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**FOLLOWING SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION, DEPARTMENT TO
BEGIN OVERSIGHT OF BROADBAND PROGRAM**

In a few weeks, the Idaho State Department of Education (SDE) will begin overseeing its High School Broadband Program (HSBP), which replaced the Idaho Education Network (IEN).

The Idaho Legislature appropriated \$6.3 million to the SDE for FY2016, less than the original Department of Administration's request of \$10.6 million. That reflected a belief by legislators that the SDE will be able to spend less for broadband support of individual school district contracts than had been spent under the previous statewide contract.

"We are confident," said Will Goodman, the SDE's Chief Technology Officer, "that we can support schools through this next fiscal year." Recent history would show he's right.

That statewide broadband contract ended on February 11th when 4th District Judge Patrick Owen confirmed his earlier ruling that the contract by the Department of Administration with Education Networks of America and Quest was void. The IEN contract had been used to pay for broadband service costs for high schools in Idaho.

The ruling caused a major crisis in the middle of the legislative session. State lawmakers, recognizing the vital need for Internet service to schools and out of a concern that the loss of Internet-based classes could affect some seniors ability to graduate, quickly began considering an offer made by new Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra to use the SDE technology division to help solve the problem.

By February 18th, the day before a bill formally giving the SDE funding authority to help local districts acquire their own broadband contracts was printed, Goodman and his department began daily phone calls with the affected school districts, identifying their needs and offering technical advice for the transition. Speed was of the essence because of the potential for broadband service to be cut off by the existing provider.



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School districts had two weeks to find a broadband provider, and a little over a month to file for vitally important e-rate funding.

The legislature was also moving quickly. Legislation flew, almost unanimously, through both houses and was promptly signed by the Governor on February 25th, providing the SDE with spending authority of \$3.6 million to help the districts cover their new broadband contract costs until the end of the school year.

Following the bill being signed into law, all districts had transitioned to their own service with the help of Goodman and his staff. “It was a tremendous amount of work and late nights for our staff as well as local school district staff,” he said. “The state technology staff and the districts really stepped up to make sure no students were harmed by this issue,” and in the end, the expertise at both ends of those phone calls meant the transition went “smoothly.” Goodman admitted that his ability to direct those efforts was owed “quite a lot” to the fact that he had previously been a district technology director. “I was well aware of the needs at the district level,” he said.

The result turned out to be an even greater savings for the state than anticipated. Of the almost \$3.4 million allocated for districts, the districts negotiated contracts that required only \$1.8 million in state support. This included costs for some added services that had been purchased by the districts off of the now voided contracts, such as phone service, wide area networks, and the loss of additional broadband capability. The legislature removed \$5 million from the Department of Administration before the \$3.6 million replacement appropriation for the SDE, therefore the total savings for state taxpayers turned out to be nearly \$3.2 million.

More importantly, Goodman noted that not one student had their graduation affected by the transition. Also, the statewide total number of students in on-line classes only fell by nine students; 22,355 to 22,346. In every case where on-line enrollment dropped in a district during the transition period, the reasons were due to students leaving the district or choosing to drop classes.

Superintendent Ybarra also is expected to ask next year’s legislature to continue the project through FY2017, to give time for a study to be conducted to develop a long-range solution.

At the end of the session, legislators were faced with three competing proposals. From these proposals, the legislature created a legislative committee to study the issue based on the adoption of HCR026. Of the two failed proposals, one proposal from the Governor’s office would place a study panel under its authority. The SDE supports the Idaho Opportunity Network (ION) proposal by Representative Luke Malek (R-Coeur d’Alene).



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Representative Malek’s ION plan would create a quasi-state agency with a board largely composed of education stakeholders including the superintendent of public instruction, the president of the state board of education, two school district superintendents, two district technology directors, the state librarian and the state controller.

“This committee could then study and propose long-term legislation for broadband services and issues, which I think is necessary,” Goodman said. “We believe at the State Department that Representative Malek’s bill offers the best long-term solution.”

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