

Good Afternoon

((Senate)) Chairman Mortimer and members of the committee

My name is Sherri Ybarra and I am the Superintendent of Public Instruction and I am proud to announce that today marks my 30th day in office and I'm here to tell you that I love every minute of it.

I would like to thank you, along with the citizens of Idaho, for the opportunity to be here today, on such a special day-- It is truly an honor.

Today, I want to offer you my vision of the path I want to take to lead our children and grandchildren into the future. We must remain committed to making our students' lives better and continue to build upon success for excellent schools in Idaho and to help all schools and students flourish.

I came from the heart of education. I have walked that path. I understand how valuable a quality education is in ensuring a bright economy for our state and a brighter future for all of Idaho's children. The new vision for the state department is **“Supporting schools and students to achieve.”** This

will be the foundation for everything we do, at the state level, to move education forward and improve student achievement. The State Department will be the “go to place” for schools, districts, and parents alike.

Examples of what we will be working on are:

-Retaining and recruiting quality educators

-Move ahead with common- sense leadership and transparency

-Work on increased operational funding for schools to help address adequate funding while addressing their unique community challenges

- Invest in innovation and technology that makes sense

-Be committed to higher standards

-Examine our current assessment system to be sure we are measuring growth, so accountability reflects our students, as unique individuals

I am dedicated to creating conditions under which the Department of Education's policies will be driven by the needs of the districts –from the bottom up, not the top down. The reorganization now-- underway at the department-- reflects the “ground up” approach we will use to ensure our work contributes to student outcomes. I believe that local trustees and districts have a much better understanding and perspective of the specific needs and problems in their own communities --than we have from Boise and I am a firm advocate of local control.

To demonstrate our emphasis on the department's strategic plan for increased service and support, Dr. Chuck Zimmerly has assumed the important role of Community Relations Officer. This new position will focus on working with Idaho school districts to build, foster and support communications and relationships with the school districts, as well as other state and local stakeholders. The new outreach effort will provide a new and direct means of communication for school districts to address their particular issues and provide guidance for school districts on policies. He is opening up the two-way communication I think is critical to my vision of

providing the best possible support this department can give to the local districts. WE care and want to know what schools and districts think.

We have already garnered positive feedback from Superintendents across Idaho --who appreciate the trust we place in their decisions --regarding their charge to deliver a quality education to Idaho students.

We also are in an increasingly competitive and digitally connected world, so students must have support for the use, and the funding of technology. Technology is all around us. It is both the future and the present-- and it is also how we can personalize a child's education to prepare them to meet the needs of the future. To help us become a top rated educational system, we must increase opportunities for classrooms to become individually focused on each student, collaborative, and engaging through commons-sense technology and funding.

What do I mean by common sense technology?

For example, it makes no sense that we *mandate* districts purchase technology devices for classrooms that might have connectivity issues, not

enough bandwidth, or only one outlet to plug in 20 devices. You need more than a device, you have to have the infrastructure and a vision to connect children to learning. That is why I have asked the Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee for a \$10.9 million dollar increase in discretionary technology funds that can include: infrastructure needs, learning management systems, or staffing, because districts know best what is going to help contribute to the learning and unique needs of their communities.

Also, at the state level, I have recently named Mr. Will Goodman as the new Chief Technology Officer at the State Department. Will is the current President of the IETA (Idaho Education Technology Association). And, as a former Teacher, Principal, Interim Superintendent and Technology Director himself, his background is uniquely suited to schools and their unique needs. He will be able to assist with concerns local districts may have over critical infrastructure, technical and broadband questions and needs.

Local control and increased operational funding is also a big part of my new vision. In the effort to address the unique challenges school districts face, I recommended to the Joint Finance and Appropriation Committee that just over \$18.7 million dollars be moved from mandated, non-discretionary lines

of the budget, to the operational category of the budget -- without restriction -- thus allowing local authorities, who know their needs best, the option of deciding where to allocate their resources. This is in addition to the \$10 million that was already requested, for a total of \$28.759 million. School districts can still choose to use those funds in the same categories or choose to address other needs as they deem necessary. It only makes sense that the people closest to our students make those decisions.

