



Thank you for allowing Idaho PTA to address the Senate Education Committee. We appreciate the opportunity to share with you our priorities, some of our accomplishments & what is important to our members to further the education of students in Idaho.

Our top priorities this year & every year is the overall well being of children & students in our state. Our theme this year is "Family Engagement" The cornerstone of our organization is our volunteers. Since in person learning was limited during the pandemic, our organization saw decreases in membership & volunteer hours. Now that in person learning is back, we have seen a stronger response with family engagement so that we may continue to volunteer in our schools to help students succeed. National PTA has over 40 years of data which show family engagement in schools has a drastic impact on student achievement and school improvement.

Today is our annual Advocacy Day at the Capitol. We have several guest speakers who are here to help educate our members about digital safety, present ideas to members on how to advocate to support students in all grade levels and an overview of education issues currently in discussion during this legislative session.

We are very excited to welcome the culinary students from the Kuna School District who prepared & served lunch today. For many of these students, it is the first time at our State's Capitol. They were dressed in their whites & chef hat. Any time these culinary students can participate in a catering event, it will help them prepare for the challenges of the food service industry in the real world. We are also very grateful to GoldenWest Credit Union who has provided a grant to cover the costs for food & transportation.

Idaho PTA continues to focus on family engagement in over 120 schools across the state. We have over 5000 members and growing which exceed our pre-pandemic membership. The growing membership tells us being part of a transparent, organized, trained association to help support students, teachers and parents continues to be important for families. Fun family engagement programs are being held across the state such as Family Game Nights, Family Movie Nights, Talent Shows, Read & Spaghetti Feed, Community Kindness Movements, Spirit Weeks, Math & Stem Nights, National PTA Reflections Art Program, Girls on the Run & All Pro Dad events just to name a few. Our PTA units help organize, gather volunteers and host most of these events at school. Learning is more than about being in the classroom and these events brings students, teachers and families together in a very positive way.

National PTA continues to work closely with our local units and have made available grants so that they may provide new and interesting ways to support family engagement.

- Mosaic Public School in Caldwell was awarded a \$2500 Healthy Lifestyles Grant sponsored by The Allstate Foundation which provides resources to support parents & students to strengthen their family & child's mental health.
- OR Trails Elementary PTA, in Twin Falls was awarded a \$2500 Healthy Minds Grant sponsored by the NY Life Foundation which partners with the local PTA unit & their school to strengthen mental health & social-emotional learning support & services.
- Park Ridge Elementary PTA in Nampa ID & Skyways Elementary PTA in CDA each received \$1000 Smart Talk Grant sponsored by Norton to help facilitate conversations of guided digital safety questions & help create a personalized family agreement for how technology will be used at home. This is 1 small way PTA works with families to help provide tools to navigate raising a child in a digital world.

On a local level, Idaho PTA is also investing in students:

- Two (2) grants were given to Pocatello middle schools this month so that they may come to the Capitol on Advocacy Day. Without this grants, they would not have the means to pay for the transportation to get here. In many cases, this will be the only opportunity these students will be able to see our State Capitol, create a lasting middle school memory & meet with their local legislator.
- Also, in 2023 Idaho PTA is providing (2) \$1000 scholarships to high school seniors that will be enrolling in an Idaho college in the fall to financially assist that student to obtain their college degree in education. We know that a 4 year college degree is expensive & we are doing our part to help our future teachers dream become a reality.

National PTA has been a partner to parents on digital parenting topics for over 5 years, exploring in-depth issues that are on the minds of today's families & connecting parent with tools, research & support to make the best decisions for their children.

On a National Level, some of PTA federal legislative priorities include

- Promoting Safe, Supportive & Inclusive Practices in Schools for All Students by asking for funding to connect students with necessary behavioral & mental health resources at schools which include but not limited to mental health services but also wellness services & sick visits for students who do not have access to healthcare.
- A Healthier Future for Child Nutrition by maintaining nutrition standards in the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010. The bill allows the USDA to make reforms to the school lunch & breakfast programs by improving the critical nutrition & hunger safety net for millions of children & help combat the concerning obesity rates among American children.

- Provide Federal Investment in Public Education to help students reach their fullest potential especially with Title 1 & IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) to receive substantial funding. National PTA research shows that a 20% increase in per-pupil federal spending for low-income children can lead to an additional year of completed education, 25% higher earnings & 20% reduction in the incidence of poverty in adulthood.

