



DEVELOPMENTS IN RURAL EDUCATION POLICY & RESEARCH February 2015

Legislative Action in Idaho Affecting Rural Education

H.B. 52: Idaho National Guard Youth Challenge Program

01/29 Introduced by Representative Wintrow

02/13 Read third time in full - PASSED - 46-17-7

02/16 Received from the House passed; Filed for first reading
Introduced, read first time; Referred to Education

02/19 Reported out of Committee with a do pass recommendation; Filed for second reading

02/20 Read second time; Filed for third reading

[Bill Text](#)

This bill removes a sunset provision for the Idaho National Guard Youth Challenge Program. The Youth Challenge was created to help people ages 16-18 that leave high school before earning a diploma to finish their education, join the workforce, and become productive citizens.

While Idaho does not have a significant problem with high school non-completion, this program could be important for rural students who leave high school before earning their diploma. Because rural students may have fewer opportunities to access job training programs, dropout recovery programs, or other alternative learning opportunities, the Youth Challenge Program may afford them valuable opportunities to prepare for the workforce.

H.B. 74: Continuous Improvement Plans

02/03 Introduced by the House Education Committee

[Bill Text](#)

House Bill 74 adds clarifying language to legislation from 2014, which requires districts to complete annual improvement plans. It emphasizes that the plans are to be focused on continuous improvement and are not traditional strategic plans. These changes are based primarily on feedback received from districts but also incorporate some of the lessons learned from the initial plans approved by local school boards. The bill also increases the amount of funding available to district superintendents and boards for training in the continuous improvement process from \$2,000 to \$6,600.

The continuous improvement planning process may add to the workload of rural districts, so it is important that the process be as clear as possible to maximize the efficiency of the planning process. Increasing funding for training can help ensure that more of those involved in planning are informed about the process. It may also encourage rural districts to improve their practices by investing in ongoing education as they will now be reimbursed for up to \$6,600 in training costs.

H.B. 83: Post-Secondary Credit Scholarships

02/04 Introduced by the House Education Committee

[Bill Text](#)

This bill encourages students to earn post-secondary credits while in high school by providing them with scholarships that will help them to continue their education in Idaho after graduation.

The scholarship amounts and requirements follow:

- Students that earn between 10 and 19 credits qualify for a \$2,000 scholarship
- Students that earn 20 or more credits qualify for a \$4,000 scholarship
- Students that earn an associate degree while in high school will qualify for a scholarship equal to the tuition and fees charged by a public college or university in Idaho for up to four semesters

This bill could help to incentivize rural students to “go on” to pursue higher education. While opportunities to earn post-secondary credits are more limited in rural areas, Idaho has been increasing its investments in dual-credit programs and online post-secondary classes for high school students. Further, the scholarships available through this bill are only available for use in Idaho’s public two- and four-year colleges and universities, which may appeal to rural students who may wish to continue their education close to home.

H.B. 110: Mastery-Based Education System

02/11 Introduced by the House Education Committee

02/17 Reported out of Committee with a do pass recommendation; Filed for second reading

02/18 Read second time; Filed for third reading

02/20 Read third time in full - PASSED - 65-0-5

02/23 Received from the House passed; Filed for first reading

Introduced, read first time; Referred to Education

This bill is intended to help Idaho move toward a mastery-based model of education, which would, “allow for more personalized and differentiated learning; create a focus on explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students; and emphasize competencies that include application and knowledge along with skill development.”¹ It is based on the recommendations made by the Governor’s Task Force for Improving Education.

If passed, the State Department of Education would be required to undertake several activities to help move Idaho toward a mastery-based education system:

- Conduct a statewide outreach campaign to increase the understanding of and interest in mastery-based education among parents, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and businesses;
- Create a committee of educators charged with identifying roadblocks and pathways to implementation for a mastery-based system as well as developing recommendations for a pilot program; and
- Launch a pilot program in a group of 20 local education agencies.

