



November 5, 2021

The Honorable Brad Little
Governor's Office
Idaho State Capitol, 2nd Floor
Boise, ID 83702

Dear Governor Little,

I am writing you because I am out of town traveling to the Council of Chief State School Officers annual policy meeting, and I have a request I would ask you to consider. I know time is of the essence on your decisions regarding the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds.

First, let me say I applaud you for making education a top priority. You have, no doubt, been tested to the limit as our state leader during this pandemic, and I support your efforts to keep our schools open and students learning. As you know, the past several months have tested the limits for our educators too, who have been caught in the political battles over masks and vaccines, all while trying to address the learning loss students have experienced. Stress, anxiety and emotional issues are at an all-time high with students and educators.

Through all of this, teachers are doing their best as conditions change continually, and now they are also experiencing a shortage of substitute teachers, which adds even more stress and pressure to their jobs. Thank you so much for providing funds to help address this and other school staff shortages.

I have recently had the opportunity to go out and substitute teach to help address this shortage. At the grass roots level, what I saw were caring teachers working hard, in-person, with their students. They are dealing with unfinished learning and everything else from closed water fountains to passing out lunch trays to sanitizing desks and other items continually to mitigate for COVID. Teachers are grateful to be in the classroom, but they are putting in extra time and effort to deal with all the challenges of the pandemic.

I believe we need to send a message to our educators and school staff that they have our support by using some of the ARP funds that are available through your office to reward their hard work.

On pages 6-7 of the "Review of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021," prepared by the Legislative Services Office, and shared at the October 19, 2021, meeting of the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee, it states that acceptable uses of these funds include the following:

Category (B) To provide premium pay of up to \$13.00 per hour in addition to base pay to workers performing essential work during the COVID-19 health emergency or provide grants to employers with employees performing essential work.

- Fiscal Recovery Funds payments may be used by recipients to provide premium pay to eligible workers performing essential work during the COVID–19 public health emergency or to provide grants to third-party employers with eligible workers performing essential work. These are workers who have been and continue to be relied on to maintain continuity of operations of essential critical infrastructure sectors, including those who are critical to protecting the health and wellbeing of their communities.

- Such workers include:
 - Staff at nursing homes, hospitals and home care settings;
 - Workers at farms, food production facilities, grocery stores, and restaurants;
 - Janitors and sanitation workers;
 - Truck drivers, transit staff, and warehouse workers;
 - Public health and safety staff;
 - Childcare workers, **educators, and other school staff**; and
 - Social service and human services staff.

- To ensure that premium pay is targeted to workers that faced or face heightened risks due to the character of their work, the Interim Final Rule defines essential work as **work involving regular in-person interactions or regular physical handling of items that were also handled by others**. A worker would not be engaged in essential work, and accordingly may not receive premium pay, for telework performed from a residence.

This was done for our first-responders, healthcare workers, and other essential workers already. Our teachers and school staff are equally important and serve one of the most important roles in our nation – educating our youth and keeping our schools open. As I know you agree, supporting our schools and those who work to support students is essential to our recovery efforts surrounding the pandemic.

Please consider giving our teachers a \$1,000 dollar bonus as soon as practical, as well as encouraging districts to use the staffing shortage funds you so graciously provided to award bonuses to their paraprofessional staff and other classified staff who are working above and beyond to perform additional tasks and to help fill staff shortages in our schools.

Once again, my sincerest thanks on behalf of all of the educators and school staff around this state for your support. I hope you will consider this request, and I would be more than happy to work with you and your staff to implement this proposal.

Sincerely,



Sherri A. Ybarra, Ed.S.
Superintendent of Public Instruction