

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 13, 2016

IEA:

Good afternoon. I am Robin Nettinga, Executive Director of the Idaho Education Association. I am joined today by Karen Echeverria, Executive Director of the Idaho School Boards Association and Rob Winslow, Executive Director of the Idaho Association of School Administrators. Each of us will also introduce the others from our organization who will be working with you this session. You've already met Penni. In addition, you will get to see Matt Compton, the IEA Director of Public Policy, on a regular basis.

Chairman Mortimer, Vice Chairman Thayne and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share with our perspective on the 2016 legislative session. Karen, Rob, and I all represent different constituencies with varying needs and points of view. That can sometimes lead to disagreement about how to address a specific issue. However, for all of our differences, we also have much in common.

ISBA:

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I've already been introduced but I would like to introduce my colleague Jess Harrison, Communication and Government Affairs Director. While Jess or I will usually staff this meeting, you may also see one of our other colleagues, Misty Swanson or Aaron Baldwin from time to time. Over the past few years, we have worked very hard to find areas of agreement. Over the past several years, our three associations have met regularly both during the session and throughout the interim to identify our shared priorities. And, we are committed to continuing to dialogue on all matters that are important to our collective memberships.

IASA:

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I, too, have already been introduced, but I would like to introduce Phil Homer and Harold Ott. Aside from representing IASA at the legislature, Harold also represents the Idaho Rural Schools Association. There have been times in the past when we were unable to agree on important issues, and even today we'll share a few of those issues upon which we disagree. However, we stand before you today in general agreement on many, many issues. And, we are excited to move forward to assist you in building a stronger education policy for our students and our communities.

IEA:

Earlier this summer, we were invited to meet with Supt. Ybarra's staff to discuss our funding priorities. All three of our organizations prioritized two issues: operational funding and fully-funding the second year of the career ladder. And, the IEA identified mentoring as our third funding priority. The new Career Ladder law requires that all newly certificated teachers receive mentoring. We know that Leadership Premiums can be paid to teachers who serve as mentors. However, districts need to also have access to adequate resources to build and implement a strong mentoring programs to ensure these very newest members to the teaching ranks have the time and support necessary to become full-fledged teaching professionals. We were pleased to see that the governor's budget recommendation includes \$5 million for professional development, specifically related to mentoring, and we will be working hard to encourage you and your colleagues to include this funding piece in the K-12 education funding legislation this session.

ISBA:

In addition to increased operational funding and the need to fully-fund the career ladder, the members of my organization also identified the rising cost of health insurance.

IASA:

We join the members of ISBA in our concern regarding this issue. Each of our organizations is pleased with Governor Otter's K-12 funding recommendation and his commitment to continue to restore funding that was cut during the recession. We all realize that Governor Otter's recommendation is the first step in a long process this session that will lead to the creation of a FY 17 public schools budget. And, we stand ready to assist him.

IEA:

As Rob mentioned earlier, we have been meeting regularly over the interim to discuss a variety of issues we know you will be asked to consider this session. We have met with Marilyn Whitney from the governor's office, with State Department staff and Supt. Ybarra, and with State Board staff on numerous occasions to discuss legislative priorities and potential legislation. We are pleased to report that in nearly all instances, we have had detailed discussions and been offered multiple opportunities to provide input on their proposals.

IASA:

And, in most cases, members of our organizations have been included in State Board and State Department work groups, committees, and task forces. We are deeply appreciative of the opportunity to provide our insight early on. We believe that the policy proposals you will be asked to consider are stronger, as a result of our involvement.

ISBA:

On those rare occasions where we have concerns about specific pieces of legislation, we will be prepared to address them with you and the members of your committee. Now, each of our organizations will briefly touch on those issues that we cannot agree upon, but which are issues that our members have asked us to bring to your attention this session.

First of all, I wanted to update you on ISBA. As we reported to you last year, charter schools are now full members of ISBA. We are still the only state in the nation to allow their full membership. 36 of the 48 charter schools are full dues paying members of ISBA.

This was the first year that charter schools participated during ISBA's Annual Business Session and voted on every resolution. As such, the priorities and positions you will see from us are supported by both traditional schools and charter schools.

In addition to the priorities that have already been discussed, we will be working on seven pieces of legislation this year.

1. The first is Election Signature Consistency. Currently with school board elections, there are no requirements for a write in candidate other than residing in the zone. We will be requesting that a write in candidate obtain five supportive signatures on a petition prior to being placed on the ballot as required for non-write-in candidates.
2. Discussion of the Sale of Public Property in Executive Session. Currently school boards can discuss the purchase of public property but not the sale of public property in executive session. This makes it impossible for the Board to discuss offers and counter-offers without the potential

purchasing parties knowing what the Board's position is. We will be asking for the ability to discuss the sale of public property in executive session.

