



## DEVELOPMENTS IN RURAL EDUCATION POLICY March 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
- 02/25 Read third time in full - PASSED - 34-0-0
- 02/26 Returned from Senate passed
- 02/27 Reported Enrolled; Signed by Speaker; Transmitted to Senate
- 03/02 Received from the House enrolled/signed by Speaker  
Signed by President; Returned to House
- 03/03 Returned signed by the President
- 03/04 Delivered to Governor  
Reported Signed by Governor on March 4, 2015  
Session Law Chapter 22, Effective: 07/01/2015

#### [Bill Text](#)

This law 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 finish their education, join the workforce, and become productive citizens.

While Idaho does not have a significant problem with high school non-completion,<sup>1</sup> this program could be important for rural students who leave school before earning their degree. 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. 110: Mastery Based Education System**

- 02/11 Introduced, read first time
- 02/17 Reported out of Committee with 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
- 02/25 Reported out of Committee with do pass recommendation; Filed for second reading
- 02/26 Read second time; Filed for third reading
- 03/10 Read third time in full - PASSED - 35-0-0
- 03/11 Returned from Senate passed

Reported enrolled; Signed by Speaker; Transmitted to Senate  
03/12 Received from the House enrolled/signed by Speaker  
Signed by President; Returned to House  
03/13 Returned signed by the President; Ordered transmitted to Governor  
03/16 Delivered to Governor  
03/19 Reported Signed by Governor on March 19, 2015  
Session Law Chapter 68, Effective: 07/01/2015

### [Bill Text](#)

This law is intended to help Idaho move toward a mastery-based model of education, which the legislature found 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.”<sup>2</sup> It is based on the recommendations made by the Governor’s Task Force for Improving Education.

The law requires the State Department of Education 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 in 2017.

Moving to a mastery-based system of education could have several important implications for Idaho’s rural schools. This type of system would not be tied to seat time, which could open up more flexibility for initiatives such as four day school weeks, blended learning classrooms, and dual-credit programs for high school students. In turn, these initiatives could create savings opportunities for rural districts.

### **H.B. 122: Continuous Improvement Plans**

02/12 Introduced, read first time  
02/18 Reported out of Committee with do pass recommendation; Filed for second reading  
02/19 Read second time; Filed for third reading  
02/20 Read third time in full - PASSED - 41-24-5  
02/23 Received from the House passed; Filed for first reading  
Introduced, read first time; Referred to Education  
03/04 Reported out of Committee with do pass recommendation; Filed for second reading  
03/05 Read second time; Filed for third reading  
03/10 Read third time in full - PASSED - 31-4-0  
03/11 Returned from Senate passed  
Reported Enrolled; Signed by Speaker; Transmitted to Senate  
03/12 Received from the House enrolled/signed by Speaker  
Signed by President; Returned to House  
03/13 Returned Signed by the President; Ordered transmitted to Governor  
03/19 Reported Signed by Governor on March 19, 2015

[Bill Text](#)

This law adds clarifying language to a 2014 law, which required districts to complete annual improvement plans. It emphasizes that these 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 lessons learned from the initial plans approved by local school boards. The law 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 law is similar to House Bill 74, which was considered earlier this session, but adds language clarifying that plans must be submitted by October 1st each year.

The continuous improvement planning process may add to the administrative burden of rural districts, so it is important that the process be as clear as possible to help minimize time spent on unnecessary tasks. Increasing funding for training can help ensure that more of those involved in planning are informed about the process. Additional funding 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. 270: At-Home School Readiness Program**

03/16 Introduced, read first time

03/17 Reported printed and referred to Education

[Bill Text](#)

Idaho ranks near the bottom nationally for the percentage of children enrolled in pre-kindergarten.<sup>3</sup> House Bill 270 would create an At-Home School Readiness pilot program to help prepare children for kindergarten. The pilot would target families in regions of the state with the lowest scores on the kindergarten Idaho Reading Indicator. Participating families would receive online instruction modules and assessments in reading and math as well as additional support and training for parents during the year immediately preceding kindergarten enrollment. The state would contract with an early education technology provider to provide ongoing program monitoring and evaluation as well as educational materials and parent training. In addition, the program would provide computer and internet access to families living at or below 185 percent of the poverty guidelines.<sup>4</sup> There are no specific appropriations made for the program within the legislation but the program may be funded through a combination of state funding, grants, and donations. It will be administered using pay-for-success contracting, in which full or partial vendor payment is contingent on program outcomes.

