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CFAC Request from the State Board of Education, Matt Freeman, Executive Director

Please submit public comments by 5:00 p.m. MT, Monday, June 22, 2020, to:

- Board@osbe.idaho.gov

Request to the Coronavirus Financial Advisory Committee (CFAC) from the State Board of Education

The State Board of Education (Board) requests funding in the amount of \$34M for two initiatives, one for a postsecondary digital campus and one for mini-grants to K-12 districts and charter schools to close the gap known as the digital divide.

When the spread of COVID-19 and the resultant stay at home order issued by the Governor required the sudden closure of K-12 schools and postsecondary campuses, moving classes online became an urgent and immediate necessity. During the rapid transition to remote delivery of instruction, technology at schools and institutions was pushed to its limits, and gaps in technology infrastructure emerged. In the K-12 system, many rural and economically disadvantaged students lacked the devices that would connect them to online curriculum. Students were also faced with the ability to continue within their current curriculum and parents were tasked with assuring that their students were able to continue their studies with as little impact as possible, often while balancing their own challenging work schedules. The funding to provide students with technology to connect to their new online classroom was not part of the previous year's appropriation.

At the postsecondary level, students found themselves adapting to a fully online or distance learning platform within a matter of days. While the institutions already deliver a large number of courses and programs online, none were prepared to offer all spring catalog courses fully online mid-semester. The public colleges and universities were already responding to constrained financial resources and thus found themselves under more significant fiscal pressure as they were called upon to deliver courses exclusively online. They attempted to manage this shift to online delivery while also vacating campuses to the extent possible; continuing to meet the health, safety, and residence life needs of students who had no home in which to return; and processing room and board refunds, among many other concerns.

In order to better support the spectrum of students across the Idaho public education system, the Board submits two requests that address these needs that were identified in the wake of the public health crisis. Each request meets the three-pronged requirements of the U.S. Department of the Treasury for CARES Act funding as follows: (1) enable higher education institutions and the K-12 school system to help address the needs of students directly impacted by the public health emergency; (2) create a response which was not addressed in the most recent budget; and (3) allow for expenses to be incurred between the time of award and December 31, 2020.

Postsecondary Digital Campus (\$4 million)

Idaho requires an immediate yet nimble response to the public health emergency for current and future postsecondary students. Strategic investment in a technology and support ecosystem for postsecondary online education is what Idaho needs to deliver resilient teaching and learning opportunities going forward. The exigencies of the pandemic have compelled the Board to submit a request for \$4 million

from CFAC to support laying the foundation of a statewide digital campus that will provide high quality, online postsecondary opportunities for Idahoans, no matter their life circumstances or where they live in the state.

“College is especially important for students from low-income families, who stand to benefit the most from the upward economic mobility that higher education can provide. At the same time, the current crisis has created new uncertainties for these students in particular.” (Carnevale, A. P. 2020, June 11. *We Can't Let COVID-19 Derail College Dreams for Low-Income Students*. Retrieved June 17, 2020, from <https://medium.com/georgetown-cew/we-cant-let-covid-19-derail-college-dreams-for-low-income-students-a1eadd61a5cf>).

Uncertainties for low-income and minority families may include unemployment or job loss, reluctance to accrue student loan debt, fear of a second wave of COVID-19, etc. Yet, we know that “[h]aving some college education raises lifetime earnings, enabling workers to earn 14 percent more on average than they would with no more than a high school diploma. The earnings premium over having no more than a high school diploma rises to 23 percent with an associate’s degree, 66 percent with a bachelor’s degree, and 123 percent with graduate education.” (Carnevale, 2020)

As a state, we have a window of opportunity to invest in a powerful resource which could mitigate the potential of a generational setback in our efforts to increase Idaho’s college-going rate and close the equity gap for low-income and minority students. A postsecondary digital campus would facilitate and increase access to online/distance learning courses, programs, degrees and support services for all students – especially those who are place-bound, time-bound, or otherwise unable to attend face-to-face classes due to health concerns and other life circumstances.

The specific digital campus model that is right for Idaho is being developed by Board staff, but the purpose and vision for what this entity will accomplish is clear: greater educational access for all Idahoans. Our digital campus strategy is meant to help fortify high-quality online postsecondary opportunities for Idahoans in the wake of the pandemic. No current funding exists for such an investment, and the request from the OSBE is for an initial infusion of resources to create the capacity to coordinate and develop this technology and support an ecosystem for online education in this calendar year.

