

**Idaho PTA Senate Education Committee Remarks**  
**Monday, January 14, 2019**  
**Presented by Maria Lorcher, VP Advocacy, Idaho PTA**  
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**1. What are the top priorities for your group for 2019?**

Our top priorities every year for the Idaho PTA is the overall well being of children & students in our state. This year at our Legislative Day on Jan 24<sup>th</sup>, here at the Capitol, our guest speakers all have to do with student's mental health. We have Shannon Decker from the Speedy Foundation, a non-profit organization which focuses on promoting mental health education & advocating for suicide prevention. Jeanne Buchaine and Dawn Tolan from the West Ada School District will be talking to parents about the importance of early intervention for mental health issues & educate parent leaders on what resources are available in our schools & districts. There are a lot of for-profit options but currently not a lot of services for those on a fixed income. Parents do not always know where to go for help & historically many of the mental health services have been made for students in higher grades, but we are starting to see the need in the younger students as well.

We understand staffing is a district issue & Idaho PTA is aware that there are districts in our state which do not adequately staff counselors at the school level. In the case of District 25, they do have enough school counselors & are so overwhelmed by the demand of their services they are pulling resources from other departments which is alarming. The current budget the district is working on for next school year is they are proposing pulling a teacher FTE (full time equivalent) from the fine arts department, specifically orchestra in the high schools to help pay for more counselors. The orchestra program will go from being a full time class at every high school to being offered only 1 trimester at each high school basically cutting it by 2/3s.

## **2. What advances has your agency witnessed in the last 24 months regarding student growth and achievement?**

All of our interaction with student growth is more behind the scenes in the schools & not necessarily in the classroom but PTA's work in conjunction with the education process to help advance student growth & achievement.

Last spring, Idaho PTA was in Washington DC advocating for the Juvenile Justice Reform Act & reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Act. While we were there it passed the house from the efforts that the National PTA has made supporting this issue. In December, the President signed it into law. What this means for Idaho is this bill includes provisions that will continue & strengthen protections for children & youth currently in the juvenile justice system including alternatives to incarceration. The Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018 is improved by supporting evidence-based programs designed to meet the needs of at-risk youth who are involved with the justice system, continuing the separation of detained youth & adults awaiting trial, continuing to ensure that detained children receive education & have a smooth transition back into the classroom after release & encouraging states to implement strategies to reduce racial & ethnic disparities among youth in the system ensuring greater protections & opportunities for youth both inside & once outside the system.

Idaho PTA is proud to announce 3 schools have been awarded National PTA School of Excellence which recognizes a schools commitment to building an inclusive & welcoming school community where all families contribute to enriching the education experience & over all well being for all students. It is a 2 year distinction & currently there are only 250 schools nationwide that have this accreditation. The schools who have been awarded in Idaho include:

Chubbuck Elementary, Chubbuck, Idaho  
Seven Oaks Elementary, Eagle Idaho  
Whitman Elementary, Lewiston Idaho

Idaho PTA continues to work closely with the Idaho Department of Education to give a parent perspective when drafting & implementing programs & policy. We are very grateful the collaboration so that parents have a voice in the education decisions for our children.

- Idaho PTA members currently serve on the Department of Education Parent Advisory Council
- We participated with the Idaho Dept of Education in creating Parent/Teacher Surveys which will go out this spring
- We participated with the Idaho Dept of Education in focus groups to give feedback on the new Report Card system for schools

### **3. If you could make any changes to general education and/or education policy, what 2 things would those be?**

The best thing to give parents in regard to the education of our children is options...give parents options. Education is not a 1 size fits all anymore because the dynamic of the American family has changed. We would be remiss to force every family to fit into 1 education scenario, by giving families options gives students an opportunity to succeed.

Idaho PTA supports the idea to change state policy so that districts can use state funds to support pre-kindergarten programs. This would give a school district flexibility to use state dollars as they see appropriate in supporting students entering kindergarten. There are different needs in different districts so giving the districts more flexibility there—by giving parents more options are in the best interest of the child. We are not suggesting that every 3-4 year old go to pre-school but if it can help the family & the child it would be helpful for our families to have the option.

US Census Bureau cites 69% 3-4 year olds are NOT enrolled in early childhood education program. This gap hinders school readiness. If a child would enroll in an early childhood program, it would be age appropriate learning. We are not suggesting 3-4 year olds sitting behind desks but instead interactive or parallel play that allows imagination, creativity type learning for kindergarten readiness.

The Idaho PTA supports state funding for all-day Kindergarten to improve achievement of young learners. Again giving parents options. It may not be appropriate for all children to go to full-day Kindergarten but so many can benefit from this type of interaction. Currently many of the Idaho schools districts offer full-day kindergarten but at a cost to parents. By funding all-day Kindergarten increases financial stability for parents by lessening the cost of education, giving families options instead of just for-profit day-care & the opportunity to learn for young learners.

Finally, in regard to District 25 having to choose between having more counselors in which they desperately need in their district by eliminating teachers in another department like Orchestra. Why do we have to choose? Why cannot we have both? Both are vital to a student's academic success. Districts should have the financial resources to serve all of its student body including the at-risk students, fine art students as well as the academic learners. Please consider increasing discretionary funding so school districts like District 25 can have both a full time Orchestra program and the school counselors their district needs.