

MEDIA RELEASE

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POCATELLO/CHUBBUCK
SCHOOL DISTRICT 25

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Restoring one of our community's cherished high schools without a bond

POCATELLO, IDAHO –The unprecedented challenge to restore one of our community's cherished high schools is now one-step closer. Now, due to landmark legislation signed into law, the Highland High School rebuild will be funded without the need for the Pocatello/Chubbuck School District 25 to pass a bond.

Governor Little signed House Bill 521 into law on March 29. Without the assurance that 521 was signed into law at the time of its deliberation, the Board moved forward with submitting the bond resolution language to Bannock County to meet the March 29 deadline.

"Now that HB 521 is law we can add clarity for our community members and say, 'thank you,' but we are not asking community members to vote for the bond anymore," said Deanna Judy, Board Chair. "The funding provided by HB 521 will fulfill our purpose to rebuild Highland High School."

This groundbreaking legislation represents a crucial step to rebuild and revitalize Highland's storied campus, offering a lifeline to the community without resorting to additional taxpayer burden through a bond measure. In the unlikely event the bond passes, the District would forego selling the bonds. The District will also forego spending any money to educate the public about the bond election.

HB 521 is projected to provide \$43 million to the Pocatello/Chubbuck School District to fund facilities construction. At the March 5 Work Session, the Board of Trustees discussed earmarking approximately \$31-\$33 million of the funding for the reconstruction of Highland High School. The new fund reapportions the \$11-\$12 million the district anticipated receiving over the next ten years from lottery funds. The Board would consider the option to continue allocating those funds as part of the district's annual Capital Improvements Program (CIP) as they have previously been allocated.

The Board took action to earmark the lump sum of new funding and use it in combination with insurance replacement monies to reconstruct Highland High School as proposed to local voters in November.

Nearly a year into the process, the Pocatello/Chubbuck School District 25 Board of Trustees, together with Highland and District administration, has worked diligently with meticulous planning to rebuild and restore the affected areas of the school as soon as possible. Ruled accidental and electrical in nature, the fire left behind a trail of lost or damaged facilities, including the gymnasium, cafeteria, weight room, band, orchestra, and choir rooms.

While the district met its goal to return learners and staff home to Highland High School with a traditional schedule for the 2023-2024 school year, many of the school's classes and extracurricular programs continue to function despite being temporally displaced (with gratitude) to alternate locations.

The substantial funding injection provided by HB 521 will enable the district to undertake the comprehensive rebuilding project immediately. The priority is to restore essential facilities and implement modern amenities to enhance the learning experience at Highland. In total, Highland lost approximately 75,000 square feet of space. The project includes: (a) replacing facilities lost or damaged in the April 2023 fire, (b) adding, remodeling, and modernizing science classrooms, (c) replacing and increasing the size of the gymnasium and activity space, (d) constructing an auditorium.

Throughout their discussions, the Board has focused on guiding goals to:

- Educate learners in facilities design for today's standards;
- Return all learners and extracurricular programs to campus;
- Modernize science and music classrooms to meet the evolving needs of a growing student population;
- Restore the gymnasium as a central hub of physical, academic, social, and cultural development, increasing the capacity and versatility of the facility to resume as the community-building heart of the school.
- Restore functional gathering spaces critical to elevating the high school experience;
- Build a functional auditorium to meet educational, cultural, and community needs;
- Make prudent and fiscally responsible decisions.

"I appreciate the Board's diligence in looking at this challenge from every angle to balance fiscal responsibility with our obligation to educate learners in safe and functional facilities that are conducive to their overall educational experience and development," said Dr. Douglas Howell, Superintendent.

Idaho House Bill 521 signifies a paradigm shift in educational funding and community support. Championed by state legislators and supported by a coalition of local stakeholders, this legislation exemplifies a commitment to investing in the future of our community's youth and ensuring access to quality education in a safe, productive, and comprehensive learning environment.

In a recent KPVI interview, Representative Dustin Manwaring said, "The board could potentially split this money and do a bunch of different things, but I think if they put it in one place, that will fit the intent of the legislature to put this towards building new school facilities and I think it would be good to just get that completely behind us and build the high school there."

The Board's has framed its work on this issue with the belief that rebuilding Highland High School is not just an investment in educational facilities; it is an investment in the community's economic vitality. Every time a community takes action to modernize its schools' infrastructure, it builds the capacity to create jobs, attract businesses, and elevate property values, laying the foundation for a prosperous future. The district continues to pledge an unwavering commitment to stretch every taxpayer dollar as far as it will go as we work together to position PCSD 25 for a strong, successful future.

As the building efforts begin, the Board and District encourages all members of the community to rally together in support of this transformative endeavor. Every individual has a vital role to play in shaping the future of Highland High School and ensuring its legacy endures for generations to come.

To follow the progress of rebuilding Highland High School, please visit sd25.us/rebuildinghighland, which will be updated throughout the duration of the rebuilding process.

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