



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, Sept. 6, 2022
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Supt. Ybarra submits fiscal 2024 budget request for Idaho public schools

(BOISE) – Restoring remaining pandemic-triggered holdbacks and continuing to improve salaries for teachers and support staff are top priorities in Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra’s public schools budget request for next year, the superintendent said Tuesday.

The proposed budget seeks approximately \$2.5 billion from the state’s general fund, up \$158.7 million – 6.9 percent – from the appropriation for the current fiscal year. About one-third of that increase is nondiscretionary spending that supports programs already required by Idaho law.

“Idaho’s economy is strong, and the best way to ensure that it remains strong is to invest in the future of Idaho students,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “With a record budget surplus, now is the perfect time.”

“Much has been said about the millions Idaho has received in federal COVID funding, as if that can fill all of our students’ needs. But that is one-time funding, necessitated by an emergency, that will not be available for ongoing programs and expenses,” the superintendent said.

“This budget will finally restore the funds that are still under the 5 percent budget holdback of 2020,” she said. “That includes \$14 million to maintain schools’ and districts’ investments in technology and IT staffing during the pandemic.”

“Our schools and districts have greater needs now as we address the lasting impacts of the long pandemic, including learning loss,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “The students most affected are our special populations, including English language learners, special education and low-income students. Our mandate is to make sure we are serving those students well.”

Chief among schools’ continuing needs, she said, is school staffing.

“Idaho’s teacher shortage is still acute and must be addressed, along with the need for more paraprofessionals and the staff for everything from school buses to cafeterias,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “To help kids and ensure they succeed, we need a full range of trained and committed workers in the schools.”

The superintendent’s budget request includes \$59.1 million in increased teacher compensation, including \$15.7 million to accelerate the career ladder beyond scheduled growth and movement.

“I’m particularly happy that this budget would fast-forward to 2025 levels on the career ladder,” she said.

The superintendent also seeks an \$18.6 million boost to classified staff funding: \$16.1 million for an 8.5 percent increase in pay, plus \$2.5 million to cover additional staffing because of growing student populations. In addition, the superintendent is asking for 8.3 percent more in operational funding for school districts and charter schools to help them with health insurance costs and rising inflation.

Another \$10 million in the budget is earmarked for educators’ professional development, including training for gifted-talented programs and funding instructional coaches to help teachers in English Language Arts, math, science and digital content.

Training to help elementary school teachers detect and address indicators of dyslexia, required under Idaho’s new early literacy law, is addressed in a \$1.5 million supplemental budget request for the current fiscal year.

“Early literacy – making sure students learn to read by third grade so they can read to learn for the rest of their lives – remains a huge focus for my department and for districts and schools across Idaho,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “This request includes \$72.8 million for literacy intervention, allowing districts and charter schools to offer the programs – including optional full-day kindergarten – that best support their students and meet local needs.”

The superintendent’s budget requests were submitted Thursday, Sept. 1, the day agency budgets were due. That was the same day as the Idaho Legislature’s special session that directed \$330 million of the state’s record budget surplus to K-12 education.

“I applaud the governor and Legislature for making this investment in Idaho schools,” Superintendent Ybarra said, “but no one knows how that money will be allocated. And it doesn’t change the significant need for the programs and staffing funded by my budget request.”

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Attachments: Budget summary documents