### **Parents & students choose our schools for many reasons**

- Bullied
- Behind academically
- Advanced
- Athletic pursuits
- Special needs
- Personal reasons/beliefs
- At-risk

### **Safety Net Schools**

Our schools are safety nets for many students.

- Mobile students
- Credit-deficient students
- Students with health impairments
- Economically disadvantaged students (higher than state average)
- Students with disabilities (higher than state average)

## **Accountability**

Idaho's virtual schools are held accountable in the same ways traditional schools are held accountable. Additionally, virtual schools are authorized by and held accountable to the Idaho Public Charter School Commission. It should be noted that there is no consideration of virtual schools' unique demographics in the federal or state accountability models.

## **Virtual vs Emergency Remote Learning**

When the pandemic hit, traditional schools had to pivot very quickly to remote learning. My heart went out to these educators all across the state and the country! All of a sudden, teachers who had been trained to teach and were teaching in a brick and mortar classroom – some for many years and even decades - had to figure out how to teach remotely. You may have heard negative feedback about remote learning, and I want to take a moment to clarify some differences between virtual learning and emergency remote learning. They are not the same, and the bullet points on this slide outline some of the differences.

- Established delivery systems & curriculum vs Attempt to replicate the in-classroom experience through video conferencing classes
- Trained teachers who elected to teach in this innovate model vs Teachers forced to teach in a new model
- Established intervention programs and specialized instruction for students with disabilities and English Learners vs confusion on how to meet the needs of students with disabilities
- Consistent expectations vs Lessened expectations
- Student engagement and attendance monitored and tracked vs Lack of systems to track attendance

Teachers and administrators in traditional schools were thrown into an extremely difficult and unfair situation, and I just want to make the point that virtual schools are vastly different than emergency remote learning.

We were here last year when the COVID enrollment surged. We took those kids. Our enrollment lessened this year but is still higher than pre-Covid. Official Fall 2021 state enrollment numbers show nearly 6000 students (5912) enrolled in our schools. We still have new students enrolling. We also have students who came in fall 2020, specifically because of the pandemic, who, for whatever reason – health, not ready to go back to in-person learning, or simply loved our schools- are staying. Our schools combined enrollment is nearly 800 students more than it was in 2019/20 (pre-pandemic year).

## **Thank you**

One size does not fit all, and that's why our schools exist and why we need to continue to exist.

Thousands of Idaho students are enrolled in our virtual schools each and every year. I ask everyone in the audience who is here supporting virtual schools to, please, raise your hand.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Committee. We appreciate your support of school choice.