Moving toward a mastery-based system of education would have several important implications for Idaho’s rural schools. This system would not be tied to seat time, which could open up more flexibility for scheduling—including four-day school weeks, opportunities for advanced learning

for students who take less time to master content, and potentially more opportunities for innovative programs like blended learning.

H.C.R. 3: Legislative Task Force on the Use of Student Data

02/04 Introduced by the House Education Committee

02/13 Read third time in full - ADOPTED - 63-4-3

02/16 Received by Senate from the House passed; Filed for first reading
Introduced, read first time; Referred to Education

[Bill Text](#)

This resolution creates and funds a task force charged with studying the use of student data in Idaho, specifically:

- Data points necessary to track students' academic progress
- Data points collected at the aggregate level
- Data points that should retain personally-identifiable information
- The connection between data collection and reporting and federal funding as well as the costs to Idaho of reducing this funding

The task force has also been charged with making recommendations on the use and collection of student data, focusing on simplifying data collection and protecting student privacy.

This resolution is the product of growing concerns related to privacy and student data collection. All districts are required to report student data by student subgroups (grade level, gender, low-income, racial minorities, special education, etc.). However, data is not reported when these subgroups contain less than ten students. This is an especially common occurrence for small, rural districts.

However, the resolution also highlights the implications of data collection on federal funding and data-driven instruction.

In rural areas, data collection often falls to already overburdened teachers and administrators and may require significant investments in technology and training. However, data collection also has important benefits. First, it is often required to receive federal funding. Some rural schools have already chosen to limit the amount of federal funding that they apply for and accept because of the administrative burden it creates for their staff. A streamlined data collection process—with clear parameters from the state—may make it easier for these districts to collect necessary data and receive federal funds.

Second, effective and efficient data collection can help provide rural districts with valuable insights about their students' academic achievement and growth. Whether that data is reported publicly, to the state, or to the federal government, student data can and should be used to inform instruction at the school and classroom level.

A streamlined data collection process with appropriate guidance from the state may make it easier for rural districts to collect necessary data, receive federal funds, and implement data-based instruction—all while protecting student privacy.

S.B. 1070: Alternate Routes to Graduation

02/12 Introduced by the Senate Education Committee

02/20 Reported out of Committee with do pass recommendation; Filed for second reading

02/23 Read second time; Filed for third reading

[Bill Text](#)

Senate Bill 1070 allows parents with concerns about required state graduation exams to discuss alternatives with the district and for their students to graduate having met alternative qualifications.

Further, while Idaho's rural students have a high graduation rate, they have a low college matriculation rate. Allowing large numbers of students to use alternate measures to graduate from high school could have detrimental impacts on college readiness in rural areas, as it introduces the possibility that "alternative" assessments will also be less rigorous. Depending on how many parents decide to opt-out of graduation exams, it could also mean that schools, district, and the state lose a valuable source of data on students' preparation for higher education. (For example, if every student takes the graduation qualifying exam and only 40 percent pass, the school knows that it has a problem to address. If only 40 percent of students take the exam and 90 percent pass, a major problem could go overlooked.) This is particularly important given Idaho's low rate of postsecondary enrollment.

S.B. 1085: Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

02/13 Introduced by the Senate Education Committee

[Bill Text](#)

This bill would require the Superintendent of Public Instruction to begin the process of removing Idaho from the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

Idaho districts have been preparing for Smarter Balanced and changing course would require the investment of additional time and resources. While a burden on all districts, this change would be even harder in rural districts. Rural districts may not have the curriculum specialists and support staff found in these other locales that can help to ease these transitions. It may also be harder for rural districts' staff to travel to workshops or trainings, which are likely to be held in areas with a critical mass of teachers and administrators.

Should this legislation pass, the legislature can minimize the detrimental effect on all districts by selecting an assessment that aligns to the existing Idaho Core standards.