On a parallel path, I am working on modifications to the old NCLB, now referred to as the ESEA waiver-- to resolve numerous issues concerning federal mandates and testing-- that are burdening our school districts and hindering their ability to affect student achievement and outcomes. For example, staggering the testing system instead of testing every student every year; an example of this balanced assessment model would look like: grades 3,5,7, and 9 take the ELA assessment and grades 4,6, and 8 take the Math assessment. Reducing the testing down to this federal minimum -- limits the impact on instructional time because the SBAC is not the only measure of student growth in the classroom, and should not be. Good educators know that it takes multiple measures over multiple times which will reflect a motion picture of growth over time (not just one snap-

shot). Another modification in the waiver we are working on includes “opt out” provisions. ~~For example, the language in the waiver could read: When a student is 18 years of age or older, or a parent or guardian opts out of a state administered test (assessments administered locally and not required to be administered by all LEA’s statewide are not covered under the “opt out” provision) no academic penalty shall result. Students shall not be singled out in any way, nor the student or the class be punished in any way because the student opted out of a state test. A student who has not opted out as allowed is counted as a non-participant (both state and federal reporting) and will not have a proficiency score, and for the state’s purpose will not be counted against participation rates; however these students will be reported as non-participants on federal reports and accountability and this may impact an LEA’s qualification for and the receiving of certain federal dollars. If the test is used for graduation decisions, some alternative assessment/route will need to be provided.~~

Next, how do we recruit and retain high quality educators? Higher pay, lower class sizes, and mentoring opportunities as a part of my tiered licensure plan-- says loud and clear to educators, “Join Idaho’s vibrant team of professionals!” We know that 30 children in a first-grade classroom

results in “more crowd control” and decreased over-all achievement, which does affect learning for the next 11 years. A child never gets that time back. With that, on my wish list.....I would like to address classroom crowding in the critical kindergarten to third-grade classes by placing a statutory limit on classroom size for those grades, which also supports the Governor’s task force recommendation for achieving reading proficiency by the third grade. I am hoping to address that in the 2017 budget request, and if the money is available for this upcoming year, we will pursue this avenue.

Also, in pursuit of a fiscally sound, accountable and innovative path forward for education, we are proposing a career ladder pilot project. As a former district administrator, I am keenly aware of the internal operations at the local level. For example, we do not have a state-wide salary schedule, it is simply a reimbursement schedule that reflects minimum pay and is subjected to teacher negotiations-- as well. Each district is unique in how they pay their teachers, and the pilot project will ensure that we don’t disrupt that internal process, that the change is handled well at the local level, and that the career ladder is used as it was originally intended and invented for: which is to raise student achievement --through rewarding effective teaching. A highly qualified teacher in every classroom is critical to a child’s

learning and therefore, we should reward our teachers and encourage them to remain in the profession.

That is why I requested \$25 million dollars be allocated toward the career ladder, which is sufficient for a 3% percent increase to ALL CEC staff in Idaho (not just the pilot participants). And it will be the participating pilot district's discretion --how they restructure their salary schedule --that reflects reforms to the traditional "steps and lanes" approach. But, in the end, the funding decision rests on the legislature.

The *implementation* of the career ladder will be the responsibility of the state department of education and I am recommending a pilot project because it is a form of risk management. We learn by doing, and we have never done this before. So, the pilot approach will enable local district officials to help determine the actual costs for long term sustainability and full implementation over the next four years.

It only seems prudent, that when the time for full implementation comes, you have accurate, proven documentation about how best to spend the taxpayer's dollars on this new approach to rewarding effective teaching.

In conclusion,

It is not enough to just say we will do these things, it's our actions that must reflect the fact that we are committed to delivering to Idaho's children the best education that we, as a team, can deliver. Let's stay positive, let's unite and do this for our kids....and in the words of the Gallup presentation the other day ..."The research states: hope and relationships are the strongest predictors of success, not numbers or test scores."

It has been said before: When the world says give up, hope whispers, "try it one more time!" Let's give our kids hope, let's make our kids' lives better, because that ensures a brighter economy and brighter future for us all.

(Read from book)

Thank you and with that, Mr. Chairman, I brought a lot of staff, and we would stand for questions, if you like. (If I can't answer your question, I'm sure someone here can.)