Minutes of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee
December 2, 2025
Lincoln Auditorium, Capitol, Boise, Idaho

Representative Jordan Redman, presiding cochair

Committee members in attendance: Senators Melissa Wintrow (cochair), C. Scott Grow, Dave Lent, James Ruchti, Representatives Jordan Redman (cochair), Douglas T. Pickett, Ilana Rubel, and Steve Berch. Also present were Ryan Langrill, Director of the Office of Performance Evaluations; and Office of Performance Evaluations (OPE) staff.

Audience members in attendance included the following: Lia Huelfl, Karca Coburn, LeAnn McFadden, Lana McFadden, Amy Johnson, Janet Cox, Emilee Bodily, Shelby Hansen, Terri Sorensen, Kristin Skinner, Megan Price, Heidi Pago, Elise Reel, Kelsey Owens, Jeanie Reeder, Brook Williams, Liz Colton, Nicholas Bennett, Heather Cicalu, Melanie Coleman, Kara Cosby, Belyn Pauylin, Rebecca McCammon, Jexi A. Burke, Stacy Tangelder, Ruth Hansen, Kyran Hansen, Chalae Temples, Jessa Christopoulos, Sarah Bristol, Lisa Barnes, Virginia Peterson, Christine Ing, Elaine Gross, Clara Alred, Pamela Zeyer, Melissa Spurrier, Heidi Bronleeve, Aleah Southfield, Vashti Smith, Tina Erbe, Elizabeth Fox, R. Brent Evanson, Jessica Felkel, Jeremy Felkel, Elijah Felkel, Leanna Maxwell, Christine Hogg, Amanda Forkey, Stacey Snow, Marti Ellis, Kristen Solesbee, Whiteney Schmide, Shelly Britton, R. Garcia, Carissa Brown.

Representative Jordan called the meeting to order at 10:13 a.m.

Representative Rubel moved that the committee release the OPE report *Idaho Home Learning Academy*. Representative Pickett seconded the motion and it passed by unanimous voice vote.

Report presentation: *Idaho Home Learning Academy*

Director Langrill introduced the background of the report request. Lauren Bailey, Principal Evaluator, Christopher Shank, Evaluator, and Kristie Brownell, Evaluator, presented the report.

Representative Rubel asked how weak organizational boundaries led to deferral of statutory boundaries and how that manifested. Ms. Bailey gave the example of the lack of guidance for supplemental learning funds and the overlap between the education service provider staff and IHLA staff. She also noted IHLA's trust for education service providers to do a good job monitoring the use of supplemental learning funds, instead IHLA monitoring or auditing their use. Representative Rubel asked about specific statutory responsibilities that were not carried out. Ms. Bailey said that this was seen in IHLA deferring the responsibility for the use of taxpayer funds to service providers.

Senator Ruchti asked for an example of a specific potential conflict of interest. Ms. Bailey referred to IHLA adding education service providers on the school's staff.

Senator Grow asked about the 41 percent overlap between IHLA & service providers and how it's determined who is working on what. Ms. Bailey mentioned how this is covered in the report and deferred to IHLA to speak more about it.

Senator Ruchti asked if testing scores improved past the 2nd year at IHLA. Mr. Shank said that while student scores improved after two years at IHLA, the growth did not continue in later years. Representative Berch added that if IHLA was a private school, their testing information would not be publicly available.

Representative Redman asked where standardized testing takes place. Mr. Shank said there was previously a requirement for traveling to a testing site, but there are now in-home testing options.

Representative Pickett asked about possible false equivalency in regard to testing in or out of traditional settings. Mr. Shank talked about the approaches used in comparing and the limitations of the report data. Representative Pickett noted concerns about whether there is an accurate proficiency representation. Mr. Shank spoke on the limits of standardized testing and noted the importance of weighing test scores against individual experiences.

Representative Rubel asked what discretionary funding looks like at virtual schools and where any remaining money goes. Mr. Shank said he could only speak to IHLA's funding model but would speak further about the funding aspect in the presentation.

Representative Berch asked if there is data on the level of teacher experience in part- vs. full-time teachers. Mr. Shank noted the report shows the position of IHLA's teachers on the career ladder and deferred to IHLA for further information.

Senator Ruchti asked about the transportation funding slide and its intent. Mr. Shank said he wanted to highlight transportation funding since it has different rules for virtual versus brick-and-mortar schools.

Representative Rubel asked how much money goes out per IHLA student. Mr. Shank said the number was not in the report, which instead focused on supplemental learning funds.

