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## **State Board of Education extends soft closure, grants flexibility to schools**

(BOISE) – As Idaho education officials grapple with what the end of this school year will look like amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the State Board of Education unanimously agreed Monday to extend the soft closure but give flexibility to Idaho’s school districts and charter schools as they determine new ways to meet requirements and gauge students’ readiness in high school civics and early reading.

That flexibility extends to whether individual districts and schools reopen in their school facilities later this spring or continue to operate remotely under soft closure, not resuming their traditional school schedule until next fall. The board’s initial order for soft closure would expire April 20, but Monday’s board action means the, soft closure would continue for the remainder of each district or charter school’s calendar for the current school year unless an individual district or school satisfies criteria to reopen. Those criteria will be developed in conjunction with state and local health officials in accordance with national guidelines.

Granting maximum flexibility to districts has been the top priority for Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra, who is in frequent contact with school and district leaders, including weekly webinars discussing all aspects of operation under the pandemic. Each district’s and school’s situation is different as they work to continue instruction and services to students during the soft closure.

Latitude for districts was also the key in two successful motions by Superintendent Ybarra. In one action, the board waived the requirement that a high school semester credit hour equal 60 hours of total instruction while schools deal with the disruption from Covid-19 and transition to distance learning. This will eliminate the need for individual districts and charter schools to submit individual waiver letters to the Department of Education.

In other action, board members agreed to ask Gov. Brad Little to use his executive powers to waive minimum instructional hours and requirements for a high school civics exam and an elementary reading test as part of the student-performance accountability measures Idaho schools are judged on.

Superintendent Ybarra explained that by this point in the year, high school students have learned the required civics material, and individual schools and districts can assess their understanding through other measures than the normally required exam. As for the Idaho Reading Indicator, scheduled to be administered in grades K through 3 in May, schools could still administer the test – remotely if school buildings have not reopened – as a means for teachers and families to see how students are progressing, but the scores would not be factored into the school’s accountability Report Card.

Superintendent Ybarra continues to hold weekly webinars with school administrators and staff to share updates and resources. The State Board of Education will continue to meet at 3 p.m. each Monday to consider additional policy issues that arise.

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