



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 24, 2024
www.sde.idaho.gov

Media Contact:
Maggie T. Reynolds
Public Information Officer
208-332-6976
mreynolds@sde.idaho.gov

Critchfield: Supporting Our Students Doesn't Have to be Complicated

By Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield

(BOISE) – I don't have to be on the road constantly to get feedback from Idahoans who care deeply about education. Running errands like grocery shopping or going to Costco can provide me opportunities to hear from both friends and total strangers. People like to share opinions or offer a word of encouragement, and because my weekends are spent at home in rural Idaho, my neighbors want to be sure the "big city" doesn't change me!

Among many topics, I consistently hear a theme: We need to get back to basics.

In education, I understand "back to basics" to mean a serious focus on reading and math. I also know that when folks talk to me about the basics, they increasingly care about teaching our kids more about civics and government. "Basics" to most people also means teaching a respect for personal responsibility and the ability to leave high school with a marketable skill or trade. There's a feeling that in all the good stuff kids can learn and do, we need more emphasis on what's most valuable for their futures.

I am happy to report that our schools do focus on reading and math. And at the Idaho Department of Education, we want to be sure they continue that focus. Literacy achievement rates held pretty steady during the pandemic years and we were encouraged by our last round of reading assessments that we are headed in the right direction.

Math is not as shiny as our reading performance, and for students in grades 5 through 9, there is a lot of improvement that needs to take place, and sooner rather than later. Our schools know that too. One of the ways I believe the state can help this effort is to more fully refine our math standards to what we expect kids to know and at what grade levels. Working with the Board of Education, my team and I are sorting through all of the current math standards to identify the essential standards that work for all kids, whether they are college bound or pursuing other post-secondary options.

We believe this work is one of the ways we get back to basics. In no way does this diminish the standards we have now or discount the teaching happening in classrooms. We believe that we can strengthen our teachers' ability to instruct and position our students with the knowledge that prepares them for the next grade and whatever is next.

As for government and civics, in the summer of 2023, Governor Little and I discussed ways to broaden the resources that we offer to our educators for use in the classroom. The state is now offering Idaho educators an interactive, multi-dimensional U.S. history curriculum. This resource adds depth and dimension to existing U.S. history curriculum, and is designed to support the development of productive citizens by offering students a deeper understanding of American history and the overall American experience.

The good news about getting back to basics is that there is room for prioritizing hard work and common sense-solutions. There is room for ensuring that what we're doing is working and for making changes where those opportunities arise. Supporting our students doesn't have to be complicated. As we focus on ensuring the long-term value of an Idaho education, let's work to keep our focus on the fundamentals when it comes to getting our students ready for life beyond high school.

###

Attached: Updated headshot of Superintendent Debbie Critchfield