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## **Mountain Home’s Stephensen Elementary Named Idaho’s First Purple Star School for Support of Military Students and Families**

(BOISE) – Idaho has joined the ranks of states offering support specific to military-connected students with the Purple Star School program. The first school in the state to receive the designation is Mountain Home’s Stephensen Elementary.

Representatives of the school district, military, Superintendent Debbie Critchfield and other dignitaries will be on-hand at the school Thursday, September 26 to celebrate the designation.

The Purple Star School program supports military-connected students through education, advocacy and collaboration that’s designed to address the unique challenges that children of active duty, National Guard and Reserve soldiers face. Some of the common challenges that military-connected families deal with include enrollment, placement in courses, credit transfers, credit requirements and more.

Establishing the program in Idaho was a priority for Critchfield when she took office in 2023. Director of Eastern Idaho Regional Support Services Spencer Barzee has led the project for the Idaho Department of Education.

“This is an important step in the process of ensuring that every type of student in Idaho receives the support they need to excel,” Barzee said. “Administrators and staff at Stephensen Elementary have put in the work to signal to military students and families that their school not only understands their unique needs, but will ensure that those needs are met.”

To receive a Purple Star School designation, schools are asked to strategically implement best practices to respond to the challenges that students face during their transition to a new school. The ultimate goal is to help keep them on track for college, workforce and life. Schools may use strategies that include training a staff member to ease entry into the new academic environment, creating student-led programs to help with social connections, creating a dedicated webpage for military families and more.

In the case of Stephensen Elementary, families and students are provided with a dedicated school liaison officer, Department of Defense-funded counseling services for K-6 students and more. Students and parents arrive at Stephensen supported by administrators and educators who have an understanding of how the educational and military experiences overlap for both students and parents.

“Idaho is a state with a proud history of military service, and this program is an opportunity for our educational communities to demonstrate gratitude for the daily sacrifices made by active servicemembers and their families,” Critchfield said. “I’d like to extend my deepest thanks to Stephensen Elementary for taking the lead and setting a statewide example of what it looks like to successfully prioritize the needs of these deserving families.”

Media interested in attending the September 26 event can reserve a space by contacting Idaho Department of Education Public Information Officer Maggie Reynolds at [mreynolds@sde.idaho.gov](mailto:mreynolds@sde.idaho.gov).

To learn more about the Purple Star School program and what it means for schools, students and families, visit <https://www.sde.idaho.gov/supporting-military-families/>. Schools that have questions or are interested in getting started on their own designation can contact Spencer Barzee at [sbarzee@sde.idaho.gov](mailto:sbarzee@sde.idaho.gov).

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