

MINUTES
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Monday, March 23, 2026

TIME: 2:00 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW55

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Lent, Vice Chairman Cook, Senators Woodward, Nichols, 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: **Vice Chairman Cook** called the meeting of the Senate Education Committee (Committee) to order at 2:05 p.m.

H 883 **Education – Adds to existing law to provide for school district and public charter school earned autonomy regarding spending. Senator Lori Den Hartog** presented the bill which would allow charter school and public school districts spending flexibility if they achieved certain criteria. This was an option, not a requirement. The bill would allow flexibility for school districts and allow for greater local control in education. **Senator Den Hartog** invited Emily McClure, Idaho Charter School Network, to explain what the bill accomplished. **Ms. McClure** stated the bill would go from an input-based system to outcome-based flexibility, which allowed schools who were performing higher to receive more spending flexibility. The bill would also removing some of the reporting that was required by the State.

DISCUSSION: **Vice Chairman Cook** asked which reports were dropped and how this would show schools were still high-performing. **Ms. McClure** responded that 11 to 12 reports were dropped. She continued that they sought input from the State Board of Education, the Idaho School Boards Association, and the Department of Education to compile the list of reports to ensure funding was not jeopardized and to decide which reports would not impact the ability to show a school was high-performing.

TESTIMONY: **Kathryn French**, Chief Operating Officer, American Classical Schools of Idaho, testified in support of the bill. She testified that the bill would allow schools to dedicate funds to high performing areas and reduce time spent on reporting.

Dr. Victoria M. Young testified in opposition to the bill. She argued the bill would create inequalities in Idaho's education system and added unfair differences in rules and funding.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Burtenshaw** asked Dr. Young about her statement on unequal rules. **Dr. Young** responded that the rules for charter schools and traditional schools were different with the traditional schools having more complex rules.

Senator Den Hartog closed by listing the types of reports that might be exempted on page 2, such as reports of building demographics, per teacher class size, students placed on court order in homes or facilities, etc. She continued that there were about 25 schools that might qualify at this time, 10 school districts and 15 charter schools. **Senator Den Hartog** mentioned that the legislation required schools to report to the Legislature in 2029 to analyze if there had been cost savings. **Senator Carlson** asked if the dropped reports would create federal funding issues. **Senator Den Hartog** responded no, they worked with stakeholders

to make sure the dropped reports would not affect federal funding. **Senator Carlson** asked why virtual schools were not included. **Senator Den Hartog** answered that she was not sure why they were not in the bill. **Chairman Lent** asked if virtual schools were directly named in the bill. **Senator Den Hartog** responded yes. **Senator Semmelroth** asked about the metrics between charter schools and public schools. **Senator Den Hartog** deferred the question to Ms. McClure. **Ms. McClure** answered that charter schools had a performance plan certificate which was a contract with their authorizer that their school would reach a certain benchmark. She continued that traditional schools did not have this certificate so they needed to create rules that would be similar to the performance certificate. **Vice Chairman Cook** asked why virtual schools were not included. **Ms. McClure** answered that the reason was a bit political, there was significant growth currently with virtual schools but at the moment none of them would qualify and they had received feedback that virtual schools did not want to be included at this time.

MOTION: **Vice Chairman Cook** moved to send **H 883** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Semmelroth** seconded the motion. The motion passed by **voice vote**.

HJM 19 **Education – States findings of the Legislature, supports federal efforts to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education, and urges Congress to fully cooperate with these efforts.** **Senator Den Hartog** presented the memorial which expressed Idaho's support for a movement to disband the U.S. Department of Education. **Senator Den Hartog** highlighted the first and second whereas statements to the Committee which discussed the 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which reserved to the states those powers that were not delegated to the federal government. They also stated that the U.S. Department of Education was created in 1980 and had lead to federal overreach. She continued that important protections, such as those concerning students with disabilities, would not cease but be transferred to a different department.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Burtenshaw** asked what the U.S. Department of Education did and if it went away, what it meant for Idaho. **Senator Den Hartog** responded that she did not have the current numbers for what would happen with federal funding but the flow of funds for students with disabilities would not end, it would shift to another department. **Senator Ward-Engelking** expressed concerns that this decision might be premature, especially since there was no plan for where programs would be housed. **Senator Den Hartog** appreciated her position and answered that most of the funding streams would return to the State as a block grant.

TESTIMONY: **Edward Clark**, Idaho Family Policy Center, testified in support of the memorial. He stated it would allow parents to make decisions on student education, stop federal overreach, and allow states to have control over their education systems.

Dr. Victoria M. Young testified in opposition to the bill. She stated that the U.S. Department of Education provided equal access to education and eliminating the department lacked evidence of benefit.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Den Hartog** closed the discussion by mentioning a March 19, 2026 article where State Superintendent Debbie Critchfield discussed what might happen if the U.S. Department of Education was disbanded. **Senator Ward-Engelking** expressed a concern that if the U.S. Department of Education was disbanded, the State might struggle to fully fund education.

MOTION: **Senator Woodward** moved to send **HJM 19** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Vice Chairman Cook** seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Semmelroth** commented that she had concerns about dissolving the U.S. Department of Education knowing that it housed important institutions like the Office of Civil Rights and the Institute of Education Sciences. She stated that she was not going to support the memorial. **Senator Burtenshaw** stated he would support the memorial but reserved the right to change his vote on the floor.

VOICE VOTE: The motion to send **HJM 19** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation passed by **voice vote**. **Senator Semmelroth** and **Senator Ward-Engelking** requested to be recorded as voting nay.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Lent** adjourned the meeting at 2:46 p.m.

Senator Lent
Chair

Lauren Young
Secretary