



Idaho State Senate

SENATOR DAVE LENT

March 13, 2024

Join Legislative Oversight Committee
Attn: Co-chair Senator Wintrow
Attn: Co-chair Representative Pickett

Dear Senator Wintrow and Representative Pickett,

The Idaho Constitution contains provisions related to the state's responsibility to provide public education, and to what extent the state must do so. Article IX, Section 1 of the Idaho Constitution outlines the state's commitment to public education as follows:

"The stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it shall be the duty of the legislature of Idaho to establish and maintain a general, uniform and thorough system of public, free common schools."

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The way Idaho provides for a free and public education is through a combination of state funding and local property taxes. Recent OPE studies have highlighted the struggles school districts have faced in paying for support staff or providing safe and adequately maintained school facilities. The study requestors would like to know more about other disparities in Idaho's K-12 public school system.

The desired information is an "apples-to-apples" comparison between all school districts in Idaho delineating certain information. The key components of such comparison would include:

1. **Resources:** Compare the availability of resources necessary to support student learning effectively. This includes (1) qualified teachers, (2) instructional materials, (3) technology, (4) classroom resources, (4) facilities, (5) support staff, (6) special education services, (7) extracurricular programs, (8) class size, and (9) student to teacher ratios.
2. **Cost Calculation:** Compare the cost of providing the identified resources. The cost estimation considers direct expenses (e.g., teacher salaries) and indirect expenses (e.g., maintenance of facilities). The cost differences between small, rural schools and large, urban schools (where economies of scale are a factor).
3. **Student and School Characteristics:** Compare student and school demographics and the diverse needs, including but not limited to such data as: (1) urban and rural needs (e.g.,

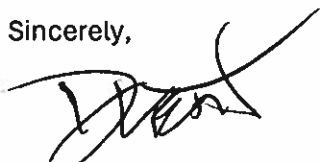
transportation, Certified Technical Education opportunities, etc.); (2) Special education needs; (3) English language learner needs; (4) behavior intervention needs; (5) mental health needs and services; and (6) poverty levels. This data would compare students/schools with higher needs receive as that relates to services and the other data points listed here.

4. **Local levy Considerations:** Identifying and comparing funding disparities among school district based upon the ability or inability to pass local levies.
5. **Policy Recommendations:** Based on the findings, providing policy recommendations to guide lawmakers and education officials in making informed decisions about funding allocations and resource distribution.

The report may be used for many purposes. The report may be used to gain an objective understanding of the financial needs of the education systems, and the differences that currently exist between school districts. This report may also serve as a basis for legislative decisions, budgeting processes, and strategic planning to ensure that public schools receive uniform funding to deliver a thorough and high-quality education to all students. Some key benefits the report could provide:

1. **Cost Estimation:** This report could help calculate the cost required to meet the state's educational standards and goals, considering class sizes, teacher-student ratios, instructional materials, technology, support staff, and other essential resources. This data helps the legislature understand the actual financial needs of schools to deliver high-quality education.
2. **Equity Considerations:** The report should examine the varying needs of students in different districts and schools, considering factors like student demographics, poverty levels, and special education requirements. This would highlight existing funding disparities and help identify where additional resources are most needed to promote educational equity.
3. **Data-Driven Decision Making:** The report would provide objective evidence to guide the legislature's funding decisions, making the process less susceptible to political influences or arbitrary allocations.
4. **Accountability and Transparency:** The report's findings would enhance transparency in allocating education funds. Legislators would understand how taxpayer money is used to support education.
5. **Impact Evaluation:** The report would allow the legislature to assess the effectiveness of current funding levels and initiatives.
6. **Strategic Policy Formulation:** The report would provide a basis for crafting targeted policies and interventions to address specific challenges in the education system.

Sincerely,



Dave Lent
Idaho State Senator
District 33



Janie Ward-Engelking
Idaho State Senator
District 18