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Superintendent Offers Congratulations for Efforts to Continue Broadband Service to Schools

(Boise) Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra offered her appreciation “on behalf of all of Idaho’s school children,” for the swift action of Gov. C.L. “Butch” Otter in promptly signing legislation that sped through the legislature this week to help keep the Idaho Education Network running through the end of the state’s fiscal year.

The legislation appropriates approximately \$3.6 million to the Superintendent of Public Instruction to help pay for broadband connection service for Idaho’s 115 school districts and 48 charter schools. The appropriation was made following the Feb. 11 ruling by Fourth District Judge Patrick Owen that voided the contract Education Networks of America and Century Link had with the Idaho Department of Administration, which had formerly administered all the funds for the IEN.

Ybarra said, “I am pleased by the quick action of the legislature and the governor, to help hold harmless the schools of Idaho, by continuing the IEN, which is vital to Idaho education.”

The bill signed by Otter Wednesday shifts funds for oversight to the superintendent to pay for broadband service through the end of June. Because the previous contract was voided, school districts throughout the state were forced to rapidly acquire new broadband service contracts – in some cases using existing providers and in some cases finding new providers.

In anticipation of the Superintendent being given responsibility for the IEN funds, Ybarra’s chief of technology, Will Goodman, and his staff have been working for the last month with the districts to offer advice on everything from requests for proposals to equipment, changes in IP addresses and new security protocols required by the switchovers. The State Department of Education has been holding daily webinars with the districts during the last week to hear their concerns, answer their questions, and keep them updated on the rapidly moving events that have occurred in the legislature during the last week. Because of the outreach already underway, Ybarra and Goodman believe the transition will be relatively smooth, once completed.

The Superintendent stressed how important keeping the IEN running is for Idaho’s school children. “Thousands of high school students need the IEN for classes they must have to graduate. The IEN is also essential for federally mandated testing later this year. Without the IEN, some districts would even lose their phone service,” she said. “In today’s world, having access to the internet is a vital component of education and communication, and will become even more so, as we prepare to launch (during the next four years) positive changes in education that focuses on the individual.”

Ybarra also commended the local school districts for their ability to react swiftly in finding local providers to continue their broadband service. “That was not easy. Anyone who’s ever tried to change just their personal internet service has an idea of the significant problems the local districts were forced to address. This shows how quickly locally controlled districts can react when given the opportunity.”