While House Bill 270 would help to expand access to early childhood education, it is unclear whether it would have a significant impact in rural communities. The program's reliance on online content delivery has strengths and weaknesses. Online resources are a valuable way to reach rural communities that would otherwise have to travel long distances to access services. While access to broadband in rural areas is expanding, it is lower, on average, than in urban communities, which could limit program access among families with household incomes above 185 percent of the poverty guidelines. And though brick-and-mortar pre-kindergarten programs may offer additional benefits of social interaction and peer-to-peer learning, this program could help families meet their children's needs when brick-and-mortar options are not available.

The legislation does not include an appropriation request for the program. Estimates for the cost per year, per child of similar early childhood programs are approximately \$900.<sup>5</sup> It is unclear if this estimate includes the cost of providing computer equipment and internet hookups to families.

### **H.B. 275: Educational Support Program**

03/16 Introduced, read first time

03/17 Reported printed and referred to Education

[Bill Text](#)

Idaho code currently protects school districts against the fiscal impact of declining enrollment through an insurance-like plan. The bill caps the annual enrollment reduction at three percent. For example, if a school district's enrollment drops to 90 percent of the previous year's enrollment, the district will still be funded at 97 percent. The cost of this provision is then distributed across all other districts. House Bill 275 would allow districts to opt out of this provision—both the protection of the three percent cap and the burden of bearing the costs of enrollment declines in other districts. If a district opts-out of the program and re-enrolls, they will not be eligible to opt out again for another five years

This bill could harm rural districts, as they are likely to most susceptible to large enrollment drops. Districts with stable enrollment would have a strong incentive to opt out. This would place the burden of funding on the very districts most likely to qualify for funding. It would also increase the funding reduction because it will be spread across fewer districts.

### **H.B. 278: School Counselors**

03/17 Introduced, read first time

03/18 Reported printed and referred to Education

[Bill Text](#)

This bill stems from the recommendations made by Governor's Task Force for Improving Education, which cited the importance of college and career counseling in students' postsecondary success. House Bill 278 adds language to the Idaho code that would allow education support units to be used for college and career advising and revises the definition of "school counselor" to focus on direct student services. It also adds a new section to the code that describes advising programs that have seen success in Idaho schools; clarifies qualification requirements for school counselors; and creates definitions for academic, college, and career advisors. Finally, the bill would put in place requirements for schools to notify parents and students of the advising services that they offer and to report annually on program effectiveness.

The changes made in this bill help support the push to increase post-secondary readiness in Idaho. However, the legislation may fall short of meeting the needs of rural schools. First, while the Governor's Task Force recommended funding this program at \$2.5 million, this bill would only provide \$120 per support unit in grades 8-12 or \$10,000 per district, whichever is greater. While this funding could potentially provide current teachers with bonuses for taking on additional responsibilities related to counseling, it is insufficient to allow rural districts to hire a

counselor. Second, while the bill would allow non-certificated staff to serve as counselors, all of those in the role must have specialized training related to college and career counseling. The legislation does not specify the type or duration of training that counselors must receive but this could potentially reduce the number of qualified candidates in rural areas, where specialized training opportunities may be more difficult to access.

