

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 9, 2022
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Media Contact:
Kristin Rodine
Public Information Officer
208-332-6807
krodine@sde.idaho.gov

Superintendent Ybarra’s civics standards resolution moves forward

(BOISE) – A resolution to put statewide emphasis on students’ understanding of government and society got unanimous approval from the House Education Committee Wednesday morning and now advances to the full House, its final hurdle before reaching the governor’s desk.

“This move to create stand-alone civics standards for all grade levels is important to Idaho parents and educators, and it’s wonderful to see such strong support from our Legislature,” said Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra, who developed the idea while visiting government and history classes across Idaho. “This sends a clear message that Idaho values civic engagement, and our students – including high school students who are about to become voters, will be taught about the importance of engaging in our system of government.”

Standards for civics education at all grade levels are currently embedded in Idaho’s social studies standards, which are up for review this year as part of the state’s regular review and adoption cycle. That makes this the perfect time to strengthen and emphasize the civics portion of what Idaho students are expected to learn at each grade level, Superintendent Ybarra said.

The need for a revamp of the state’s civics standards was reinforced by a nationwide Fordham Institute study, released last June, that gave Idaho’s civic standards a D for lack of rigor and specificity. The study also found that “the presentation is awful and the organization is poor,” the superintendent said.

“This resolution will address the organization and the presentation of the standards,” Superintendent Ybarra said, and the committee that will be formed to review and revise the standards will work on the content. Civics standards will be highlighted in a package that includes civics components from all grade levels and social studies subject areas, making them easier for parents to find and understand, she said. Civics would still be part of the standards for history, economics and other subject areas.

The revised and repackaged civics standards will not create additional burdens for districts and charter schools in terms of separate courses or additional work for teachers, the superintendent said.

Civics, basically, is the study of the rights and duties of citizenship. Idaho Code already requires that instruction in citizenship be given in all elementary and secondary schools, and all high school students must pass a civics examination in order to graduate.

House Education Committee Chair Lance Clow, R-Twin Falls will carry Senate Concurrent Resolution 115 to the full House. He co-sponsors the civics standards resolution, along with Senate Education Committee Chairman Steven Thayn, R-Emmett, and Sen. Jim Patrick, R-Twin Falls.

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