



## IDAHO SCHOOL READINESS ACT

Research shows that only 51 percent of Idaho's students are ready to learn when they enter kindergarten. That means they can recognize basic letters and numbers and write their name. Another 49 percent are not ready to do these things. The percentage of children not ready to learn is substantially higher for Latino and low-income children.

Statically speaking, the nearly 50 percent of children who are not ready to learn will have great difficulty ever catching up with their peers. That means they won't be able to read proficiently by 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade when schools stop teaching kids how to read. It increases the chances that they will drop out of school, certainly not go on to post-secondary, and likely end up on social services or in the criminal justice system.

Despite these troubling statistics, Idaho is one of only six states that spends no money getting kids ready to learn by kindergarten. That is the case even though Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman from the University of Chicago and other researchers estimate that for every dollar invested in school readiness taxpayers can save significantly more on downstream taxpayer costs.

Other states have embraced school readiness because they know it works. One of those states is Mississippi which passed comprehensive legislation three years ago to get its children ready to learn when they enter kindergarten.

***IBE believes that if they can do it in Mississippi, we can do it in Idaho!*** That's because politically, economically, geographically and culturally Idaho and Mississippi are almost most mirror images of each other.

What has become known as the "Mississippi Plan" for school readiness contains many of the components that IBE believes the Idaho Legislature could eventually embrace, including parental choice and local control. So IBE has spent several months working with other stakeholders to come up with what we call the "Idaho Plan" or officially the *Idaho School Readiness Act*. It contains the best of the Mississippi Plan with modifications that will make it even more attractive to Idahoans.

### **In summary, here is what the *Idaho School Readiness Act* would do:**

- It would give parents the *choice* of getting their four-year-olds ready to learn either in off-site programs or in the home. Or they can choose neither option. The programs would be entirely voluntary.
- For off-site programs, the state would play two roles. First, the State Board of Education would establish the guidelines that define a “high-quality” school readiness program. Second, the Legislature would provide 50 percent of the funding for students enrolled in off-site school readiness programs.
- Local communities would come together and create “Collaboratives.” These Collaboratives would be responsible for coming up with the other 50 percent of the funding and choosing the local programs that will be funded.
- Collaboratives could include the local school district, charter schools, businesses, United Ways, local YMCAs, Rotary Clubs, other civic organizations and foundations. Any group that wants to be part of the solution and has resources to offer can belong to a Collaborative.
- Each Collaborative would select a “lead partner” that would apply to the state for matching funding and administer the project. Once approved for funding by the state, the local Collaborative would decide which program or programs in the community meet the specifications of “high quality” and provide funding for seats in the program.
- A priority would be given to four-year-olds who come from low-income families or communities that historically have low kindergarten readiness scores.
- Local school districts, charter districts, for-profit and non-profit programs could all qualify to become school readiness providers in the local community and receive state and local funding if they meet the “high-quality standards” set by the State Board of Education.

### **That covers how the “off-site” provision of the *Idaho School Readiness Act* would work. Here is how the “at-home” investment would work:**

- The Idaho School Readiness Act would provide state funding in two ways for parents who want to get their children ready at home. First, the state would contract with a provider to install technology and software in homes with which parents can help prepare their four-year-olds for kindergarten. Second, the state would fund “parents as teachers” programs where a trainer goes into homes and helps give parents the skills to get their children school ready.
- The Act contains an “accountability” provision. Any parent who agrees to accept state money must agree to have their child screened for reading readiness *whether or not* they are enrolled for kindergarten. The effectiveness of both off-site and at-home programs would be measured by whether students are ready to learn based on the fall Idaho Reading Indicator.

**In summary, the Idaho School Readiness Act contains several provisions that fit Idaho:**

- Participation is voluntary
- Parents choose the best program for their children
- Children can learn off-site or in the home
- Local communities have a financial stake and run the program
- The state plays a supportive role
- All programs are accountable – effectiveness is objectively measured

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