Idaho State Board of Education

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For Immediate Release
July 15, 2020

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BOARD APPROVES RECOMMENDATIONS TO HELP BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Idaho State Board of Education today approved a list of recommendations intended to help school districts prepare for "blended learning" instruction during the upcoming school year and the methodology for administering the grant programs approved by the Board last month.

Blended learning would combine both in-person classroom learning and remote options from home should local public health concerns warrant that.

The implementation of the grant programs will make available $3.8 million in federal elementary and secondary school education relief funds and $30 million in federal coronavirus relief funds to help bridge the digital divide between students who have online access and those who do not. The funding can be used by school districts and charter schools to purchase learning management systems, computers for students and teachers, adaptive learning technology, improve connectivity and provide teachers additional training to deliver remote instruction.

The funding will be administered by the State Department of Education.

“There’s not enough money to completely solve the problem but we are going to do the best we can,” said Board Member Kurt Liebich who co-chaired a committee that developed recommendations on coordinating efforts on the use of monies from the two funds. “Districts are going to have to prioritize what they need and it will have to be something we work towards, that we can’t completely solve the digital divide by the end of August when school starts.”

Liebich estimated between 28,000 and 45,000 Idaho students do not have access to the internet.

In other actions, the Board also approved a letter supporting Governor Brad Little’s plans for implementing a 5 percent holdback in General Funds for school districts and charter schools during State Fiscal Year 2021, which started July 1. The Governor ordered the holdback in response to the drop in state revenue caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The holdback reduces the state public school budget by nearly $99 million.

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