### **H.B. 296: Career Ladder**

03/19 Introduced, read first time

Reported printed and referred to Education

03/20 Reported out of Committee with do pass recommendation; Filed for second reading

03/23 Read second time; Filed for third reading

[Bill Text](#)

House Bill 296 makes several important changes related to teacher pay in the state. If passed, this legislation would:

- Raise base salaries for Idaho teachers over a five year period
- Put in place a career ladder with two rungs and multiple cells
  - A residency rung for beginning teachers
  - A professional rung for teachers with a professional endorsement
- Provide additional bonuses for teachers with advanced education or degrees
- Award premiums to “Master Teachers”

In order to move from the residency rung to the professional rung, teachers would be required to apply for and earn an Idaho professional endorsement. Unfortunately, the requirements for this endorsement do not require candidates to demonstrate evidence of student growth or other indicators of effective teaching.

Raising salaries in Idaho’s schools could help to recruit more teachers to the state or retain teachers in rural areas, however it does little to target recruitment or retention on those teachers that are most effective in improving student outcomes.

### **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 in the Senate from the House passed; Filed for first reading

Introduced, read first time; Referred to Education

02/27 Reported out of Committee with do pass recommendation; Held one legislative day

03/03 Read in full - ADOPTED - 32-0-2

03/04 Returned from Senate passed, to JRA for enrolling

03/05 Reported enrolled; Signed by Speaker; Transmitted to Senate

03/06 Received from the House enrolled/signed by Speaker

Signed by President; Returned to House

03/09 Returned Signed by the President; Ordered transmitted to Secretary of State

03/10 Delivered to Secretary of State

[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 publicly 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 the necessary data to 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

03/04 Placed in the Committee of the Whole

Reported out without recommendation, as amended

Reported engrossed; Filed for first reading, as amended

Read first time as amended; Filed for second reading

03/05 Read second time as amended; Filed for third reading

03/09 Read third time in full as amended - PASSED - 35-0-0

03/10 Received from the Senate; Filed for first reading

Read first time; Referred to Education

[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.

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. 1086: Professional and Technical Education Programs**

02/13 Introduced by the Senate Education Committee

02/16 Reported printed; Referred to Education

02/24 Reported out of Committee with do pass recommendation; Filed for second reading

02/25 Read second time; Filed for third reading

02/26 Read third time in full; Retained on calendar

03/02 PASSED - 34-0-0

03/03 Received from the Senate; Filed for first reading

Read first time; Referred to Education

03/16 Reported out of Committee with do pass recommendation; Filed for second reading

03/17 Read second time; Filed for third reading

03/18 Read third time in full - PASSED - 69-0-1

03/19 Returned from House passed

03/20 Reported enrolled; Signed by President, to House for signature of Speaker

[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 DPTE would be required 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 Rights in Education**

02/16 Introduced; Read first time

03/05 Reported out of Committee with do pass recommendation; Filed for second reading

03/12 Placed in the Committee of the Whole

Amendments ordered printed; Referred for engrossment

Reported engrossed; Filed for first reading, as amended

Read first time as amended; Filed for second reading

03/13 Read second time as amended; Filed for third reading

03/16 Read third time in full as amended - PASSED - 23-12-0

03/17 Received from the Senate; Filed for first reading

Read first time; Referred to Education

[Bill Text](#)

[Engrossment 1](#)

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 and discipline;
- Parents are given opportunities to review primary and supplementary learning materials;
- Parents will have the right to withdraw their students from activities that they believe harm their child(ren) or violate their beliefs, values or principles.

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.

### **Bills in the U.S. House and Senate**

#### **H.R. 937: Fast Track to College Act of 2015**

02/12 Introduced in the House; Referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce

Sponsor: Representative Ruben Hinojosa – D, TX

Co-Sponsors: Representative Chaka Fattah

[Bill Text](#)

This bill would allow the Secretary of Education to award six-year matching grants to local education agencies (LEAs) that partner with institutions of higher education (IHEs) to form dual enrollment programs, which allow high school students to simultaneously work toward their high

school diploma and earn post-secondary credits. Priority would be given to programs that target low-income students as well as applicants from states that are currently providing assistance to dual enrollment programs. The bill would require applicants to ensure that students will not be charged tuition or fees for post-secondary credits earned and that these courses will be taught by faculty that meet the high standards of IHE partner organizations.

