

MINUTES  
**SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Tuesday, March 08, 2016

**TIME:** 3:00 P.M.

**PLACE:** Room WW55

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Mortimer, Vice Chairman Thayn, Senators Nonini, Patrick, Souza, Den Hartog, Buckner-Webb and Ward-Engelking

**ABSENT/ EXCUSED:** Senator Anthon

**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 Mortimer** called the Education Committee (Committee) to order at 3:12 p.m.

**H 526** **Chairman Mortimer** said that the Committee heard this bill last week and due to the lack of time to properly consider all the questions and testimony, the remainder of the hearing was rescheduled (see Minutes from March 3, 2016). He called Blake Youde, Chief Communications and Legislative Affairs Officer, State Board of Education (SBE), to answer questions regarding **H 526** Relating to Education: Reading Evaluation and Intervention .

**Vice Chairman Thayn** stated he approves the bill as written. He said he is concerned with the reading assessment and with how funds are to be distributed. He would like those addressed in the next legislative session.

**Mr. Youde** replied that after the first hearing, the SBE clearly heard those concerns. Other concerns that came to light were how to support districts as they improve their reading proficiency rates. SBE needs to determine the ideal funding amounts for districts in order for districts to maintain their reading proficiency rates. Mr. Youde said the SBE would appreciate the opportunity to work on the issues over the break.

**Senator Den Hartog** said that her concerns about **H 526** are the accountability components and students' progression in reading proficiency. She said it is important that school districts are implementing solutions that will work for their specific situations. Resources need to be available for schools and school districts if student literacy skills do not improve. She emphasized that the critical components in this program are adequate funding and result reporting. **Senator Den Hartog** explained literacy progression expectations need to be defined. In conclusion, she said, the success of the program lies with the leadership in the districts and the individual schools.

**Sherri Ybarra**, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, said as a prior third-grade teacher she appreciates this piece of legislation. She reminded the Committee that in K-3, students spend their time learning to read; from fourth grade on, they must be able to read in order to learn. Students that read above grade level gain confidence that sets them up for future success. **Superintendent Ybarra** explained the different reading levels and how reading proficiency statistics affect the "go on" initiative. She said this bill invests in Idaho's students by giving more students the opportunity to get the early reading intervention they so desperately need. She reported that those states that have shown the most impressive improvements in reading have made the most sizable investments in reading. Beginning in 2004, Idaho's funding for reading has steadily declined.

Speaking to accountability, **Superintendent Ybarra** said the IRI is the most objective measurement available. She explained the differences of other assessment tests and why the IRI is the best assessment. She said that part of **H 451** targets professional development to help teachers be better trained to deliver the intervention. There are three factors for reading success: 1.) family involvement, 2.) resource materials and 3.) well-trained teachers. She urged the Committee to recommit to literacy proficiency for every child in Idaho by supporting **H 526**.

**Senate Nonini** said that many have mentioned that by not having a literate population there are costs to society in lost earnings and productivity. He emphasized that there is also an additional cost in the correctional department and welfare system. It is unfortunate that funding for reading had been reduced during the recession years. He is in support of **H 526**.

**Vice Chairman Thayn** asked if the emotional and social maturity of young children correlates to learning how to read. **Superintendent Ybarra** replied the three critical factors for reading success are what helps to determine the readiness of a student.

**Jane Reynolds**, Moreland Elementary School Principal, Snake River School District, explained they work with all the district's developmentally delayed preschool, kindergarten and first-grade students. She stated that early literacy is her passion and expertise. She said the reading programs they use incorporate people, programs and technology. She explained how each component works to achieve the desired reading proficiency outcomes. **Ms. Reynolds** reported the results of the program with achievement scores showing an upward growth in proficiency, and emphasized how students are held accountable for their completion of tasks (see attachment 1).