Senator Grow asked if the loose governance happened under the Oneida School District or occurred after. Ms. Bailey noted the long-time overlap between the Oneida Board of Trustees and IHLA's own board. She said that based on survey responses, IHLA has improved practices and become more stringent since they became a charter.

Senator Wintrow asked if education service providers function like Managed Care Organizations in Medicaid. Mr. Shank said her comparison is somewhat similar, but there are differences. Senator Wintrow asked about leftover funding reversions. Mr. Shank said that unspent supplemental learning funds stay with the service providers.

Representative Pickett asked for more details about the survey questions related to families' discontent with brick-and-mortar schools. Ms. Bailey said there would be supplemental material forthcoming with detailed survey responses.

Senator Grow asked if there is a system in place to audit schools like IHLA. Ms. Bailey said IHLA's first financial audit was just completed, but the service providers were not audited as there is not a process in place for that. Senator Grow asked how much profit is being made. The providers were forthcoming about how much was spent on supplemental learning funds, but the team did not ask to see the providers' financials. Senator Grow asked if there was any profit made by IHLA. Mr. Shank said charter schools are allowed to operate retaining some funds at the end of the year and around $3 million was not spent out of the foundation program funding that ILA received over the course of the year.

Representative Berch raised concerns about the lack of information on the funding retained by service providers. Mr. Shank deferred to the service providers who would be answering questions later in the meeting. Representative Berch also asked if there is any information about IHLA students who have graduated high school through the program. The presenters deferred to IHLA for that information.

Senator Ruchti asked if there is anything in Idaho code that is designated as supplemental learning funds. Mr. Shank said there was not. Senator Ruchti commented that it seems money enters characterized as one appropriation, but by the time it gets to the end of the road, it is being used as payments to school districts, families, and the providers. Mr. Shank noted that the end process is not simply just cash payments, but reimbursement for resources. Senator Ruchti noted that this is still concerning in terms of oversight.

Representative Rubel asked who is responsible for IHLA's curriculum aligning with the state's. Ms. Bailey said that statute requires curriculum to be adopted by the school board. Supplemental curriculum does not have any definition in statute or rule. The State Department of Education says the process for curriculum substitutions in brick-and mortar schools is approved on an individual basis. IHLA has a list of non-board adopted supplemental curriculum.

Representative Pickett asked about the projected enrollment for IHLA, if it was going to become static, or if that enrollment would be picked up by other virtual schools. Ms. Bailey said that despite fluctuations, the virtual population is here to stay. Mr. Shank added that there have recently been higher levels of transfers to other virtual schools that offer supplemental learning funds.

Representative Redman asked if IHLA adopts curriculum that aligns with state standards for all students. Ms. Bailey said there are curriculum options available to all students which are board-adopted and aligned with state curriculum standards. She added that families can choose not to use that curriculum and instead use an alternative that hasn't gone through that adoption process.

Senator Wintrow asked how the restriction or removal of supplemental learning funds would impact families. Ms. Bailey said supplemental learning funds were the top reason families chose to enroll. Families expressed frustration with new additional requirements to get access to the funds and some said they would leave IHLA without the funds. Representative Berch asked if the needs of these families could be met if supplemental learning funds and more individualized learning capacity were available through traditional public schools. Ms. Bailey answered that the IHLA population seemed more interested in the learning environment of the school, and some families would homeschool regardless.

Senator Grow commented on the care needed in seeking to bring brick-and-mortar and virtual schools into alignment regarding finances, standardized testing, and alternative curriculum.

Hailey Sweeten, incoming Executive Director for the Idaho Home Learning Academy, spoke. She outlined steps to improve student support, strengthen oversight of supplemental learning funds, formalize curriculum tracking, and prevent potential conflicts of interest. She said they support creating a clearer and more equitable funding framework for virtual schools while emphasizing that virtual education provides an important public school choice for Idaho families.

Senator Grow asked Director Sweeten for details about IHLA spending 37 percent less per student. Director Sweeten said that as a virtual charter they do not get transportation or facility funds and determined this based on information from the National Center for Education Statistics. Gideon Tollman, financial officer at the State Department of Education, agreed that IHLA does about that much in per student spending versus in-person school. Senator Grow asked how often this difference is evaluated by the board. Mr. Tollman said the adjustments are reviewed yearly.

Representative Berch asked about the rates IHLA high school students go on to college. Emilee Bodily, Executive Director at Braintree, said that for the 2024-2025 school year, 51 percent went to year college, 30.8 percent went to a 2-year college, ten percent went to full-time jobs, five percent went to a vocational school, and 2.6 percent went into the military.