Aid to Lessen the Digital Divide (\$30 million)

Many students do not have the necessary devices and are unable to access the technology necessary for connectivity to school resources. This proposal seeks to narrow the gap between students and educational resources, known as the digital divide. The Board is requesting \$30M to provide mini grants to school districts and charter schools to help close the digital divide by the start of the 2020-2021 school year (August 2020) and prepare school districts and charter schools to pivot to a blended learning model— an educational model that blends in-seat, in-person teaching with an online pedagogical model.

The grant program would be managed by the State Department of Education, using a framework developed through a Digital Divide Committee of the Governor’s K-12 Emergency Council. Grants would be awarded to school districts and charter schools to enable them to support blended learning strategies to assure quality and equitable instruction for all students.

Grants would provide funding for expenses incurred between March 1, 2020 and December 30, 2020, to provide:

- Devices to students
- Connectivity to students
- Infrastructure to staff/schools
- Adaptive Technology for providing instruction and support for special education students
- A statewide Learning Management System (LMS)
- Professional development to teachers related to effective online teaching and LMS use

During the 2020 spring term schools were forced to shutter their doors in response to the Coronavirus pandemic to keep students, staff, and their communities safe. During this same period, schools attempted to fulfill their responsibility to continue to provide instruction and other supports to their students. In order to continue to provide instruction, schools found they needed to grapple with issues around students not having devices or connectivity to the internet in order to participate in online learning opportunities. Idaho's rural and low-income families were impacted the hardest by these issues. During this time, this digital divide exacerbated student achievement gaps between Idaho's groups of historically underserved student populations as these students struggled to stay connected to their schools and teachers and continue their learning.

Idaho has a constitutional responsibility to provide a uniform, thorough, and free system of public education. The pandemic forced school districts and charter schools (local education agencies, or LEAs) to close their doors for continued periods of time in order to lessen the spread of COVID-19. Many LEAs incurred expenses to purchase tools necessary to continue providing and delivering quality instruction. A number of LEAs were not able to fully acquire tools necessary to continue providing and delivering quality instruction.

Providing quality online or remote instruction requires that students have devices to connect to their schools' online learning environments, connectivity for those devices, a learning management system or hybrid online platform for delivering instruction, and training for teachers and staff to use the tools and work with students in a way that keeps them connected and engaged in the learning. Due to variations in size, resources, and local priorities, LEAs in Idaho are at various points along the digital divide continuum. LEAs with existing programs providing one-to-one devices to their students may have a greater need to provide professional development to their instructional staff to provide quality online or blended instruction. LEAs with robust learning management systems and instructional staff with a track record of using these systems may have greater need for student connectivity and devices.

The Board has collected feedback from the Governor's K-12 Emergency Council and through surveys to LEAs. The surveys have focused on identifying priority areas for LEAs to provide equitable, quality instruction to all students and additional supports for special education students arising from building closures and social distancing requirements necessary to keep students and staff safe during the pandemic. LEAs have indicated their highest priority during the pandemic is to enhance capabilities for remote/online learning at the local level. LEAs have also identified the need for maximum flexibility in order to provide blended learning to their students. The K-12 Emergency Council asked LEAs for an estimate on the number of devices needed by grade band, number of families/students and teachers that need connectivity at home and the number of educators that need professional development or training around delivery of on-line instruction. LEAs indicated they had the most difficulty in quantifying the need for connectivity, and estimated, in addition to professional development, they would need the following to address the digital divide at the local level:

Devices		Connectivity		Professional Development	
Total Devices	114,180	Total Homes	19,329	Total Educators	15,696
Teachers	8,209	Teachers	1,462		
Students	105,971	Students	17,867		
K-3	32,555			K-3	8,101
4-6	24,234			4-6	2,625
7-12	49,182			7-12	4,970

* Numbers updated 6/15 based on additional responses received from LEAs

The Board recognizes the \$30M request will not be enough to close the digital divide for all students. LEAs would use grant funds in coordination with existing technology funds to offset the added expenses caused by the pandemic in order to provide continued instruction to students during the pandemic. Should the funds be made available, the Board would coordinate the use of these funds and other CARES Act funding and initiatives along with private partnerships to leverage the greatest benefit for all Idaho students.

A separate request, not included in the State Board's request, comes from the Council for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CDHH). This request is for \$26,600 to purchase approximately 30 iPads (with cellular data plan). CDHH would make the iPads available on loan to help the deaf community communicate, access information in American Sign Language, work remotely from home, and communicate with telehealth providers. In order to reduce the number of actions for CFAC, Chairman Adams has recommended that the CDHH's request be included in the State Board's technology request.