



Idaho Department of Education

Mr. Bybee (on behalf of JFAC Co-Chairs),

As Superintendent of Public Instruction, I have the responsibility to submit a K-12 budget request that meets the needs of our students and the expectations of our parents. Legislators have a responsibility to pass a balanced budget while upholding their obligation to fund public education.

I followed the statutory budget process and submitted our initial K-12 request in late August. We then worked closely with the Governor's Office and adjusted our budget request when revenue projections were lowered. In December, I submitted a revised public schools budget for FY 2026 and FY 2027 that included reductions.

Those revisions were significant. We reduced our request by \$50 million for special education. We cut that despite the growing financial pressure on local districts and charters to provide federally required services for our highest-need students. The funding gap between student needs and available resources is estimated to be \$100 million. We cut another \$22 million in FY 2026 and \$42 million from FY 2027 to align with current attendance data. We brought our budget in line with the state's financial reality. When factoring in inflation, even flat budgets mean cuts to overall operations.

I will not be recommending further cuts to the public schools budget for FY 2026 or FY 2027.

The public schools budget is more than numbers on a spreadsheet. It represents every one of our students, classrooms, teachers and communities.

Whether we are talking about the biggest district in the Treasure Valley or the one-room schoolhouse in Lowman, schools are deeply woven into the fabric of Idaho communities. When funding is cut too deeply or carelessly, student opportunities shrink, programs disappear, and costs shift to local taxpayers.

What does that look like? Larger class sizes; ending shop programs; cutting support for math and literacy; outdated textbooks and instructional materials; cuts to interventions; removing athletic, music, art and debate programs; laying off teachers and support staff; hiring freezes; declaring emergencies to break teacher contracts; increasing fees; and a heavier reliance on local taxpayers.

This will cause disproportionate harm to rural students. We have serious concerns about the legal risks for unmet needs with students in special education as well. We have seen this before. It took years for our schools to recover from cuts during the 2008 downturn.

Over the past decade, Idaho's investments in K-12 education have led to real, measurable gains—stronger readers in our early grades, higher graduation rates, and more success after high school. These outcomes, and many more, are the return on the state's investment in our students.

I urge legislators to remember that education funding is a long-term investment in Idaho's prosperity. Idaho's future workforce, economy, and communities depend on the strength of our public schools today.



Debbie Critchfield, Superintendent of Public Instruction