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Superintendent Ybarra's 2021 budget ask focuses on needs of students, teachers

(BOISE) – Teacher pay, social-emotional learning, mastery expansion and literacy are top priorities in Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra's 2021 budget request for Idaho public schools.

"This budget request continues our emphasis on improving teacher compensation, enhancing student safety and wellbeing, and creating innovative, individualized ways to help students meet their potential and find success in academics and beyond," Superintendent Ybarra said. "Education stakeholders and Idaho families share those priorities, and they also match up well with Gov. Brad Little's objectives to improve K-12 education in this state."

"My total ask for public schools is about \$1.99 billion, a 5.3 percent increase over the current year's general fund appropriation," the superintendent said. "That increase amounts to a little more than \$100 million, and the Legislature has increased education funding by at least \$100 million every year since I became superintendent. I look forward to presenting my case to the Joint Finance Appropriations Committee early next year."

Line items in the budget include \$40 million to extend the career ladder to improve pay for Idaho's veteran teachers. That dollar request may be revised later this year based on the recommendations, expected in early November, of Gov. Little's "Our Kids, Idaho's Future" K-12 education task force.

"The career ladder, a product of Idaho's first K-12 education task force, has come a long way toward rewarding Idaho educators for their efforts and skill, especially in attracting new, early-career educators," said Superintendent Ybarra, a member of the current task force. "But we still need to do more for our experienced teachers, recognizing their value and encouraging them to stay in Idaho schools despite higher pay in other states."

Another key request in the 2021 public school budget is \$1 million to develop and implement training for Idaho educators in social-emotional learning to help teachers and school staff recognize and respond to students' emotional needs.

"Social-emotional learning is vital to helping children develop the self-awareness, problem-solving and impulse control needed to overcome challenges and thrive in school, work and community life,"

Superintendent Ybarra said. “Teachers and school staff are eager to help in that process, and we aim to develop strong, flexible training to address those needs. Social-emotional learning will also be a prominent theme in my department’s School Safety Symposium, which will be held Oct. 8 for school officials, first responders, policymakers and local leaders.”

Another growing focus for Idaho schools and educators is mastery education, a student-centered, competency-based approach that has proved successful in 32 schools across Idaho that participated in model program launched by the State Department of Education three years ago. Now Idaho is seen as a national leader in mastery education, and up to 48 new schools have applied to join the Idaho Mastery Education Network, more than doubling the total. The new schools include 14 school districts and five charter schools that are new to the network. Any Idaho public school district or charter school may participate in the network by applying to the SDE.

Superintendent Ybarra’s budget request seeks \$500,000 to continue expanding mastery-based education in Idaho, boosting the funding from \$1.4 million to \$1.9 million.

“Idaho lawmakers approved expanding the mastery network during their 2019 session, but we didn’t receive any additional funding,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “This budget request aims to fill that gap and sustain Idaho’s transition to mastery-based education.”

The fourth key objective in the superintendent’s budget request is to make permanent last winter’s one-time appropriation of \$3.16 million to continue funding literacy intervention programs to support struggling readers.

“This effort, spearheaded by Gov. Little, is an essential part of our push to help young Idahoans learn to read so they can read to learn,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “Having a one-time influx of dedicated funds was wonderful, but we need to make it permanent, providing district literacy intervention programs financial stability year after year and making it possible to evaluate the programs’ success.”

As the superintendent and staff worked to develop the 2021 budget request, they met Aug. 14 with education stakeholders including the Idaho Education Association, Idaho School Boards Association, the Idaho Association of School Administrators, Idaho Business for Education, Career Technical Education, the State Board of Education, Idaho Digital Learning and charter school representatives.

“Input from stakeholders, and our collaboration with the governor’s office, have been essential in this process, as have the discussions of the governor’s K-12 task force,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “It has made developing a budget request by the early September deadline especially challenging this year, since the task force is not expected to finish its work until November. As a result, I may submit a budget revision this year based on the recommendations that come from the task force.”

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Editors and reporters: Budget summary documents attached