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Teacher pay, retention are prime focus of Supt. Ybarra's 2022 budget ask

(BOISE) – Improving pay for Idaho's veteran teachers and restoring educators' ability to move up on the career ladder is the top priority in the 2021-22 public schools budget request submitted by Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra.

The career ladder was frozen this past spring as part of the pandemic-triggered 5 percent holdback requested of K-12 schools and all state agencies.

"The pandemic has changed many things, including how we deliver instruction to students in many of our schools," Superintendent Ybarra said. "But what hasn't changed is the vital need for K-12 students to get the educational opportunities they deserve. And for that, we need dedicated teachers."

"We continue to struggle with a teacher shortage in Idaho, and the fear and confusion caused by the pandemic have likely aggravated that shortage," Superintendent Ybarra said. "It's essential that we continue to make good on our promise to improve teachers' salaries and reward and retain the experienced teachers who are invaluable to our students, schools and communities."

"I'm also requesting a pay increase for the classified staff members who are also vital to schools' success," the superintendent said.

Her budget request includes \$3.4 million for a 2 percent increase in classified staff's pay and \$21.7 million for restoring the career ladder.

The request also includes a \$10.6 million increase in discretionary funds for school districts and charter schools to cover increased costs for employees' health insurance.

Ybarra's no-frills budget recognizes the economic hardship the Coronavirus pandemic has dealt to Idaho and the nation.

"This budget puts people first, and I am confident we will gain support from legislators and the governor to fulfill the promise of the career ladder and take the steps needed to help our schools and students succeed," Superintendent Ybarra said.

“We will continue to monitor economic indicators, including state revenue forecasts and receipts, and if conditions warrant, I will revise this budget request before the October deadline for budget revisions.”

The request totals \$2 billion in state general funds, an increase of just 1.5 percent above the \$1.97 billion legislators originally approved for the current school year. Although it does unfreeze the career ladder, the budget request does not seek to fully restore other cuts necessitated by the one-time 5 percent holdback.

Nearly a third of Ybarra’s total request -- \$62.7 million -- is nondiscretionary spending required by statute for growth in student numbers and programs including the master educator premium and Advanced Opportunities. Projected growth, particularly in enrollment and participation in the State Department of Education’s highly successful Advanced Opportunities program, necessitates increasing those line items. More and more students are taking full advantage of Advanced Opportunities, which promises \$4,125 to each participating student to jump-start their higher education or career training by earning college credits before graduating high school.

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Attached: Budget summary documents