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Media Contact:  
Kristin Rodine  
Public Information Officer  
208-332-6807  
[krodine@sde.idaho.gov](mailto:krodine@sde.idaho.gov)

## **Guest Opinion: Teacher Appreciation Week has special importance in these trying times**

By Sherri Ybarra  
Superintendent of Public Instruction

Teacher Appreciation Week is something we celebrate every year in Idaho, and for very good reason. But this year, May 4-8 has particular resonance because Idaho teachers are stretching their imagination and energy to meet students' needs during a state and national crisis that has closed our schools and impacted education in ways we never expected.

Like all of us, Idaho's teachers are dealing with the challenges of social isolation, working from home and coping with the effects of this pandemic on those they know and love. On top of that, they've been plunged into uncharted territory to find innovative, creative ways to keep communicating and connecting with students when classrooms are closed and not all children have equal access to online programs and devices. Most crucially, they've had to instruct and encourage their students without their greatest tool: the warmth and energy of personal contact.

From using the internet and social media to interact with students individually and in groups, to standing outside a student's home to help with homework from a safe distance, our teachers are finding ways to connect. They're even taking to the airwaves to reach students without online access by teaching via Idaho Public Television's "Classroom Idaho" program, a collaboration of Idaho Public Television, the State Department of Education and Idaho Business for Education.

I know firsthand how rewarding it is to be a teacher. It can also be physically, mentally and emotionally challenging, especially when you can't be in the classroom interacting with and helping your students. It has been truly inspiring to see the imaginative social media posts and hear stories from across the state about how teachers and students are connecting to keep that personal touch we know is so important. And, it is why I have made it a priority to share as many of those stories as possible on the Department's Facebook page.

If this current pandemic and the closure of schools has shown us anything, it is how very important our teachers and schools are to the daily life and learning of Idaho's children. At the State Department of Education, teachers are at the heart of our mission: supporting schools and students to achieve.

Just one indicator that Idahoans have great appreciation for the teachers in their lives this year is that

we've received an unprecedented number of nominations for the 2021 Teacher of the Year from parents, community members and educators throughout our state. We'll be accepting nominations until Monday, May 11. The process is easy: Just fill out the [online nomination form](#). Please take the time to reach out to the teachers you value – not just with words but also with actions. Check out the [Teacher Appreciation Toolkit](#) on my office's web page if you need ideas.

Let's make sure Idaho teachers know how much they are appreciated and valued, this week and every week.

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