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Guest Opinion

Resources abound for Idaho parents to help students ‘learn forward’ this summer

By Sherri Ybarra
Superintendent of Public Instruction

Summer learning has never been more essential.

Educators often talk about the “summer slide,” when student skills and learning abilities drop off from disuse. As a former third grade teacher, I know how important it is that children continue reading, inquiring and exploring during the months between academic years.

The stakes have never been higher than they are this summer, as Idaho families emerge from a school year disrupted by a pandemic and look ahead to an academic year with new challenges.

One thing we learned over the past few months is that our students, parents and educators are innovative and resilient. Despite the unprecedented challenges and uncertainties, Idaho parents rose to the occasion, partnering with their children’s teachers, using online resources and ensuring students were engaged.

A positive result of the school closures is that we have compiled and created great resources for students to suit their individual needs, interests and grade level. And this spring’s distance learning experience sharpened many families’ skills in assisting at-home education.

I encourage families to put most of their focus on what lies ahead by front-loading the skills that will be needed in the fall. This is a great opportunity for students to learn forward.

In addition to summer programs from local schools, libraries and organizations, you’ll find a wealth of free online courses and information on the State Department of Education’s [Educational Resources for](#)

[Parents & Educators](#): from Khan Academy to National Geographic, Reading Rockets to MathsChase and the Big History Project.

Videos about how to use Khan Academy and other resources are available on the [State Department of Education's YouTube channel](#). You'll find playlists for various content areas, along with archived live events including May webinars I hosted with Idaho school superintendents and current and former Teachers of the Year. You may draw inspiration and ideas from listening to those conversations; I know I did.

Your child can take a wide array of classes from Idaho teachers through Classroom Idaho, a partnership between the SDE, Idaho Business for Education and Idaho Public Television. The classes cover language arts, math, science and more for grades 3 through 6. Engaging and informative, the classes aired on IdahoPTV April 20 through May 29 and now can be watched online via [IdahoPTV's YouTube channel](#).

Idaho teachers will offer more televised classes this summer on Idaho Public Television's Classroom Idaho Bootcamp, with half-hour sessions for kindergarteners through third-graders, and math and language arts lessons for grades 4 through 6. The Bootcamp, a partnership with Idaho Digital Learning Alliance, will start July 13 and continue for five weeks.

A number of other partner organizations are also collaborating to ensure students have educational opportunities this summer. My thanks to the Idaho Commission for Libraries, RISE-Treasure Valley's Education Partnership, United Way, and the Lee Pesky Learning Center for all their efforts.

Summer is a great time to refresh and prepare for the school year to come. I want to emphasize how important it is to engage with your child – read with them, play educational games and encourage them to explore. I am tremendously thankful to Idaho parents for all they have done, and will continue to do, to help students learn and succeed.

As always, I – along with my staff at the State Department of Education – are here to support and help you. I hope you and your family have a safe and fun summer.

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