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## **Critchfield: Teaching Our Kids about the Dangers of Fentanyl**

*By Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield*

(BOISE) – If you’re like me, you’ve heard about fentanyl for the last few years. And, if you’re like me, you are aware that it is an illicit drug that can have fatal consequences. At a high level, I was aware that fentanyl was a major priority for law enforcement, but beyond that, I didn’t take much more interest as I have focused on student achievement, teacher retention and school funding.

I was not expecting to add fentanyl awareness to our list of imperatives during my first year in office. That changed when, sitting around a conference table last September, I learned from top law enforcement officials about the immediate threat that fentanyl poses to Idaho’s young people.

I woke up to this problem. If, like me, you don’t really know about fentanyl, it’s time you do.

I learned that young lives are being lost and communities damaged. I learned that cartels manufacture and then traffic fentanyl north to the United States. Drug users may seek it out specifically or may inadvertently purchase pills that contain it. Both situations are dangerous because fentanyl, even in extremely small doses, can be deadly. Taken intentionally or accidentally, fentanyl kills.

Sadly, the drug is a simple mouse click away. Students can access fentanyl through social media platforms and numerous other online means.

I immediately began to ask our school leaders how fentanyl impacts their districts. I also began to think of the role schools could play in educating youth about this threat. The same public schools that incorporated Nancy Reagan’s “Just Say No” 1980s anti-drug campaign and anti-smoking education in the 1990s are now positioned for anti-fentanyl education.

I found ready and willing partners in law enforcement at the local, state and federal levels. The legislature's Joint Millennium Fund Committee also provided funding to help us work towards our objectives. With a plan and the right people at the table, we are ready to offer resources and trained professionals to schools interested in having these conversations.

Our first step is a joint partnership with Idaho State Police (ISP) to build out an existing program so we can get trained experts into schools to teach our students and their families about fentanyl. Schools can tap into grant opportunities to bring ISP, students and parents together to learn what the threat looks like and how to protect against it.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Idaho has also stepped up. We've also received support from Governor Little's Office of Drug Policy and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. These allies understand the threat and are ready to help. I am grateful for friends in this effort.

The stakes are high but our classrooms can play a powerful role in helping families receive accurate information when it comes to the threat fentanyl poses. I'm excited to see how this collaborative outreach can make a difference in our communities, our schools, and most importantly, for our students.

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