



For Immediate Release

Thursday, April 5, 2018

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Free online program will help Idaho's young learners get ready for kindergarten

(BOISE) – Starting next week, all Idaho 4-year-olds will have free access to an animated, interactive reading-readiness program dubbed Smarty Ants through a five-year grant agreement between the State Department of Education and the online literacy program Achieve3000.

The State Board of Education voted unanimously Thursday to accept the grant, and the online portal for the program is scheduled to go live Tuesday, April 10. The goal is to make every Idaho parent, day care and outreach program aware of this opportunity.

"I'm excited to be able to offer families throughout Idaho the opportunity to jump-start their pre-kindergarten student's education with this free, fun and interactive online program," Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra said. "Smarty Ants will help Idaho children build a strong foundation for loving reading and succeeding in school."

"This is a unique approach to providing quality literacy support to children and families for that last year before kindergarten," State Board of Education President Linda Clark said. "I am looking forward to seeing the results and encourage families to check it out."

Saki Dodelson, founder and CEO of Achieve3000, said the company is "excited to play a role in this groundbreaking initiative, and honored to partner with the Idaho Department of Education."

"At Achieve3000, we know that every kid is not afforded an equal chance during the early years, often due to access of resources," Dodelson said. "We recognize that college and career readiness is only possible if we begin closing the gap before it becomes too large to bridge. Technology gifts us with an unparalleled opportunity to help level the playing field by giving every kid, regardless of his or her background, a jump on learning and, ultimately, a greater chance to succeed in the real world."

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Editors and reporters: A second Smarty Ants news release with links to the website will go out when the site is live, which is scheduled for April 10.