

MINUTES  
**SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Tuesday, March 10, 2026

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

**PLACE:** Room WW55

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Lent, Vice Chairman Cook, Senators Woodward, Nichols, Rundhaug (Carlson), Burtenshaw, Zito, 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 meeting of the Senate Education Committee (Committee) to order at 3:00 p.m.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** **Vice Chairman Cook** moved to approve the Minutes of February 23, 2026. **Senator Nichols** seconded the motion. The motion passed by **voice vote**.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** **Senator Semmelroth** moved to approve the Minutes of February 24, 2026. **Senator Burtenshaw** seconded the motion. The motion passed by **voice vote**.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** **Senator Burtenshaw** moved to approve the Minutes of March 2, 2026. **Senator Ward-Engelking** seconded the motion. The motion passed by **voice vote**.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** **Senator Ward-Engelking** moved to approve the Minutes of March 5, 2026. **Senator Nichols** seconded the motion. The motion passed by **voice vote**.

**UNANIMOUS CONSENT:** **Chairman Lent** asked for unanimous consent to switch **S 1357** and **H 623** on the agenda. There were no objections.

**H 623** **Education - Adds to existing law to require Idaho public schools to establish policies providing for a daily moment of silence.** **Representative Bruce Skaug** presented the bill which would mandate school districts to adopt policies that require schools to have a minimum of sixty seconds of silence at the beginning of the school day.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Burtenshaw** asked why the moment of silence at the beginning of the day was chosen. **Representative Skaug** answered that many students came from broken homes and offering a moment of silence in the morning allowed students to prepare for the day. **Senator Burtenshaw** asked why the bill had received pushback. **Representative Skaug** responded that he did not know why the bill received pushback. **Vice Chairman Cook** asked about the bill not having a fiscal impact. **Representative Skaug** answered the bill was a mandate with no penalties.

**Senator Woodward** asked about the implementation of the bill. **Representative Skaug** answered that it would be up to the school districts to implement the bill. **Senator Woodward** asked about the parents' responsibilities in helping implement the bill when a child would not participate in the moment of silence. **Representative Skaug** responded that the school districts would have their own procedures. **Senator Woodward** asked if the Idaho Legislature should adopt similar policies. **Representative Skaug** answered that the Legislature had a silent prayer time in the morning. **Senator Ward-Engelking** asked how they would implement the bill with young students and in special education

classrooms. **Representative Skaug** stated he believed teachers were capable of handling their students to be quiet for a single minute.

**Senator Semmelroth** asked about the current law and if teachers could take their own sixty seconds of silence. **Representative Skaug** responded that some already did. **Senator Semmelroth** asked if there was anything preventing schools from implementing this at the school level. **Representative Skaug** answered no. **Senator Semmelroth** asked if he thought mandating schools when they could already choose to do so would take away local control. **Representative Skaug** answered they were giving control to the parents and legal guardians. **Senator Semmelroth** asked if parents could opt-out of this mandate. **Representative Skaug** responded that he did not know what an opt-out would look like.

**TESTIMONY:**

**Dennis Mansfield, Allen Gorin, Rabbi Mendal Lifshitz, Daniel Murphy, Benjamin Chafets, and Pastor David McGarria** testified in support of the bill. They argued the bill would support students' mental health and allow them to take a moment to prepare for their day.

**Heather Stout, Kathy Dawes, Vicki Fadness, Dr. Mary Mosley, and Bonnie Fafth** testified against the bill. They argued the bill was a way of introducing religion into schools and had concerns about the First Amendment protection against compelled expression.

**DISCUSSION:**

**Vice Chairman Cook** asked Rabbi Lifshitz about his claim that a moment of silence would reduce student suicide rates and where he found this data. **Rabbi Lifshitz** explained he found data in other states that a moment of silence helped students improve their mental health. **Senator Ward-Engelking** asked if the suicide rate was the only thing that changed in those data. **Rabbi Lifshitz** responded that he could not answer her question.

**MOTION:**

**Vice Chairman Cook** moved to send **H 623** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Nichols** seconded the motion. The motion passed by **voice vote**. **Senator Semmelroth** and **Senator Ward-Engelking** requested to be recorded as voting nay.

**S 1357**

**Education - Adds to existing law to establish provisions regarding certain limitations on scholarships.** **Senator Okuniewicz** presented the bill which would limit the number of foreign student athletes who received athletic scholarships at the Idaho higher education institutions. **Senator Okuniewicz** stated the bill would cap new international scholarships but would still allow current students to finish their degrees.

**TESTIMONY:**

**Jeremiah Dickey, Spencer Danielson, Boise State University (BSU) Head Football Coach, Beck Roghaar, BSU Women's Tennis Coach, Pauline Thiros, Idaho State University (ISU) Athletic Director, Sean Carter, ISU Volleyball Coach, Cody Hawkins, ISU Head Football Coach, Terry Gawlik, University of Idaho Athletic Director, and Tom Wistrucill, Big Sky Conference Commissioner,** all testified in opposition to the bill, stating it would discourage students from competing in their programs, create recruiting challenges for both students and coaches, and could potentially create issues with National College Athletics Association (NCAA) policies and conference competitiveness.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Semmelroth** asked Director Thiros about her comment about being a competitive school that wanted to keep students in Idaho. **Director Thiros** answered that if ISU wanted to appeal to Idaho students to enroll in the athletic program, they needed it to be competitive. **Senator Zito** asked where the money for their scholarships came from. **Director Thiros** responded that it was a mix of funding from private donations, institutional funding, and athletic event revenue. **Senator Zito** asked Director Gawlik why the University of Idaho had to go outside the United States to be more competitive. **Director Gawlik** answered that in certain sports they did. **Senator Zito** asked if it would help athletic programs to invest in developing student abilities. **Director Gawlik** responded that it had been considered but it would take a considerable time and money to develop the lower level programs of some sports.

**Senator Nichols** asked Commissioner Wistrick about his comment on how the bill would affect NCAA policies. **Commissioner Wistrick** answered that he did not have a formal letter from the NCAA, but in his experience, the NCAA might flag Idaho under the policies on discrimination. **Senator Nichols** asked if eliminating scholarships would be seen as discriminatory. **Commissioner Wistrick** responded that if the intent was seen as discriminatory under the NCAA, it could be, which would affect conference schedules.

**MOTION:** **Senator Burtenshaw** moved to hold **S 1357** in Committee subject to the call of the Chair. **Senator Ward-Engelking** seconded the motion. The motion passed by **voice vote**.

**ADJOURNMENT:** There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Lent** adjourned the meeting at 4:38 p.m.

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Senator Lent  
Chair

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Lauren Young  
Secretary