

MINUTES
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Monday, February 06, 2023

TIME: 3:00 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW55

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Lent, Vice Chairman Toews, Senators Den Hartog, Nichols, Carlson, Herndon, Lenney, Ward-Engelking, and Semmelroth

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chairman Lent** called the meeting of the Senate Education Committee (Committee) to order at 3:08 p.m.

GUBERNATORIAL REAPPOINTMENT: **Committee Consideration of the Gubernatorial of Alan Reed, Public Charter School Commission** (Commission), of Idaho Falls, Idaho, for a term commencing May 12, 2023 and expiring May 12, 2026. **Mr. Reed** gave a brief overview of his background. He outlined some of the goals of the Commission and some of the challenges that the Commission was facing. Mr. Reed emphasized the need to raise the education standards for Idaho schools and continually look for new ways to help schools so that they were meeting student's needs.

DISCUSSION:

Senator Den Hartog asked Mr. Reed how he viewed the role of the Commission both in regulatory and supportive capacity. **Mr. Reed** explained that the Commission had always maintained regulatory responsibilities but as time went on and staffing increased, the Commission was able to develop more of a supportive role to charter schools. He stated that the Commission needed to maintain a balance between these two roles going forward.

Senator Lenney questioned why a charter school in Nampa, Idaho, was closed the year prior. **Mr. Reed** pointed out the school was closed because the school board was nonfunctional and did not fulfill the operational needs of the school.

Senator Semmelroth asked Mr. Reed to expand on the importance of the Commission's role in ensuring tax dollars were used effectively by charter schools. **Mr. Reed** stated that the main priority for the Commission was to make sure that charter schools in Idaho had a large enough student population so each school could pay for the facility and other expenses.

Senator Herndon asked if Mr. Reed could describe the staffing at the Commission. **Mr. Reed** summarized a few of the different staffing positions on the Commission that were involved in overseeing renewal evaluations for public charter schools. This included specialists for analyzing school finances, curriculum, and handling office procedures. He also mentioned the request for two additional staffing positions on the Commission which would assist with monitoring curriculum and providing support for charter schools.

Senator Nichols inquired what goals the Commission had set for improving student academic performance as well as what Mr. Reed's thoughts were on social emotional learning and transgender sex education. **Mr. Reed** emphasized

the importance of finding the right curriculum for each school and elevating the performance standards for all schools. He mentioned the learning priorities for each school should be reading and math, but also must provide students with the opportunity to feel safe at school.

Senator Herndon asked Mr. Reed to describe the working relationship of the staff on the Commission. **Mr. Reed** indicated how the members of the Commission mainly worked with the director on individual school reports that the director's staff created.

Senator Den Hartog inquired if the Commission had been engaging in or facilitating an exchange of educational ideas between themselves and traditional public schools. **Mr. Reed** commented that there should have been an exchange of ideas between public schools and charter schools, but it had been a challenge to start these conversations.

Senator Lenney asked if Mr. Reed would support a sectarian public charter school. **Mr. Reed** answered that he did not have an opinion on the matter.

PRESENTATION:

Redefining Success with at-risk youth. **Monica White**, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Elevate Academy, presented an overview of Elevate Academy and how it was unique compared to traditional schools in Idaho. The mission of Elevate Academy was to offer at-risk students across the State of Idaho a quality career technical education so that they could become contributing members of society. **Ms. White** explained Elevate Academy aimed to ensure that all students had some kind of work opportunity immediately after graduating. She mentioned that each Elevate Academy location across the State of Idaho had tailored its curriculum to support careers in local community industries. **Ms. White** commented on how Elevate Academy's graduation rates were not reflective of the school's success with at-risk students. This was due to how graduation rates were measured in the State of Idaho. **Ms. White** discussed some of the challenges Elevate Academy faced, which included securing funding, meeting a growing demand of potential students, and finding talented teachers (Attachment 1).

DISCUSSION:

Senator Nichols asked if Ms. White could clarify how Elevate Academy's graduation rates were being hurt based on the way they were measured. **Ms. White** explained that graduation cohorts were based on a timeline and if a student did not graduate four years after beginning high school, they were considered a dropout. Since Elevate Academy instructed many at-risk and nontraditional students, this had reflected poorly on their graduation rates.

Senator Carlson inquired whether enrollment at Elevate Academy was at maximum capacity. **Ms. White** answered the Caldwell campus was at maximum capacity and the Nampa and Post Falls campuses were approaching maximum capacity.

Senator Ward-Engelking asked whether Ms. White knew of a better process for funding traditional and charter schools across Idaho. **Ms. White** was unaware of such a process.

Vice Chairman Toews asked Ms. White if she could speak to Elevate Horizon's ability to hire a wide range of teachers. **Ms. White** explained how the ability to cast a wider net for teachers had been very helpful for Elevate Academy and commented on the additional training that went into the career technical teaching positions.

Senator Den Hartog asked if Ms. White could comment on the relationship between Horizon Charter and the Valley View School District, as well as the potential for an Elevate Academy location in that school district. **Ms. White** described how the working relationships between Elevate Academy and other school districts had steadily increased over time.

Chairman Lent asked Ms. White to speak to the need for high school graduates who did not go on to college to have marketable skills upon entering the workforce. **Ms. White** stressed the importance of giving these students marketable skills before graduation so they could be productive members of society and contribute to their communities.

PRESENTATION: **Overview of Public Radio.** **Tom Michael**, General Manager, Boise State Public Radio (BSPR), provided the Committee with a synopsis of public radio in the State of Idaho and the role it played in educating Idahoans. **Mr. Michael** described the various services and programming that BSPR provided. He highlighted the substantial listening audience that tuned into BSPR and its ranking as one of the top two news talk radio stations in Idaho. BSPR had approximately 11,000 donors who contributed annually. **Mr. Michael** outlined the Federal Communications Commission restrictions on public radio on what could and could not be broadcasted in relation to donors. **Mr. Michael** spoke about BSPR's emergency alert system that operated 24-hours a day and seven days a week and how this service benefited Idahoans. He mentioned the awards that the BSPR had received for its live breaking news coverage, including the Edward R. Murrow award. **Mr. Michael** provided a list of public radio broadcast sites across the State of Idaho and concluded by talking about the Mountain West News Bureau, a multi-state news network collaboration between Idaho and five other states.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Herndon** asked how BSPR could do a better job with news reporting that was more representative of the country's ideological center. **Mr. Michael** believed that BSPR and public radio in general was reflective of the ideological center and referenced an independent study called the Media Audit that supported his view. **Senator Herndon** asked Mr. Michael if he could commit to ensuring that BSPR not label any of the Senators in the Idaho Legislature as "far right". **Mr. Michael** claimed that he would pass along Senator Herndon's concerns to his editorial and journal staff.

Senator Nichols asked how BSPR acquired their ratings numbers and if they had to pay to obtain them. **Mr. Michael** told the Committee that BSPR collaborated with a group called Radio Research Consortium, which allowed them to access their ratings. He mentioned that the annual cost for the contract with Radio Research Consortium was \$13,670. **Senator Nichols** inquired how much local programming did Idaho have on public radio versus out-of-state programming. **Mr. Michael** indicated compared to other public radio stations, BSPR had more local programming.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Lent** adjourned the meeting at 4:24 p.m.

Senator Lent
Chair

Linette Grantham
Secretary

Tyler Allen
Assistant Secretary