Representative Berch asked if there were comparisons available between the qualifications of faculty who were full- and part-time and the qualifications of faculty at IHLA vs. brick-and-mortar schools. Director Sweeten said many of their teachers are early in their careers and lower on the career ladder. She also said the school relies heavily on part-time teachers.

Senator Ruchti asked what counts as daily attendance for virtual schools. Director Sweeten said that work completion is tracked as attendance. It was clarified that this meant students were not marked present or absent each day and resulted in a higher average daily attendance than brick-and-mortar schools. Senator Ruchti noted that higher daily attendance would also result in more money for IHLA.

Senator Grow asked about the overlap between IHLA and the service providers, particularly how employees track their work for each entity. Director Sweeten said staff are supposed to treat each role as separate jobs.

Senator Ruchti stated concerns about unspent money allocated for full-time staff and health benefits being turned into discretionary funds, changing the funds into something not intended by the original appropriation.

Representative Pickett asked about the practice of hiring teachers part-time at 29 hours per week. Director Sweeten said this hiring practice is present in most schools, but IHLA is just at a larger scale.

Representative Berch expressed concerns about public money being used to pay for things not typically offered by public schools, like dance lessons or soccer camps. Director Sweeten said that their model emphasizes parental choice and that public schools have opportunities IHLA students wouldn't have. Representative Berch asked about guardrails and Director Sweeten said there is a board-approved list of items, including items that are not allowed.

Representative Redman asked where standardized testing takes place. Director Sweeten said they piloted the ISAT at home last year, with alternate locations also provided.

Dallan Rupp, Superintendent of the Oneida School District, expressed support for the evaluation and for virtual education in Idaho. He said his dual role as superintendent and IHLA board member strengthened oversight and collaboration. He noted the report found no misconduct and that IHLA has complied with state laws and regulations.

Senator Ruchti asked what the district did with the additional $5 million paid to the Oneida School District by IHLA that was discussed during the report presentation. Superintendent Rupp said the funding went to technology, support staffing (such as HR), and overall expenses for running facilities. Representative Pickett asked if the facility IHLA operates from is owned by the Oneida School District. Superintendent Rudd acknowledged this and noted that this is part of where the $5 million went.

Emilee Bodily, Executive Director of Braintree, addressed Senator Grow's prior question about profit margins. She explained that their company receives about $2,900 per student but only keeps about four percent as profit. Senator Grow asked how her company keeps staff who also work for IHLA from charging both entities for the same time. Director Bodily said all employees must sign an ethics handbook, that they have clear job descriptions, and their time-tracking requirements ensure employee work aligns with their roles. She added that they do not employ board members or administrators in overlapping roles.

Senator Wintrow asked Director Bodily to break down her company's structure. Director Bodily said they serve 300 students in five states. She said most employees are teachers who may also work in other states. In some states the organization hires state-certified teachers to provide

instruction. Staff roles include field trip and event coordinators, funding team members, and curriculum specialists.

Senator Wintrow asked how much time students spend directly with a teacher. Director Bodily said this varies depending on age and grade level. Students can meet regularly with teachers through weekly meetings, office hours, and daily academic support.

Senator Lent commented on the paradigm shift where learning has become the constant and time is the variable. Director Bodily agreed, noting the use of monthly benchmarks and offline opportunities.

John Thorn, President of Harmony Educational Services, spoke about his company's 17-year history working with many different states. He noted that they find that some of their families are still unaware that they are public school families and talked about ways to help families understand the nature of their enrollment.

Janet Cox, CEO of Home Ed 360, spoke about her company, which only operates in Idaho. She clarified that 41 percent of their employees are also IHLA employees, but not the other way around.

Gideon Tollman, financial officer at the State Deptartment of Education, spoke on behalf of the Superintendent Critchfield. He said the department has worked closely with IHLA since early 2023 to provide oversight and support. He noted that the department also shares concerns about differences in funding between virtual and traditional schools and legal clarification from the legislature is needed.

Matthew Reiber, from the State Board of Education, spoke on the behalf of Board President Kurt Lieberman. He said their official comments were submitted in a letter from Board President Liebich and Director White.

Representative Berch asked about the Board's goal to pursue outcome-based accountability in all schools. Mr. Reiber spoke about the complexity in defining the necessary standards for success, which can differ for each student.

Senator Wintrow asked about the point of diminishing returns if there are too many choices in education. Mr. Reiber spoke about the balance of taxpayer money when trying to support students and parents.

Several committee members expressed their appreciation of the report and the complex issues presented.

Representative Redman adjourned the meeting at 1:00 p.m.