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Superintendent Ybarra releases report on Idaho's education landscape

(BOISE) – More than one in five new Idaho teachers doesn't return to their school the following year. Students with the greatest economic and academic needs tend to have teachers with the least experience. These and other results from a new study are an urgent call to action, Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra said.

"We've heard the stories, but now we have the evidence," Superintendent Ybarra said. "The more we understand our challenges, the better we can address them."

"This information strengthens our commitment to our plan to attract and keep great teachers, increase their pay and make sure all Idaho students have access to an excellent education, regardless of whether their homes are rural or low-income."

The report, unveiled Monday morning, is on display at the State Department of Education's Legislative Open House from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday on the first floor Statehouse Rotunda.

Requested by Ybarra, "Idaho's Educator Landscape" was researched and written at no expense to the state in partnership with Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest, one of 10 federally funded regional educational laboratories in the nation. REL Northwest analyzed statewide data from the 2011-12 to 2016-17 school years.

"Idaho's education stakeholders can use the results from this study to identify unmet needs in the teaching workforce and develop strategies which focus on the schools and the student populations that are most in need of support," said Havala Hanson, lead researcher of the study. Among the report's findings:

- Across Idaho, in each year of the study, about 1 in 5 teachers did not return to their school the next year. That percentage was highest in schools with relatively high poverty and low test scores. On average, 22 percent of novice teachers, 19 percent of early-career teachers and 18 percent of teachers with four or more years of experience did not return the next year.

- Idaho’s teacher workforce is becoming less experienced, with novice or early career teachers representing an increasing share, especially in relatively low-performing, high-poverty schools. The average percentage of teachers with less than four years of experience grew from 17 percent in 2011-12 to 24 percent in 2016-17.
- Many Idaho schools are struggling to keep up with increasing enrollments of English learners. About one-quarter of schools with at least 20 English learners enrolled did not have an English language development teacher in 2016-17.
- A statewide increase in hiring teachers with alternative authorizations for certification is most pronounced in rural Idaho, which includes more than 70 percent of the state’s school districts. The percentage of rural teachers with alternative authorization more than doubled over the five-year study period, from 3.3 percent to 8.4 percent. In non-rural schools, that figure rose from 1.9 percent to 5.8 percent.

Superintendent Ybarra’s priorities for this legislative session include increases in teacher pay through year four of the Career Ladder and creation of Rural Education Support Networks to enable groups of rural districts to pool their resources to address needs such as filling critical positions and mentoring teachers. The SDE’s continuing “Be an Educator” campaign also aims to attract more students to the state’s teacher-education programs and its schools.

The Educator Landscape report also looked at changing student demographics. Idaho served nearly 300,000 K-12 public school students in 2016-17, an increase of about 6 percent – 17,000 students – over the five-year study period. Researchers found that about half of the state’s public school students were economically disadvantaged, about 10 percent were eligible for special education services and about 5 percent were English learners.

Of Idaho’s six regions, the Central region including Twin Falls had the highest increase in students in all three of those categories: a 5.6 percent increase in economically disadvantaged students over the study period, a 3.3 percent increase in special education students and a 1.3 percent increase in English learner students. In the Southwest region that includes Boise, those percentages of increase were 1.5 percent, 1.1 percent and 0.5 percent. Statewide, the number of economically disadvantaged students increased by 0.6 percent, special education students increased by 1.4 percent, and English learners increased by 0.2 percent.

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Editors and reporters: A copy of the report and an Infographic of some of its findings are attached to this email. Report author Havala Hanson will be at the SDE’s legislative open house, set for the first floor Statehouse Rotunda from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday. For interviews with Hanson, contact communications manager Allyson Hagen at 503-275-9189 or allyson.hagen@educationnorthwest.org.