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Idaho K–12 Budget Moves Forward; Critchfield Questions Disparity in Virtual School Cuts

(BOISE) – Idaho’s K–12 public schools budget cleared a key hurdle Friday morning, with lawmakers advancing a proposal that maintains current funding levels despite a tighter state revenue outlook.

The K–12 budget represents one of the state’s largest investments and provides the primary funding for public education across Idaho.

“In a year with real revenue constraints, our focus has been on maintaining support for students and protecting what matters most in the classroom,” Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield said. “The motions put forward today largely reflect the priorities we recommended alongside the Governor, and I’m pleased to see that we were able to maintain current funding levels for Idaho schools.”

Critchfield noted that in the current fiscal environment, holding funding steady is a meaningful outcome.

“In a year with a lot of ups and downs, this is a win for education,” she said. “There were tough conversations throughout this process, but staying focused on students helped guide those decisions.”

However, Critchfield raised significant concerns about how virtual education programs were treated in the budget.

“Throughout today’s discussion, there was a strong emphasis on fairness across virtual schools,” she said. “But when you look at the final decisions, Idaho’s own state-created provider—the Idaho Digital Learning Alliance—was reduced by 52%, while other virtual programs saw cuts of just 1.8%. That is a significant and difficult gap to reconcile.”

“IDLA serves Idaho students with Idaho teachers in communities across our state,” Critchfield continued. “If fairness is the goal, we need to make sure our actions reflect that—especially when it comes to a program that was created to meet the needs of Idaho families.”

Critchfield added that the issue highlights the need for broader conversations about how Idaho funds virtual education and ensures consistency across programs.

“We know there are ongoing discussions about how to modernize our funding formula, including how we account for virtual learning,” she said. “Those conversations are important—but they should result in policies that are consistent, transparent, and aligned with what’s best for students.”

She also highlighted a separate effort advancing in the Legislature to support students with the highest needs.

“We’ve been working with lawmakers on a targeted approach to better support students with extraordinary needs,” Critchfield said. “That proposal has advanced out of committee unanimously, and we’re encouraging Idahoans to reach out to their legislators in support as it continues through the process.”

While Friday’s action marks an important milestone, Critchfield emphasized that the budget process is not yet complete.

“This is a critical first step, but there are still additional steps ahead,” she said. “We remain committed to working with the Legislature to ensure Idaho’s public schools are supported and that these investments translate into meaningful outcomes for students.”

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