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Supt. Ybarra: Funding and supporting districts' back to school efforts is top priority

(BOISE) – School districts throughout Idaho will have the opportunity to receive two streams of federal funding, distributed by the State Department of Education, designed to help them navigate the pandemic and begin the next school year with the tools and resources necessary to deliver blended learning.

Late Wednesday afternoon, the State Board of Education approved Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra's proposals for distributing \$30 million from the governor's Idaho Rebounds Coronavirus Relief Fund and \$3.8 million from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund.

The State Board of Education also accepted the recommendations of the Digital Divide Task Force, which include four key elements Idaho school districts and charter schools must consider as they develop their strategies for blended/ hybrid or remote learning as the 2020-21 school year commences:

- All students must have access to devices to engage in blended (online and traditional) learning
- All students must have adequate access to the Internet either at home, in their school building or in the community.
- Each district or charter school must invest in a Learning Management System (LMS) to support delivery of content and curriculum and facilitate communication between teachers, students and parents
- Districts and charter schools must support professional development to ensure educators have the tools they need for online or blended learning.

"How and when students return to school will ultimately be up to each district or charter school working with parents and their local health districts. It is essential that we support that flexibility as we provide guidance," Superintendent Ybarra said. "Communities across the state will be in different

stages of the pandemic when school reopens this fall, and districts will choose the approach that best serves their students, staff and parents. That could mean split or rotating schedules, a phased-in opening, online or blended learning, or traditional in-person instruction.”

Under the Idaho Rebounds Coronavirus Relief Fund, all districts and charter schools can apply for funds to cover Coronavirus-related expenses between March 1 and Dec. 30 of 2020. Those districts that apply and meet the award criteria will receive a base amount of \$21,000 plus \$6 per enrolled student plus an adjustment for entities with a low-income enrollment of 10 percent or greater.

ESSER funding to districts and charter schools will prioritize funding for a district-selected Learning Management System (LMS). District funding will include a base amount of \$5,000, plus a per-student allocation and funds for professional development.

An opt-in LMS was advocated by Superintendent Ybarra to establish equity for all Idaho districts, large and small, in their ability to provide online or blended learning.

The State Department of Education issued [a Request for Proposals](#) Tuesday seeking “strategic partners with strong experience and a proven background in online learning management systems for K-12 students.” The proposal period ends July 27.

The department plans to select several LMS providers by the end of the month. All districts in Idaho will have the option to choose one of those providers or to stay with the LMS provider they currently have.

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