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Superintendent Ybarra lauds Gov. Little's commitment to education

(BOISE) – As Idaho’s top advocate for schoolchildren, Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra responded to Gov. Brad Little’s first State of the State address by expressing appreciation to the new governor for making education his top priority, committing funding and ideas to the shared effort of supporting Idaho schools and students to achieve.

Gov. Little’s education funding proposals echo many of Superintendent Ybarra’s priorities for fiscal 2020 and lay a solid groundwork for the process of determining future funding for Idaho’s public schools, the superintendent said. Still to come are numerous discussions with lawmakers and stakeholders, and the superintendent’s budget presentation to JFAC, which is scheduled for Jan. 24.

“Idaho, unlike the federal government, is required to balance its budget,” Superintendent Ybarra said Monday afternoon. “In light of lagging income tax revenue and predictions of a slowing economy, Gov. Little courageously set a high bar for funding education, ensuring it remains a top priority.”

Much like a family, the superintendent said, Idaho government must live within its means. “There are many important and competing demands for limited state resources,” she said.

Superintendent Ybarra welcomes the governor’s plans to help students at both ends of the K-12 spectrum: building on the SDE’s new Idaho Reading Indicator assessment by boosting literacy efforts for children in the early grades and increasing funding for the highly successful Advanced Opportunities program that helps teenagers jump-start their college or career-technical studies while still in high school.

The superintendent also praised the governor’s commitments to increase teacher pay and create a new task force to continue the education improvement efforts beyond the five-year term of the task force launched by Gov. Butch Otter.

“Also, I love Gov. Little’s idea of creating a ‘children’s cabinet’ to advise him on education issues,” Superintendent Ybarra said.

Gov. Little did not address Superintendent Ybarra’s request for a multi-pronged student safety initiative dubbed KISS (Keep Idaho Students Safe), but his budget references a coordinated effort between the SDE and others to improve student safety.

Superintendent Ybarra said she looks forward to participating in that new effort, and she remains hopeful funding will be found to enhance student safety.

“Strengthening the security of our schools and preparing educators to identify and intervene with students prone to violence before a tragedy happens is still one of my top priorities,” said Ybarra. “I’m certain there’s strong support among citizens and policymakers, and I’m committed to advocating for our kids and their safety.”

Summarizing her response to the governor’s Monday speech, Superintendent Ybarra said, “I believe that Idaho and her schoolchildren will be well served by Gov. Little.”

“I’m very much looking forward to working with Gov. Little, Pro Tem Hill, Speaker Bedke, Chairman Mortimer, Chairman Clow and members of JFAC to ensure local control in our schools is preserved, education is adequately funded, and our kids remain a top priority.”

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