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Critchfield: Civics Education is Essential

From Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield

(BOISE) – There are many things that we learn while we’re in the classroom. Whether we were kindergarteners learning the alphabet or twelfth graders delving into high-level physics, educators provide valuable knowledge during our K-12 years.

Education should create a foundation and then build upon it so those skills are put to work in our everyday lives. Reading, writing, math; these are things that we use daily to get by and get ahead. But what about the skills we use for everyday citizenship? Here in Idaho, we’ve taken meaningful steps to strengthen civics education. For instance, Idaho is one of a handful of states that require a full year of civics instruction and a civics test, and my department worked to make marked improvements to that test during the last legislative session. These improvements will ensure that our students can *prove* that they have a foundation in the framework of the American experience. We’re also building on that foundation with curriculum that emphasizes real-world applications like mock elections, debates and service learning.

Civics – the study of the privileges and obligations of citizens – enables us to value independence and personal responsibility. These are *teachable* qualities, at home *and* school. Civics is not just about history or memorizing the branches of government. It’s about equipping students with the tools they need to think critically, communicate respectfully and participate actively in our democratic system. These are skills that serve not only their own lives, but also the strength and stability of our state and nation.

With this in mind, I have prioritized codifying this learning process for every public school student in Idaho. Related to this, my department has created new curriculum content standards addressing instruction in Western civilization. These proposed new standards would make a comprehensive, two-semester course available to Idaho high school students. The goal is to ensure that in addition to understanding our current rights and obligations as citizens of this great

country, Idaho's students also have a background in and an understanding of the deep roots and rich history of the values that we hold dear.

If successful, this addition to Idaho's social studies standards will be adopted by the State Board of Education and approved by the Idaho legislature, and I am eager to see this valuable learning path benefit our students and shape future citizens, advocates and leaders for Idaho and for the country.

Civics education is not a luxury. It's a foundational part of a free society.

Our students deserve an education that prepares them for citizenship, and I am committed to ensuring that civics remain a central part of that education in every Idaho classroom.

Our responsibility doesn't stop here. Parents, educators, elected officials and local leaders all have a role to play. Our children are watching how we solve problems, how we talk to each other and how we show up for our communities. If we want the next generation to be engaged citizens, we must model what civic responsibility looks like in action.

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