3. Extra Day Contracts. Under the current law school districts and charter schools are unable to issue separate contracts to certified employees who may need to start the school year early or stay after the end of the traditional contract. Employees such as professional education teachers and librarians often times work additional days in the school year beyond the traditional contract. Without the ability to have extra day contracts, those extra days become part of their traditional contract. With the traditional contract comes property rights including the inability to reduce the days next year if needed and full blown appeal rights. We will be asking for the ability for school districts and charter schools to issue extra day contracts for these purposes.
4. Teacher and Principal Evaluation Timeline. Currently teacher and principal evaluations must be completed no later than May 1. Part of the evaluation must include the inclusion of measures of student achievement. School districts and charter schools have not received test scores in time to use them in the evaluation process. We are hopeful that by extending this timeline by one month, test scores will be available.
5. Information on Past Job Performance. School districts and charter schools are required to request and submit information on past employment when hiring new certificated employees. This can sometimes be a paperwork nightmare. We will be asking for the ability to use a checklist as opposed to physically copying or scanning and forwarding all of the documents.
6. Administrators in Districts with Remote Schools. This legislation will ask for funding for an additional ½ time administrator in districts with remote schools. Currently in Idaho, there are only six districts that have applied to the State Board of Education for this designation.
7. Class Size Average Calculation. This issue comes into play with the use-it or lose-it dollars. Currently, the law requires an average calculation of all school districts together. We will be asking that we average like districts with like districts. That way West Ada's class size will not be averaged with South Lemhi's class size.

In addition to our specific legislation, we may ask for some clarification on the Parent's Rights law that was passed last year. As you will remember, we expressed concerns during our testimony last year about what parents might request. During the hearing last year, testimony indicated that parents would have the right to choose the school for their kids but did not have the ability to direct how that school educated the kids. We were assured that if there was a federal or state law or rule that directed the school district or charter school to do something, that the parents would have no ability under the parental rights law to make requests that would be violation of those laws or rules. Unfortunately, that is precisely what is happening. We already have had several school districts that have spent much needed dollars on attorney fees to defend their positions against parental requests. As such, we would like to see some clarifying language added to the statute.

IEA:

As for the IEA, we believe we are in agreement with Karen and her organization on all but the issue of supplemental contracts this year.

As in years past, our organization continues to be concerned about our state's ability to recruit and retain teachers. Granted, this is not just an Idaho problem. States all across the nation are beginning to experience problems in recruiting and retaining teachers. Most recently, a study from the University of Louisiana pointed to a number of forces that drive teachers from the profession. According to the study, one of the primary reasons a teacher leaves the profession is that s/he have a mistaken sense of what is

expected of them in the classroom. Those of us who have worked in a classroom can attest to how difficult that work can be. And, without the proper training and support, it is difficult to feel prepared and effective.

Like you, we want to be sure that the most qualified teachers are hired to work in Idaho's classrooms. That's why the IEA has consistently raised concerns when policies are created that allow for shortcuts to becoming a teacher by bypassing requirements that a teacher understand and practice how to best teach before taking responsibility for an entire classroom of students. Shortly, you will be asked to approve a SBE rule re: alternative authorizations. The IEA has raised concerns regarding this rule, and we intend to share our concerns with you when you review that rule in the coming weeks.

Additionally, we drafted legislation that would require transparency regarding the number of under-prepared teaching certificate holders currently employed in Idaho schools. I am happy to report that in our work with the SBE, we believe we have found a solution that will begin to address our concerns about this issue. As a result, the IEA does not intend to introduce additional legislation this session.

Instead, our primary focus during this session will be on education funding. Idaho has the 47th lowest investment per student in the country. One-third of all rural school districts in our state operate on a four-day school week, and our employees are some of the lowest paid in the nation. Studies, surveys and anecdotal evidence continue to show that a lack of support for public education has been a significant factor in Idaho's inability to provide a fully-trained workforce and attract more businesses. We are committed to working with you to make sure we can provide quality programs, recruit and retain qualified staff, and ensure our children have the opportunity for a bright, prosperous future.

IASA:

The IASA has a number of priorities this year as well. I have a document that I would like to hand out to you, and I'll briefly touch on a few of our issues.

Again, thank you for this opportunity. We look forward to working with each of you this session to develop education policy that will help us ensure that we create a world-class public education system for every child in our state. Thank you. We are willing to stand for questions.