

MINUTES  
**SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Wednesday, January 17, 2024

**TIME:** 3:00 P.M.

**PLACE:** Room WW55

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Lent, Vice Chairman Toews, Senators Den Hartog, Nichols, Carlson, Herndon, Lenney, Ward-Engelking, and Semmelroth

**ABSENT/  
EXCUSED:** None

**NOTE:** The sign-in sheet, testimonies, and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

**CONVENED:** **Chairman Lent** called the Senate Education Committee (Committee) to order at 3:00 p.m.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** **Senator Herndon** moved to approve the Minutes of January 11, 2024. **Senator Carlson** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**GUBERNATORIAL  
APPOINTMENT VOTE:** **Committee Vote on the Gubernatorial Appointment of Lieutenant Colonel Peter Koehler to the Idaho Public Charter School Commission.**

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Herndon** stated that he spoke with LTC Peter Koehler. **Senator Herndon** stated that LTC Koehler was dedicated to the mission of charter schools. LTC Koehler learned to adapt to collaboration since he left the military. **Senator Herndon** stated he appreciated the personal conversation he had with LTC Koehler.

**MOTION:** **Senator Semmelroth** moved to send the Gubernatorial Appointment of LTC Peter Koehler to the Idaho Public Charter School Commission to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Vice Chairman Toews** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**PRESENTATION:** **K-12 Outlook. Debbie Critchfield, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Idaho Department of Education (Department)**, gave a brief overview on the K-12 Outlook and Strategic Plan (Attachment 1).

**Ms. Critchfield** stated that the plan's first element was to ensure that Idaho children were reading at grade level by third grade, and were at grade level for math. The Department asked all districts to choose research-based curriculum rooted in reading and phonics. The Department vetted phonics-based curriculums for districts to choose from. Trained reading teachers and proper teacher preparation were ways to improve within a successful district. She stated each of the reading scores represented a real student with a real story worthy of recognition.

**Ms. Critchfield** addressed State math scores. Idaho and national math scores between grades 5-8 had significantly dropped.

**DISCUSSION:**

**Chairman Lent** stated that he was trying to understand "advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic" as it pertained to math scores on a graph (Attachment 3). **Chairman Lent** stated that his understanding was that grade level was considered basic. Based on the graph, about 70 percent of students were basic or above. The goal was to have all students at grade level or above. **Ms. Critchfield** stated that many students were near other levels. It was these students that the Board was trying to target. She stated that the Department's goal was to have all students be proficient or advanced in math and reading. She stated that the reality was that some students' capabilities did not allow for this. Some students were non-verbal and some students were not native English speakers, yet the schools still tested them.

**DISCUSSION:**

**Ms. Critchfield** discussed the second element (Attachment 1). The Department set a goal to prepare Idaho students for life, college, and career. Financial literacy became a graduation requirement to reach this goal. The Department prioritized relevant experience. **Ms. Critchfield** stated that she was dedicated to apprenticeships in order for students to apply what they had learned. There were \$11 million in requests for money in apprenticeships.

**Ms. Critchfield** discussed the third element (Attachment 1). This goal was to attract and retain exceptional teachers and leaders. **Ms. Critchfield** thanked the Legislature for the financial support of teachers over the past few years. **Ms. Critchfield** stated that as she traveled all over the State, she heard from teachers who were ill-equipped to deal with behaviors seen in classrooms. She stated that while many students went to their teachers for help, teachers should not feel like they have to provide therapy. The Department was working to support educational roles for families and training teachers to deal with behavior in the classroom.

**Ms. Critchfield** gave an overview of the teacher preparation program. She stated that she was working with colleges and institutions to fill the gaps seen in student teaching programs. **Ms. Critchfield** shared that about 30 percent of teachers left the profession within the first year. The Department worked to change this number by asking for additional funding to incentivize student teaching in rural areas. The Department was focused on providing more mentoring opportunities for teachers.

**Ms. Critchfield** discussed the fourth element (Attachment 1). This goal was to modernize the education funding structure. The Department submitted their budget on September 1. **Ms. Critchfield** stated 1994 was the last year there was a comprehensive look at funding. The Department wanted more local budgeting control and more money directed to student outcomes. She stressed local school board training.

Lastly, **Ms. Critchfield** emphasized the empowerment of parents to make informed decisions. She stated that she loved her job and enjoyed her work for Idaho children.

## DISCUSSION:

**Senator Lenney** applauded the move to refocus on phonics in schools. He stated that Common Core emphasized sight reading over phonics. **Senator Lenney** asked if Common Core ended in Idaho. **Ms. Critchfield** responded that the Idaho Legislature went through a process about two years ago where they "Idahoized" Common Core. She stated that Idaho schools were not currently teaching Common Core due to the changes made in recent years.

**Senator Lenney** asked if SmarterBalanced Consortium was responsible for bringing Common Core to Idaho. **Ms. Critchfield** replied that they did have a role in it. She stated that SmarterBalanced Consortium had a test that was required by the federal government to align with the standards. The test had to change due to changes in standards. **Senator Lenney** asked if it was beneficial for Idaho to be a member of the SmarterBalanced Consortium. **Ms. Critchfield** stated that it would not make sense if the State did not keep the assessment.