S.B. 1086: Professional and Technical Education Programs

02/13 Introduced by the Senate Education Committee

[Bill Text](#)

Senate Bill 1086 creates an online platform to help students receive non-elective credits on the path to earning a post-secondary technical certificate, an associate of applied science degree, or industry certification. The platform would build upon relationships between the Idaho Division of Professional-Technical Education (DPTE), the Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA), Idaho

technical colleges, and the Idaho Pathways to Technology in Early College High School (PTECH).

The bill also requires the DPTE to promote the alignment of core program requirements across the state's professional and technical colleges. This would help ensure that credits earned in high school can be transferred and applied to post-secondary or technical programs as required courses, not as electives. The DPTE has dedicated resources to both initiatives outlined in this bill.

This bill helps expand opportunities for rural students to gain post-secondary credentials in high school and prepare for the workforce. It is especially important because it helps to ensure that credits earned while in high school will help students move closer to earning a degree or certificate. If tailored to provide skilled labor to support local industries, these programs may also help Idaho retain more college-educated workers and grow the state's economic base.

S.B. 1096: Parental Role in Education

02/16 Introduced by the Senate Education Committee

[Bill Text](#)

This bill adds a new chapter on the parental role in education to the Idaho code, first stating that parents hold the primary responsibility for their children's education. Second, the bill requires districts, charter schools, and school administrators to work with parents to develop and implement a policy to increase parental involvement in education. This policy would be required to include:

- Parents and teachers cooperate in areas such as homework, discipline;
- Parents are given opportunities to review primary and supplementary learning materials;
- Parents will have the right to withdraw their students from activities they believe are objectionable (or that use objectionable materials)

Districts would be required to notify all parents of their rights on an annual basis.

While affirming the parental role in education is important, the policy development and notification requirement in this legislation has the potential to add to the administrative burden of rural teachers and administrators.

S.C.R. 105: Idaho-Specific Standards and S.C.R. 106: Student Assessment

02/16 Introduced by the Senate Education Committee

S.C.R. 105 [Bill Text](#)

S.C.R.106 [Bill Text](#)

S.C.R. 105 is a response to the growing opposition to the Common Core State Standards. It would require the State Department of Education and the State Board of Education to revise the current Idaho Core Standards into more Idaho-specific standards. The resolution also notes that the standards should never be used as a rigid script in teaching.

In contrast to Senate Bill 1085 on student assessment, S.C.R. 106 does not require the state to leave the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Instead, it gives the State Department of Education until January 15, 2016 to prepare a report on the feasibility of using alternative

assessments (to Smarter Balanced) and present this report as well as any alternative assessments to the legislature. Such assessments must be ready for use by the spring 2016 testing cycle.

Both concurrent resolutions have the potential to create a significant burden for all districts—but especially rural districts—which have already begun to prepare for the new standards and assessments. However, S.C.R. 106 is a more measured approach than Senate Bill 1085, as it provides a time period for the legislature to study the feasibility and impact of alternative assessments.

Bills in the U.S. House and Senate

S. 227: Strengthening Education through Research Act

01/21 Introduced in the Senate; Referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

02/04 Reported by Senator Alexander without amendment or written report in the Committee

Sponsor: Senator Lamar Alexander, R – TN

Co-Sponsor: Senator Patty Murray, D – WA

[Bill Text](#)

This bill would ensure that 25 percent of the funding for Regional Education Laboratories (RELs) is dedicated to studying and serving rural areas. Though there are currently numerous REL projects dedicated to improving and understanding rural education, there are several key reasons why this work should be continued. First, it is essential to expand the body of research on rural education. Second, RELs provide direct services to communities, such as providing technical assistance in developing dual-credit programs in rural districts. Third, they provide research that informs other federal programs and legislation, for example, looking at how rural schools' experiences with the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program differ from those of urban or suburban schools.

