

# Idaho

*Clay Webber*

As of 2021, the state of Idaho currently has the lowest per-pupil expenditure in the nation, ranking 51<sup>st</sup>.<sup>1</sup> As recent as 2020, Idaho was ahead of Utah in its amount of per-pupil funding, but has now drifted even lower. Over the last several years there has been a push to increase education funding in Idaho, however that progress was disrupted by the Covid19 pandemic. This resulted in the governor's executive order cutting budgets by 5% in 2020. Governor Little also implemented a freeze on teacher salaries in 2020. Unexpectedly, the state announced last December that they predicted a surplus of at least \$600 million dollars in unexpected tax revenue moving into 2021.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the surplus, education received \$100 million more than was originally budgeted due to CARES Act funding in 2021.

## FUNDING PRIORITIES FOR P-12

- **Restoration of 5% Holdback in FY2021 Appropriations:** The 2021 budget restored the 5% holdback and funded education at historically higher levels.<sup>3</sup>
- **Career Ladder:** The career ladder was implemented with the goal of unfreezing and incrementally raising teacher salaries each year, eventually reaching a salary of \$40,000 per year. During the legislative session, the career ladder was fully funded, allocating enough funds to reach the \$40,000 goal. The legislature voted to fund two years of teacher salary raises with a massive \$1.1 Billion.
- **Literacy Initiative:** Lawmakers voted to make this funding permanent in the 2020 legislative session. This action provides continued funding for early elementary reading improvement in the amount of \$26 million, due to the 47% of K-3 students in Idaho behind in reading skills. The budget included a \$20 million increase for literacy and student learning losses during the pandemic.

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1. "Idaho's National Education Spending Ranking Does Not Tell the State's Full School Funding Story." Reason Foundation, March 10, 2021. <https://reason.org/commentary/idahos-national-education-spending-ranking-does-not-tell-the-states-full-school-funding-story/>.

2. "Five Education Issues to Watch during the 2021 Session ..." Accessed November 2, 2021. [https://www.idahopress.com/news/local/five-education-issues-to-watch-during-the-2021-session/article\\_a9fb0b2c-d944-5a38-8046-2c83b678d502.html](https://www.idahopress.com/news/local/five-education-issues-to-watch-during-the-2021-session/article_a9fb0b2c-d944-5a38-8046-2c83b678d502.html).

3. "Idaho State Department of Education (SDE)." SDE. Accessed November 2, 2021. <https://www.sde.idaho.gov/superintendent/leg-priorities.html>.

Clay Webber, Principal of Asbury High School in Albertville, Alabama

- **Social/Emotional Learning:** A \$1 million line-item was included in the budget to help schools train their staff to help students facing social-emotional issues.
- **Opportunity Scholarship:** The legislature continued funding this scholarship program in excess of \$20 million to help Idaho students pay for college.
- **K-12 Funding:** After cuts to the original budget, K-12 spending will decrease by 6 % for 2020-2021.

#### CHANGES TO FUNDING FORMULA FOR P-12

- A new funding formula is needed to address low per-pupil expenditures in the state of Idaho. Idaho was expected to roll out a new funding formula before the pandemic. However, a planning bill was passed instead. A bill to revise the K-12 funding formula never received a hearing in the 2020 legislative session. There were no bills introduced during the 2021 legislative session to revise the formula. Legislators have been discussing a potential rewrite of the funding formula for the last five years, but it remains unchanged.

#### PRESSING STATE ISSUES AFFECTING P-12

- **Education Funding Formula:** A bill to revise the K-12 funding formula never got a hearing in the 2020 legislative session. Legislators have been discussing a potential rewrite of the funding formula for the last four years, but it remains unchanged.
- **Kindergarten Jump-Start Bill:** A bill passed that requires school districts with kindergarten jump-start programs to offer a “training program” for parents, encouraging parents to help their students get ready for kindergarten.<sup>4</sup>
- **Teacher Shortage:** Idaho is still experiencing a teacher shortage that is trending in many states across the nation. According to the Idaho State Department of Education, Idaho loses 10% of its teacher population each year.<sup>5</sup> This is 2% higher than the national average. Idaho’s neighboring states also offer higher salaries to teachers.
- **Lack of Pre-K Program:** A bill creating a state Pre-K program has yet to

4. “Legislative Roundup, 5.4.21: Senate Passes Key Education Budgets, Including Higher Ed.” Idaho Education News, May 6, 2021. <https://www.idahoednews.org/top-news/legislative-roundup-5-4-21-senate-passes-key-education-budgets-including-higher-ed/>.

5. Kyra Finner “Teacher Shortage in Idaho Growing, along with the Rest of the Country.” The Bengal, February 26, 2020. <http://isubengal.com/teacher-shortage-in-idaho-growing-along-with-the-rest-of-the-country/>.

be passed in Idaho. Idaho is one of only four states without a state-funded pre-k.

EXCLUSIVE TO P-12: WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES TO TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL OFFERED BY YOUR STATE? WHAT DOES THE TREND IN FUNDING LOOK LIKE FOR THESE ALTERNATIVES?

- **Charter Schools:** Charter schools do not overwhelmingly impact the Idaho public school system in a negative way. There are 57 charter schools in the state that enroll 24,004 students, 7.8% of the state's total student enrollment. Idaho families have increasingly turned to alternative learning models such as charter and virtual schools during the pandemic.

TOTAL DOLLAR AMOUNT FOR IDAHO'S PER PUPIL EXPENDITURE (EXCLUDING LOCAL AND FEDERAL FUNDING)?

\$7,444

ALLOCATION OF STATE DOLLARS AND PERCENT OF THE STATE BUDGET FOR P-12

- Idaho Public Schools were funded with a total of \$2.048 billion in 2021.<sup>6</sup> This is over a \$74 million increase in funding for education compared to the previous original budget. These numbers do not reflect the CARES Act or ESSER I funds. P-12 schools saw a funding increase of 3.8% overall compared to last year. The legislature cut \$2.5 million from higher education, leaving the funding level at \$629.9 million. The Idaho state budget allocated 48.5% of overall funding to P-12 public schools in within the state.

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6. "Idaho Legislature." Accessed November 2, 2021. <https://legislature.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/budget/publications/Legislative-Budget-Book/2020/Legislative%20Budget%20Book.pdf>.