

Backgrounder - Spokesman-Review Election Center

Idaho Propositions 1, 2 and 3

Whether or not to repeal Idaho's controversial new school reform laws is the hottest election issue in the state this year, with three referenda on the ballot.

A "yes" vote on Propositions 1, 2 and 3 would keep the "Students Come First" laws proposed by state schools Superintendent Tom Luna in place; a "no" vote would repeal them.

Because lawmakers pushed through follow-up bills adding emergency clauses to all three laws after opponents began gathering signatures for the referendum, the laws already have begun being phased in, rather than having been put on hold until the election; but that would stop if voters turn their thumbs down on some or all of the measures.

Luna promoted the reforms as a way to do more in Idaho schools without spending more money, after three years of unprecedented school budget cuts that he called Idaho's "new normal."

Here's what the three measures do:

PROPOSITION 1

This measure rolls back most collective bargaining rights for teachers; makes all contract terms expire every year; limits contract negotiations only to salary and benefits; requires those negotiations to be conducted in open meetings; allows districts to impose terms if negotiations don't yield agreement by a June deadline; and prohibits considering seniority when laying off teachers. It also eliminates an early retirement incentive program for teachers; requires parent input and student achievement to be factored into teacher evaluations; and eliminates the "99 percent" funding protection that school districts previously had when they lost large numbers of students from one year to the next, which previously held their state funding at 99 percent of the previous year's to avoid sudden cutbacks including teacher layoffs. Requires information on liability insurance providers to be distributed to all teachers; in the past, many teachers have purchased such insurance through teachers unions.

PROPOSITION 2

This measure sets up a new merit-pay bonus program for teachers. Initially, teachers could get bonuses if they teach in a school in which student test scores rise, and if student achievement rises by other school district-selected measures. Later, they also could get bonuses for taking on leadership roles or working in hard-to-fill positions. This measure doesn't fund the bonuses, however; the funding is contained in Proposition 3.

PROPOSITION 3

Rewrites Idaho's school funding formulas to direct funds within the public school budget to the reform programs, including merit-pay bonuses, a new program to provide technology boosts including a laptop computer for every Idaho high school student and teacher, and a new focus on online learning.

Redirects a portion of existing state funding for schools to online course providers; the funds would automatically flow from school districts to the providers if students enroll in the courses, with no permission from school districts needed. Reduces state funding for Idaho Digital Learning Academy, a state-operated online course provider, with the idea that it could tap into the same formula as other providers if students choose its classes.

Directs state Board of Education to determine the number of online classes to be required for high school graduation; in response, the board has set that figure at two online classes. Funds dual-credit courses, for both college and high school credit, for students completing high school graduation requirements before their senior year. Shifts \$14.8 million a year from teacher salary funds to help pay for the new programs. Directs funds within the school budget to math and science boosts to meet a new graduation requirement. Permits public colleges to run charter high schools.