

MINUTES  
**SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Thursday, February 22, 2024

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

**PLACE:** Room WW55

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Lent, Vice Chairman Toews, Senators Den Hartog, Nichols, Carlson, Herndon, Lenney, Ward-Engelking, and Semmelroth

**ABSENT/ EXCUSED:** None

**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 Lent** called the meeting of the Senate Education Committee (Committee) to order at 3:02 p.m.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** **Senator Den Hartog** moved to approve the Minutes of February 7, 2024. **Senator Semmelroth** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** **Senator Semmelroth** moved to approve the Minutes of February 12, 2024. **Vice Chairman Toews** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** **Senator Semmelroth** moved to approve the Minutes of February 13, 2024. **Vice Chairman Toews** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** **Senator Carlson** moved to approve the Minutes of February 14, 2024. **Senator Nichols** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**PRESENTATION:** **Hispanic Education Climate in Idaho. Margie Gonzalez**, Executive Director, Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs, shared a variety of statistics about the Hispanic population and Hispanic student presence in Idaho (Attachment 1). She stated that Hispanic students were concentrated in southern Idaho where many public school districts had over 50% Hispanic student population. She shared that the Hispanic student population posed challenges to school districts. Poverty rates among Hispanic students were higher than in non-Hispanic students with 29% living in poverty. Hispanic students often started school with an achievement gap compared to non-Hispanic students, and performed lower on proficiency tests. This gap was attributed to language barriers and a lack of early childhood education opportunities. **Ms. Gonzalez** asserted that it was very important to address academic achievement gaps and to increase bilingual and bicultural educators in Idaho schools and on Idaho school boards. She shared about the significant impact of the Hispanic Youth Leadership Summit which was held annually.

**DISCUSSION:** In response to Committee member questions, **Ms. Gonzalez** explained that children of non-migrant workers did not have access to early childhood education programs. Increasing access to early childhood education programs was important to close the academic achievement gap. **Ms. Gonzalez** also recommended a stipend for bilingual paraprofessionals to help with recruitment and retention of staff.

**S 1356** **EDUCATION - Amends and adds to existing law to provide for a strategic plan for school districts and public charter schools and to provide for a certain training for school district board of trustee members and public charter school board of directors members.**

- MOTION:** **Senator Den Hartog** moved to hold **S 1356** in Committee subject to the call of the Chair. **Senator Ward-Engelking** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.
- S 1361** **EDUCATION - Amends existing law to require school district boards of trustees and public charter schools to adopt certain rules of procedure for the conduct of their meetings, which shall include provisions allowing members of the public to comment and offer up items for the agenda.** **Senator Carlson** explained that **S 1361** provided a framework for in-person public comment at regular meetings of school boards before a school board took final action on items. It ensured members of the public who resided in a school district were permitted to request an item be added to the school board meeting agenda. **S 1361** promoted local control by requiring that school boards adopted their own rules and order of procedure which governed their meetings. **Senator Carlson** requested **S 1361** be sent to the 14th Order for amendment to add public charter schools to the legislation.
- DISCUSSION:** **Senator Nichols** asked for clarification about the public comment intent. **Senator Carlson** explained that school boards varied in the amount and method of public comment they allowed. The legislation allowed school boards to design their own procedures regarding how they received public comment, but ensured public participation.
- TESTIMONY:** **Quinn Perry**, Deputy Director, Idaho School Boards Association (ISBA), testified that the ISBA was neutral on **S 1361**. She stated that **S 1361** affirmed and codified best practices related to school board operations. She clarified that the ISBA always advised school boards to take in-person public comment at regular meetings. She expressed support for the amendments that Senator Carlson proposed.
- Pam Johnson** testified in favor of **S 1361**. She stated that current open meeting laws did not provide for regular public participation. Public participation at school board meetings was not allowed equally or consistently. She pointed out that public commentary was important because it built trust between the public and the board. She added that online commentary which was allowed by some school boards was perceived by the public as an exclusionary tool and that it bred distrust. She stated that participation in school board meetings was a matter of parental rights.
- DISCUSSION:** **Senator Herndon** asked Quinn Perry for her recommendations on how to manage contentious board meetings. **Ms. Perry** stressed the importance of setting clearly defined expectations for the functioning of meetings and the behavior of participants. This included following the agenda and applying time limits on public comments. She added that in most cases law enforcement was not needed for school board meetings, but if an agenda item was anticipated to be particularly contentious, it was prudent to involve law enforcement in advance.
- Senator Den Hartog** asked for clarification on public comment and whether it was restricted to one part of a meeting or whether an ongoing dialog was intended. **Ms. Perry** explained that public commentary at school board meetings was not intended to be an ongoing dialog.
- MOTION:** **Senator Lenney** moved to send **S 1361** to the 14th Order of Business for possible amendment. **Senator Den Hartog** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.
- ADJOURNED:** There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Lent** adjourned the meeting at 3:45 p.m.

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Senator Lent  
Chair

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Lisa Stein  
Secretary