**Dr. Linda Clark**, State Board of Education, said this is a very important piece of legislation; solid reading skills are absolutely crucial. She stated this is an equity bill and explained that there are 36,000 students in Idaho who are below grade level in reading proficiency; of those, 16,000 are receiving State-funded support while the other 20,000 may or may not be getting help based on their school's discretionary resources. She emphasized that professional development is vital to ensure that they have the best skills to educate students.

In addressing some concerns from Committee members, **Dr. Clark** said there are two working groups that are reviewing assessments: the Primary Literacy Assessment Committee is analyzing the IRI effectiveness, and the SBE's Assessment Oversight Committee is reviewing accountability.

**Eileen O'Shea**, Student Services Administrator, Kuna School District, said the current issue in education is ensuring secondary students read at grade level. She said that as a student who is reading below grade level gets older, it is harder for them to learn the subjects required for graduation. Ms. O'Shea shared what the Kuna School District is doing to help their kindergarteners read at grade level. At the end of the school year, all but one of the students was reading at grade level. She said that with the right resources, time and money, students can achieve reading proficiency. She urged the passage of **H 526**.

**Senator Den Hartog** said the bill does not specify the amount of funding but anticipates approximately \$300 per student. She asked if that is enough money to achieve the goals. **Ms. O'Shea** said she wasn't sure but it was a good starting point.

**Lauren Necochea**, Project Director, Idaho Voices for Children, gave the Committee a report detailing the reading intervention successes of three Idaho school districts that experimented with reading intervention (see attachment 2). She urged the sending of **H 526** to the floor with a do pass recommendation.

**Hollis Brookover**, Vice President, Idaho Business for Education (IBE), said she worked on the Governor's Task Force for Improving Education subcommittee for literacy; **H 526** and **H 451** are the culmination of their work and a critical part of the Governor's education agenda. She explained there are short-term educational goals that must be achieved, but a pipeline of talented students are necessary to meet the State's workforce demands. She emphasized that education is a continuum, each year building on another. **Ms. Brookover** is very concerned that 36,000 of K-3 students in Idaho are not reading at grade level. To battle the reading problems in Idaho, an intensive early literacy intervention needs to take place. IBE respectfully urges the passage of **H 526**.

The following submitted their testimony in support of **H 526**: Karen Echeverria, Executive Director, Idaho School Boards Association (see attachment 3), and Rob Winslow, Executive Director, Idaho Association of School Administrators (see attachment 4).

**Mr. Youde** concluded by stating he believes the testimony has answered many of the concerns and questions from the Committee. He said this is a bill from the SBE and they have worked with many stakeholder groups and other professionals. They are confident this is the starting point for improving reading proficiency.

**Senator Nonini** said he still has concerns that if the fund level requested by the Governor is not appropriated schools wont be able to attain the provisions outlined in § 33-1616 (2), Idaho Code. But whether or not all the funds are appropriated, the reading scores must move upward.

**MOTION:**

**Senator Nonini** moved to send **H 526** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Den Hartog** seconded the motion.

**Vice Chairman Thayn** said this is very important legislation. He appreciated the testimony from Ms. Reynolds and Ms. O'Shea about what is working and he hopes they will share this information with other districts. He stated the bill focuses too much on what the State will do; it is more important to know what is working in the districts and how to replicate those programs. He is in support of **H 526**.

**Senator Den Hartog** quoted Jim Foudy, Superintendent, McCall-Donnelly Joint School Districts, "We made a conscious decision to use our funds for things that made a difference for kids," and said that sums up the gist of the bill. She emphasized this legislation is for Idaho's children and we must no longer fail them. She said during this session she has had many concerns about how State money is being spent. She has been waiting for a piece of legislation that is intensely focused on the needs of our students. She is in support of **H 526**.

**Chairman Mortimer** said he is excited that this bill is here and is eager to see the literacy needle move upward.

The motion passed by **voice vote**. Chairman Mortimer will carry **H 526** to the floor.

**ADJOURNED:**

There being no more business, **Chairman Mortimer** adjourned the meeting at 3:56 p.m.

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Senator Dean M. Mortimer  
Chair

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LeAnn Mohr  
Secretary