Funding Opportunities for Rural Education

Gates Family Foundation, Colorado – Capital Grants for Education

The Gates Family Foundation of Colorado has an ongoing capital grants program that supports:

- Charter schools which serve a substantial number of low-income students, have demonstrated strong academic performance, and have implemented a sustainable financial model.
- Traditional public schools in rural areas which have planned capital improvement projects that will reinforce the long-term health of their communities. Projects should focus on schools used as community gathering spaces.
- Licensed early childhood education centers, with a goal of ensuring school readiness and strengthening rural economies.
- Organizations that provide life-long and experiential learning opportunities to rural communities.

All applicants must be a registered nonprofit or government entity such as a school located in Colorado. Before applying for a capital grant, organizations must secure at least 30 percent of project funding. The foundation's board considers factors such as community support for projects, organizational governance, and mission in its grantmaking. Further, it recommends that organizations incorporate green building standards and sustainable practices into their development plans "wherever possible."

Applications must be submitted at least 10 weeks prior to board meetings. Submission deadlines are: January 15, April 1, July 1, and October 1. Application information can be found [here](#).

More information on the Gates Family Foundation's Capital Grants for Education can be found [here](#).

Corporation for National and Community Service: 2015 Foster Grandparent Program

The Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) has engaged Native American seniors since 1955 in work as mentors, tutors, and role models for at-risk and special needs youth. Foster grandparents may work on a part- or full-time basis in locations such as schools, drug treatment centers, correctional facilities, and childcare centers. Activities may focus on homework, parenting skills, or building healthy relationships.

Organizations interested in partnering with FGP are strongly encouraged to send a letter of intent to FGPSCP@cns.gov by April 17, 2015. The letter should include: the name of the applicant organization and its contact person, address, email address, phone number, and how the organization heard about the FGP.

More information on the Foster Grandparent Program can be found [here](#).

America's Farmers Grow Rural Education

Nomination forms are now being accepted for the fourth annual America's Farmers Grow Rural Education grant program. The initiative, organized by Monsanto, allows farmers to nominate their local public school district for grants of \$10,000 - \$25,000 to improve math and science education. Information on America's Farmers Grow Rural Education, which has invested more than \$7 million in rural schools since 2011, is available [here](#).

Farmer applications are being accepted between January 1 and April 1, 2015. The nomination form is available online [here](#)

Research, Commentary, or Other Developments in Rural Education

Limited Access to AP Courses for Students in Smaller and More Isolated Rural School Districts

Douglas Gagnon and Marybeth Mattingly
Carsey Research: National Issue Brief #80, Winter 2015
[Article](#)

This brief from researchers at the University of New Hampshire looks at student access, enrollment, and success in Advanced Placement (AP) courses in relation to district poverty, racial composition, and locale. The researchers' overall findings for rural students were not encouraging: 47.2 percent of rural districts have no secondary students enrolled in AP courses. In contrast, just 2.6 and 5.4 percent of urban and suburban districts have no students enrolled in AP classes, respectively.

The researchers found that access to Advanced Placement courses varies based on district size and proximity to urban areas. This is why remote rural districts with small populations—the smallest and most isolated districts in the sample—were ten times less likely to offer AP courses than larger “rural fringe” districts. They hypothesized that the disparities between districts are a product of rural districts' isolation. Some districts may elect not to offer AP courses because they do not have enough eligible students. Other districts may not have sufficient human capital to offer advanced coursework such as AP classes.

Success rates for AP courses— defined by the researchers as earning a four or five on an exam—were affected most dramatically by district poverty. Students from families in the top income quartile had an average success rate of 49.3 percent, over twice that of the students from families in the bottom income quartile (24.3 percent success rate). In poorer districts, the researchers found that success rates across locales varied little, but did have a much wider variance across higher-income districts. In the latter, 60.7 percent of urban students earned a four or five on the exam, compared to 59 percent of suburban students and just 44.7 and 44.9 percent of students from towns and rural districts, respectively. The researchers posit that the affluent urban and suburban areas may have a better developed “AP culture,” meaning that they have more selective requirements for enrolling in AP courses, leading to higher success rates. Students in these districts also generally enroll in more AP courses and therefore have more opportunities to be successful.

ⁱ <http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/legislation/2015/H0110.pdf>