

An Open Letter to Idaho School Districts from Concerned Educators

On behalf of students and educators in our districts, we call on district officials to approve budgets that will ensure stable, supportive, safe, and healthy schools for our students.

In the wake of the COVID-19 public health crisis, Idaho students have experienced great turmoil and uncertainty. Our public schools should be a place of healing for students and communities as we work through the COVID-19 crisis. We need to provide students with as much of a stable learning environment as possible with multi-layered emotional supports. Today's students were experiencing high levels of anxiety and difficulty with mental health issues like depression, suicide, and disruptive behaviors before this natural disaster. It would be irresponsible to further compromise mental health issues by eliminating staff from schools and exacerbating already woeful student-to-counselor ratios. In many cases, our students' lives depend on it.

Some districts in Idaho are considering budget cuts that would de-stabilize school environments and, at worst, deny students access to vital services they now, more than ever, will depend on when schools reopen. Now is not the time to hit the panic button and start slashing education budgets. When the school year resumes this fall, in whatever form it may take, students must have access to the fundamental resources to guarantee their health and safety. This includes the custodial services to maintain sanitary conditions, nurses to ensure our students' health are being monitored, kitchen staff to feed our students, and counselors on hand to step in before a crisis manifests, not after. All jobs are essential.

Idaho has financial resources. Idaho districts have access to CARES Act Federal Emergency Relief Funds, state emergency funds, and in the case of many rural districts, funding through the Secure Rural Schools act. This is on top of the increases voted in by the legislature earlier this year. Most districts also have made prudent decisions that allowed them to build sufficient "rainy day" reserve funds. If a global pandemic doesn't qualify as a "rainy day", we don't know what does. These funds should be used prior to any cuts to personnel and the services they provide. Idaho ranks near last in funding public education, but not because our state does not have resources. This crisis highlights our students' needs and our collective calling to work together to invest in the schools our students deserve.

We ask school districts to lead, do right by Idaho children and approve budgets that provide stable and equitable services and support for our students.

In unity and with dedication to our students,

- Marci Bradley - Aberdeen EA
- Mattie Bedwell - Aberdeen EA
- Jason Stucki - American Falls EA
- Shannon Butikofer - American Falls EA

- Tabetha Bissegger - Bear Lake EA
- Amy Wren - Blackfoot EA
- Barton Black - Marsh Valley EA
- Mary Anne McGrory - Pocatello EA
- Taylor Bowles - Preston EA
- Jon Hawkes - Snake River EA
- Amanda Eller - ISU Faculty EA
- Lisa Puckett - Bonneville EA
- Jolene Johnson - Clark County EA
- Monique Lenz - Fremont EA
- Laura Milton - Idaho Falls EA
- Kent Hayes - Rexburg EA
- Marian Hayes - Rexburg EA
- John (Cody) Sanders - Sugar Salem EA
- Angela Hoopes - Teton EA
- Eva Ochoa - Firth EA

(Representatives of school districts across the state have also joined in signing the letter, including;

Boundary County, Coeur d'Alene, Lakeland, Lake Pend Oreille, Post Falls, St. Maries, Wallace, West Bonner, Central Idaho, Clearwater, Kendrick, Lapwai, Lewiston, Moscow, Fruitland, Gem County, Marsing, McCall-Donnelly, Meadows Valley, Middleton, New Plymouth, Notus, Parma, Payette, Wilder, Blaine County, Buhl, Cassia, Filer, Gooding, Hansen, Jerome, Kimberly, Minidoka, Twin Falls, Wendell, Pingree, Aberdeen, American Falls, Bear Lake, Blackfoot, Marsh Valley, Pocatello, Preston, Snake River, Bonneville, Clark County, Firth, Fremont, Idaho Falls, Rexburg, Sugar-Salem, Teton, Boise, West Ada, Caldwell, Kuna, Mountain Home, Nampa, Vallivue