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CRITCHFIELD OPINION: Post-Legislative Tour is About Service and Connecting with School Leaders

By Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield

For the last two weeks, I've crisscrossed Idaho with members of my team to visit school leaders all around the state. This is an annual State Department of Education practice and its timing is deliberate. This 'post-legislative roadshow' is held soon after the end of Idaho's annual legislative session and is meant to share with local district leaders the changes made to education policy and how those new laws will affect their teachers, students, budgets and operations.

We hosted events in Idaho Falls, Pocatello, Nampa, Twin Falls, Moscow and Coeur d'Alene. More than 500 superintendents, business managers, trustees, teachers and other leaders attended. Audience members also included key education groups like the Idaho Association of School Administrators, Idaho School Boards Association as well as state lawmakers from the education and budget committees.

Each stop on our tour followed the same format and included my staff and I updating attendees on changes to school funding, newly passed laws requiring updated policies and operations and much more. We made presentations and then welcomed audience questions. Some were easy to answer and others need a follow-up. We reminded our school folks that the legislative session just ended and some items that they will need to address weren't yet finalized on our end. Attendees shared opinions on the issues that matter most to their district. By the end of the tour, we'd exchanged loads of important information and I was very appreciative of those who participated. Education is a team endeavor and it was really satisfying to talk through tough issues with the goal of providing facts and support.

This event is one of the most important services the State Department of Education provides to Idaho schools. The policy changes made by the Idaho Legislature are numerous and have impacts on every school across the state. Some new laws are high profile. Others are lesser known, but nonetheless important. For local leaders, watching every education-related development in Boise while running a district or charter is impossible.

This tour was my first as superintendent. I have participated in other ways for years, but to lead out, set the tone and engage with our educational communities on their own turf was an

incredible opportunity for me as a public servant. It's so important to hear directly from our school leaders and discuss the work we do.

My hope and goal was that attendees saw a superintendent and education department who listen to the challenges they face. I also want them to see us as willing partners in addressing those issues. In our efforts to support students as the primary focus of what we do, this type of outreach and support is critical to our shared success.

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