The bill would also allow the Secretary to award matching five-year grants to states that make dual enrollment programs more accessible to students (focusing on students who have been historically underrepresented in higher education), provide technical assistance to dual enrollment programs, and invest in training and assessment to improve these programs.

Finally, the bill would require the Secretary to contract for an independent evaluation of these dual enrollment programs and provide technical assistance and information on best practices in dual enrollment to LEAs and their partner IHEs.

These grant programs include several important provisions that could affect the quality of dual enrollment in rural areas. First, the potential impact of standards for participating faculty members is unclear. Standards could help to raise the quality of instruction in these programs. However, similar to teacher certification rules, it could also hurt dual-enrollment programs in rural areas by further restricting the supply of faculty members. Second, the grants would support state departments of education and the U.S. Department of Education in providing technical assistance focused on strengthening partnerships between secondary and post-secondary institutions.

It is important to note that this grant is competitive. While geographic priorities are included in the bill and grantees are to be selected from a cross-section of urban, suburban, and rural areas, rural programs could still be discouraged from applying because of the investment necessary to complete a federal grant application.

### **S. 517: Secure Rural Schools and Payment in Lieu of Taxes Repair Act**

02/12 Introduced in the Senate; Referred to Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Sponsor: Senator Ron Wyden – D, OR

Co-Sponsors: Senator Mike Crapo – R, ID; Senator James E. Risch – R, ID; Senator Jeff Merkley – D, OR; Senator Tom Udall – D, NM; Senator Michael F. Bennet – D, CO; Senator Claire McCaskill – D, MO; Senator Jon Tester – D, MT; Senator Shelley Moore Capito – R; WV; Senator Dianne Feinstein – D, CA; Senator Martin Heinrich – D, NM

[Bill Text](#)

This bill would restore mandatory funding status to the Payment in Lieu of Taxes Program (PILT), which provides compensation to counties that do not receive tax revenue because they contain public lands. The program has not been fully funded since 2013 but has depended on temporary appropriations. Its funding expired in late 2014 and the Bureau of Land Management estimates that many schools will face funding cuts of up to 50 percent as a result of this lapse in program funding. S.517 would extend program funding for three years at 2011 funding levels. This would provide more than 700 counties in the United States with approximately \$360 million in lost revenue.

The Payment in Lieu of Taxes program is critically important to a subset of rural schools that receive limited local revenues as a result of their proximity to public lands. Ensuring that these schools have a consistent source of revenue through PILT helps ensure equity in public school funding.

## **Funding Opportunities for Rural Education**

### **Weyerhaeuser Giving Fund**

The Weyerhaeuser Company supports communities in the U.S. and Canada where it has a significant presence or business interests. Local advisory committees help to develop funding priorities within the Foundation's four focus areas: affordable housing and shelter; education and youth development; environmental stewardship; and human services, civic and cultural growth.

Preference is given to programs that serve a broad range of community interests; meet important community needs; have strong local support; are sustainable, with a history of demonstrated results and accountability; and can provide a measurable impact on the local quality of life. Registered nonprofits and schools are eligible for funding through the Weyerhaeuser Foundation, however the company does not fund "services the public sector is reasonably expected to provide."

Applications are currently being accepted through an online portal until August 31, 2015. Organizations are encouraged to connect to the Giving Fund Advisor at their local Weyerhaeuser facility to discuss their proposal. Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis, though decisions are generally not made until after August 31st.

Application information can be found [here](#).

The online submission form can be found [here](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Only 2.9 percent of students are classified as "known" dropouts. Idaho State Department of Education. "New Baseline Gradation Rates." Accessed March 23, 2015. <http://idahodnews.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Graduation-rate-news-release.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/legislation/2015/H0110.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. "The First Eight Years." Accessed March 22, 2015.

<http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-TheFirstEightYearsKCPolicyReport-2013.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> \$44,862.50 for a family of four - <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/15poverty.cfm>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/legislation/2015/H0270SOP.pdf>