**Senator Den Hartog** asked if the Department knew what needed to change in teacher preparation programs related to reading. **Senator Den Hartog** also asked about some companies who claimed they were based on the science of reading, but may still follow the SmarterBalanced literacy approach. **Ms. Critchfield** stated that the National Council on Teacher Quality's recent report initiated phone calls to deans seeking to improve the teacher preparation program. The Department worked with local school boards to find the best curriculum based in the science of reading.

**Senator Ward-Engelking** stated that she was fascinated by teaching being a career that did not pay for internships. **Senator Ward-Engelking** stated that students paid for the semester they student-taught which meant these students were paying to work. **Senator Ward-Engelking** asked if there was more engagement in students who wanted to go on to higher education. **Ms. Critchfield** stated that there was a high level of applications to the Launch Grant Program. She stated that a measure for success would be graduation rates.

**Senator Nichols** asked Ms. Critchfield to define the science of reading. **Ms. Critchfield** deferred to her colleague to answer the question. **Ryan Kantrell**, State Department of Education, defined the science of reading as a body of research. This included phonics, fluency, awareness, comprehension, and vocabulary. **Senator Nichols** stated that the National Council of Teachers of English had concerns about the Science of Reading. **Senator Nichols** stated that these concerns were that the science of reading was the "next best thing". **Senator Nichols** asked how the Department knew this new reading program worked. **Ms. Critchfield** stated that this was not the "next best thing". She stated that the SmarterBalanced curriculum was the "next best thing". **Senator Nichols** stated that she was an advocate for phonics.

**Senator Semmelroth** stated that four-year institutions were required to be nationally accredited. There were some teachers who only had one, two, or three years of education in potentially unaccredited programs. **Senator Semmelroth** stated that she would like to see aggregated data on math and reading scores of students whose teachers attended accredited programs. **Senator Semmelroth** stated that teacher turnover impacted student learning. She asked how the Department was involved in accreditation. **Ms. Critchfield** stated that she was a member of the Idaho State Board of

Education. She agreed that teachers came to the classroom with different backgrounds. She stated that this proved the importance of mentoring. **Senator Semmelroth** stated that she agreed with Ms. Critchfield. **Senator Semmelroth** further stated that teacher apprenticeships showed the apprentice as the "teacher of record", though they had not completed their education. She stated that mentoring in schools was a part of the process. This process needed to include high quality feedback, regular observations, and ongoing professional development.

**Chairman Lent** asked if Ms. Critchfield was leaning away from process and focused more on outcomes. **Ms. Critchfield** stated that the Department discussed goals and strategies with school districts before they moved forward with funding.

**PASSED THE GAVEL:** Chairman Lent passed the gavel to Vice Chairman Toews.

**DOCKET NO.  
08-0203-2301**

**Rules Governing Thoroughness - Proposed Rule. Jenn Thompson**, Chief Policy Officer, Idaho State Board of Education, proposed a single pending revision on page 11. She gave in-depth context to the revision being proposed by referring to a section not being revised on the top of page 13, Section 112. The removal of Subsection 03.e was requested by the Idaho State Department of Education.

**DOCKET NO.  
08-0401-2301:**

**Rules of the Idaho Digital Learning Academy (ZBR Chapter Rewrite) - Proposed Rule. Ms. Thompson** introduced Jeff Simmons, Superintendent, Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA). Ms. Thompson gave a short overview of the proposed revision based on Governor's Zero-Based Regulation (ZBR) initiative. She referred to page 20 of the packet, which indicated minor removals of duplicative language. A major change clarified the definition of "acceptable use policy" and defined it once in Subsection 010.01. **Ms. Thompson** proposed changes to consistent language of using "virtual environment". IDLA requested broader language to Subsection 102.01 that allowed end-of-semester exams to have alternate test options. Subsections 102.02 a, b, and c were changed. Subsection 102.02d was removed. There was a shift in Subsection 102.03 in the removal of the first sentence.

**DISCUSSION:**

**Senator Semmelroth** asked for clarification on the term "periodic" in reference to Subsection 102.03. **Ms. Thompson** replied that it was not defined in the section, but at the IDLA level. **Mr. Simmons** stated that "periodic" was defined as the end of each unit and was dependent on the pace of the program.

**Senator Semmelroth** asked Mr. Simmons about work with artificial intelligence (AI) with his students. **Mr. Simmons** stated that he was not putting any student information into AI programs. Some team members used AI for efficiency reasons.

**Senator Toews** asked if the rule change from "plagiarism" to "acceptable use policy" was a result of students using AI. **Mr. Simmons** explained that there was a plagiarism policy in place for students, known as the "Academic Honesty Contract."

**PASSED THE GAVEL:** Vice Chairman Toews passed the gavel back to Chairman Lent.

**ADJOURNED:**

There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Lent** adjourned the meeting at 4:34 p.m.

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Senator Lent  
Chair

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Lisa Stein  
Secretary

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Madison Schrader  
Secretary