

MINUTES
HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
DIXON SUBCOMMITTEE
Dixon Subcommittee on Pending Rules

DATE: Thursday, January 21, 2016
TIME: 9:00 A.M.
PLACE: Room EW41
MEMBERS: Chairman Dixon, Vice Chairman Harris, Representatives McDonald, Pence
**ABSENT/
EXCUSED:** None

GUESTS: Dr. Troy Rohn, Boise Schools; Harold Ott, Idaho Rural School Administrators; Rob Winslow, Helen Price, Idaho Association of School Administrators; Brad Hunt, OARC; Clark Corbin, Educational News; Gayle Wilde, Sylvia Garitou, American Association of University Women

Chairman Dixon called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

**DOCKET NO.
08-0109-1501:** **Tracie Bent**, State Board of Education, said this Docket addresses the Idaho GEAR Up Scholarship. The scholarship has been under utilized. Only \$836,000 has been awarded, and \$1.4 million remains in the fund, which started with two million dollars. The scholarships are awarded to students who attended schools which participate in the GEAR Up Program. Those students eligible for free or reduced lunch and who participate in the program are eligible for the scholarship. The changes are to add additional flexibility to students who participated in the program.

Ms. Bent said one change is to lengthen the deadline, so those who missed the deadline can still apply. The letter of intent language was changed from thirty days to sixty days. In response to questions from the committee, Ms. Bent explained that the GEAR Up Program helps students understand what they should do in advance to prepare to go to college. Each school district can do this differently, such as conducting parent nights, including visits to college, and increasing counseling resources. The funding impacted by this rule is scholarship money for students who have completed the GEAR Up Program and graduated from high school.

Ms. Bent explained that the time to use the scholarship money will expire soon, so the department wants to add flexibility for the group of students who attended the program. Another change is to allow students who were awarded scholarships to continue receiving scholarship money for ten semesters, instead of only eight. There is a limited time to distribute the scholarship money, and the fund still contains \$1.4 million dollars.

MOTION: **Rep. Pence** made a motion to recommend the full committee approve **Docket No. 08-0109-1501. Motion carried by voice vote.**

**DOCKET NO.
08-0113-1501** **Ms. Bent** explained that this Docket adds specificity and makes minor changes to the Opportunity Scholarship Program. The Opportunity Scholarship is a need-based scholarship with limited funds available, and more students apply for the scholarship than they can award. The scholarship is for approximately \$3,000, minus whatever PELL Grant or other moneys the student receives. The students are ranked by grade point average, and the scholarship is awarded to those with the highest GPA. The change is to use an unweighted grade point average, rather than one which gives more weight to advanced placement course grades. Some smaller school districts do not offer advanced placement courses, which makes it more difficult for students in those districts to compete for the scholarship.

Rep. McDonald said he could understand that rationale, but he thought it was also not fair to students in advanced placement classes to not use a weighted grade, because it is easier for students in regular classes to maintain a high grade point average. **Rep. Pence** said she also believes this change is unfair to students who choose to take the more difficult advanced placement classes.

In response to questions from the committee, **Ms. Bent** said the executors of the scholarship program do not have access to student transcripts, which indicate whether classes are advanced placement or not. Currently, the school counselor verifies the GPA of students who apply for the scholarship. She added that, after recipients were chosen based solely on grade point average, the department had looked at their transcripts, and at least 54% of the recipients had taken at least one advanced placement class, so it doesn't appear that using a non-weighted grade would discriminate against students who take advanced placement classes. The department is looking at ways to make sure the evaluations of grades are equitable.

Dr. Troy Rohn, Boise Schools, testified in opposition to **Docket No.**

08-0113-1501 He said the change from weighted to un-weighted grade point averages penalizes students who take rigorous classes. The Boise School District has increased the rigor in its curriculum by offering advanced placement courses, and students who take those classes do better on the SAT and in college. Those students should be rewarded by allowing them to use a weighted GPA to successfully compete for scholarships. He cited an example of a student who has straight A's except for an AP Physics class, which is a B grade. That student's un-weighted GPA would be 3.974, which would be below a 4.0 GPA for a student who takes no advanced placement classes. The unintended consequence of the rule change is to level the playing field for school districts which do not offer AP courses, or do not offer very many. Instead of penalizing the students in districts which are trying to increase rigor and college readiness, concluded Dr. Rohn, a better solution would be to find ways of implementing AP courses in high schools statewide.

MOTION: **Rep. McDonald** made a motion to recommend the full committee reject **Docket No. 08-0113-1501. Motion carried by voice vote.**

ADJOURN: There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 10:27 a.m.

Representative Dixon
Chair

Jenifer Cavaness-Williams
Secretary