This year I will be addressing our Federal Legislators in March not only to brag about our members & what they are doing in Idaho to help students in school but to also discuss support of these initiatives from National PTA.

Usually at our Advocacy Day when we address the Education Committee's there is usually an "ask" from our membership. This year, since there is \$330M being distributed for K-12 public education, we do not have an ask, but we have a few thoughts:

Some issues we are discussing are bonds & levies. On March 14th, just 2 weeks away 47 school districts will be asking voters to approve levies & bonds. These are being asked of tax payers so that schools can deal with overcrowding, keeping schools running smoothly & building new schools to accommodate Idaho's historic growth. During these uncertain economic times in which the costs of goods have been outpacing wages, asking families to tighten their budgets continues to be a tough ask for our communities. According ID Ed News, since 2000, only 52% of proposed school bonds have passed. The public is asking why are schools asking for money when the government has a surplus? Reducing or eliminating the need for bonds & levies would be a great way to use some of the surplus money- maybe not forever but at least when there is an economic surplus available in the state.

Teachers: We love our teachers & our membership worries about the great ones leaving & attracting new qualified teachers to education. During the pandemic, teachers have been challenged beyond the call of duty. Education Week did a survey in 2022 to evaluate the satisfaction or depending on how you look at it the dissatisfaction of teachers & there are many factors but 1 item stuck out which is "workload". An average teacher works over 54 hours a week. Teachers are being asked to not only juggle their regular teaching duties, covering for staff shortages which leads to overcrowded classrooms but also the pressure for academic recovery to figure out how to get every student back to grade level learning, deal with kids "zoomies" & supporting students with greater mental health needs.

Local 8 News in Idaho Falls reported in the spring of 2022, 900 teacher vacancies needed to be filled by August 2022 which dropped to 134 since the start of the school year. The greatest need have been in special education, math & science especially in rural districts. In some cases school districts have been scrambling to fill the positions with people who have little or no education experience or training. Idaho Ed News reported since 2017 Idaho continues to see a trend in nontraditional teachers & hiring more professionals with no teaching experience or college graduates who did not major in education. My daughter has a friend in the Treasure Valley who graduated from BSU with a degree in elementary education but is currently teaching 8th grade science. She has had to relearn science since it was not her primary discipline in college & work through the curriculum with the students to make sure all the subject matter is covered. She is succeeding but the learning curve for her to master the subject matter adds to her workload on any given week.

PTA volunteers see firsthand the struggles teachers may have on a daily basis. Our volunteers are in the classrooms and are doing the best they can to support the students & the teachers, but from our perspective, we are seeing greater number of teacher burn-out. A teacher who is overwhelmed, lacks a work/life balance, those who may not get the right amount of support because everyone else is too

busy covering for staff shortages is going to be less effective in the classroom. Those who stand to suffer the most are Idaho's kids whose teachers may be undertrained, inexperienced or overwhelmed. According to Western Governors University the average teacher is 42 years old & they have taught about 14 years but now the attrition rate in the first 5 years of teaching is close to 50%. Statistically, if teachers make it past the 5 years they are more likely to stay in the profession, but we are seeing more & more teachers leaving to pursue other careers

There are many factors-competing industries with less pressure, better pay, better work/life balance as well as barriers Idaho has to become a certified teacher. Is a standardized test the best way to evaluate the success of a teacher or does it show that a teacher can take a standardized test?. Idaho does not offer college graduates an alternative to become a certified teacher which can include submitting a portfolio of review or provide other evidence of qualifications. This can be an issue especially for teachers who are moving here from other states. How many teachers are moving to Idaho do not pursue teaching because the requirements to be a certified teacher require them to take all the standardize tests again? Senator Cook brought this to PTA's attention last year at Advocacy day.

The surplus could help our teachers by providing them with competitive pay, providing mentorships, coaching, goal setting & training which will be essential to attract & retain teachers especially in our rural communities. Providing extra resources to districts to provide a fully staffed, healthy, nurturing school environment is not only for the kids but we need it for the teachers as well. The quality of our public schools starts with the quality of our teachers & using our financial resources so our teachers are supported will go a long way to improving the education of our students in Idaho.

I will stand for questions.