



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 3, 2025
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Supporting our Educators to Support our Students: Success in Literacy through the Science of Reading

From Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield

(BOISE) – When we think of fundamental ways we can set students up for success in the classroom and beyond, we might think of the mastery of advanced subjects. Seeing a high school senior performing at a high level is certainly a great indicator that they’ll springboard into something great, but what if I told you that the first indicator that a child will do well in school and in life must be mastered well before high school?

Literacy – the ability to read and write – is one of the most fundamental skills that a student can obtain, and the consequences of not doing so can have a cascading effect. By the time a student reaches third grade, they are expected to read to learn rather than just learn to read. Reading and writing evolve from being their own task into a tool that students use to complete new and increasingly complex projects. Simply put, a student who hasn’t mastered the intricacies of reading and writing will find themselves behind in more areas than literacy.

Given how high the stakes are, it’s imperative that we support students in their pursuit of literacy at every turn. With that in mind, recently passed legislation, led by myself and Governor Little, will bring even more literacy supports to our young learners centered on phonics.

Senate Bill 1069 puts specific focus on supporting students by supporting our educators. The bill earmarks \$5 million to go towards intensive professional development for K-3 educators in phonics, a proven method of instruction for teaching kids how to read. A title you may hear frequently is the Science of Reading. The foundation of this teacher training is phonics, and it focuses on *evidence-based* methods of teaching and learning. Research in the Science of Reading provides the evidence to show how literacy skills develop in young learners. It focuses on evidence-based practices, meaning the methods have been *tested and shown to improve outcomes*. It’s not being provided because it sounds good and *might* work – it has been proven to work, and proven solutions are what Idaho teachers and students deserve.

So how can your educators get involved? The answer is, we'll come to them. Earmarked funding will be used to strengthen the Department of Education's existing SMART Project, which provides embedded coaching by bringing Science of Reading-aligned literacy coaches directly to schools monthly. This professional development approach is different than most. This is not a paper to read or a program on a computer. It's trained teachers who help other teachers in a coaching model. These coaches provide the critical bridge between research and classroom instruction, equipping teachers to apply strategies with real-time support and guidance.

These supports are a proven way to help our young people on their path toward reading and writing. Preparing our educators to effectively deliver on the promise of literacy means delivering on the larger promise of what education means for Idaho's learners: an investment in success, themselves and their future.

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