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Student Advisory Council meets with governor, watches lawmakers at work

(BOISE) – Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra’s Student Advisory Council held its third meeting Monday with an immersive look at Idaho’s state government.

The 13 students – grades 4 through 12 from districts in all regions of the state – attended meetings of the House and Senate Education committees, conducted a mock legislative hearing on an education bill that is awaiting a Senate committee hearing, and met with Gov. Brad Little.

“This was a great day for the students to learn about our system of government firsthand and the issues that affect their education,” Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra said. “And it made me realize I only have one more meeting with these amazing students, who have exceeded all of my expectations for this new advisory council.”

The students also learned about programs to promote Idaho students’ mental well-being from Hannah Crumrine of the State Department of Education’s Student Engagement and Safety Coordination team. Crumrine, coordinator for youth suicide prevention and safety, led the students through several exercises designed to help them be perceptive to mood and changes in patterns when they interact with peers.

“The cool thing about brains is that they’re changeable,” Crumrine said, handing out numerous resources including a personal safety plan form and tips on how to help friends and others. “Train your brain to notice and comment on positive changes in the people around you.

She talked about Sources of Strength, a peer-based grant program designed to build on students’ strengths, detect issues and intervene before suicidal thoughts, bullying, dating violence or other

destructive behavior sweep them away. Popular in many Idaho middle and high schools since 2014, the program has now been extended to provide 12 classroom units in elementary schools.

Gov. Little spent about a half hour with the students, answering questions ranging from “Would you recommend a career in politics?” to “How can students be more involved, making a difference in their communities?” The governor also posed for photos with each student and signed two students’ rubber ducks – an honor Superintendent Ybarra also received.

Bridget McNamee, a Coeur d’Alene fourth-grader and the youngest member of the advisory council, welcomed the governor with a Powerpoint presentation about a survey she and her sister, a fifth-grader, conducted at Dalton Elementary in Coeur d’Alene, drawing responses from a whopping 87 percent of the 375 students.

“There are two details from the survey I would like to highlight for you,” McNamee told the governor:

- How much students love their teachers, and
- How students feel about reading.”

“This graph shows you that 76 percent of first graders love reading,” McNamee said. “I personally think this is exciting, since they are just learning to read.”

The Student Advisory Council’s final meeting will be held this spring, and Superintendent Ybarra is already looking forward to recruiting a new crop of applicants.

“We got nearly 60 applications for this first incarnation of the council, and it’s been so successful I’m guessing we’ll have an even larger field of applicants for next year,” Superintendent Ybarra said.

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Attached: A photo of the Student Advisory Council with Superintendent Ybarra and Governor Little.