



BLUUM
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PARENTS' GUIDE

to Idaho's School and Learning Choices



AUTUMN 2016

About Bluum

Bluum is a nonprofit organization committed to ensuring Idaho's children reach their fullest potential by cultivating great leaders and innovative schools. Bluum believes that school choice helps families, children and educators achieve more and do better. Bluum works to help Idaho become a national model for how to maximize learning opportunities for children and families.

Bluum seeks to empower and support educators who take risks and put children first by:

- » developing innovative leaders;
- » growing successful school models;
- » sharing research and learning innovations; and
- » providing school support and management help.

For more information, visit bluum.org.



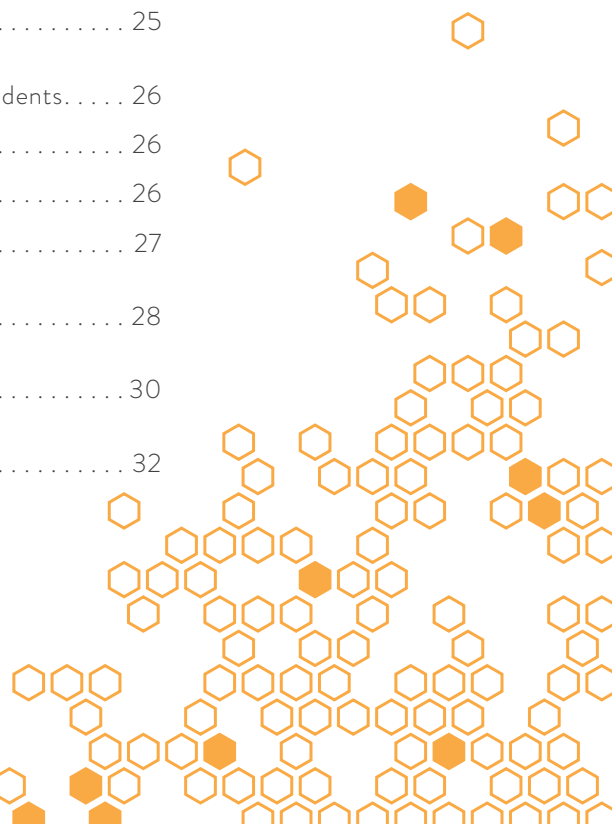
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FOREWORD

by Terry Ryan and
Suzanne Metzgar

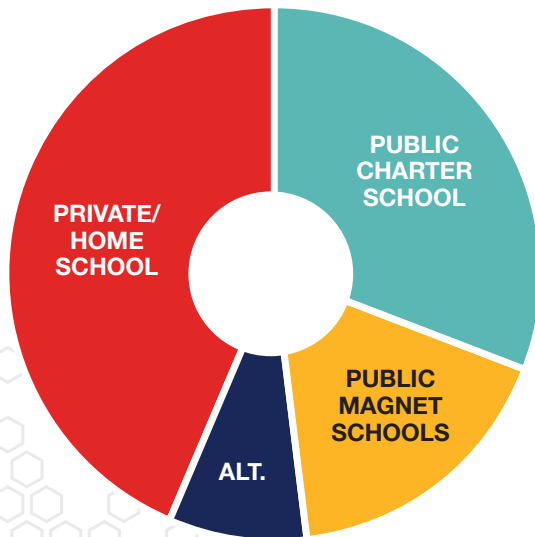
We've had the extraordinary opportunity to visit many schools across the Gem State - public district, public magnet, public charter, alternative, private, parochial and online. No matter the school type or the location, one common theme we've found in every school is parents who want the very best opportunities for their children.

"We've created this Parents' Guide to empower parents!"

We've created this Parents Guide to empower parents! We want to provide a resource that defines your options and offers ideas for how best to take advantage of these for your child(ren). We believe that providing information about Idaho's many — and growing — learning options can help parents make better choices for their families.

Because there's no one school that's going to be "good" for every student or family, we've also created an online tool to help parents make an active choice based on whether a school is high quality, and also whether it is a good fit for your child and family. You can find our Choosing a School Guide on our website.

Of the 321,056 or so Idaho K-12 students, approximately 20 percent attend a school of choice rather than their traditional neighborhood school. More than 11,000 Idaho students are on wait lists for public magnet and public charter schools.



Students in Schools of Choice: 65,099

- ◆ 26,791 private and home-school students
- ◆ 20,219 public charter school students
- ◆ 12,317 public magnet school students
- ◆ 5,772 alternative school students

(sources: Idaho SDE Public Records Reports; NCES Private elementary and secondary schools, enrollment, teachers, and high school graduates, by state)

In coming years, Idaho is set to grow more school options; including public Innovation Schools, an independent “unschool” in Boise, at least two new parochial schools and several new public charters schools. Added to the expanding list of school options available to parents and children are a growing number of course choices, dual-credit opportunities and other alternative learning options that go well beyond the traditional offerings of brick-and-mortar classrooms. Students across the state are taking a variety of courses through Khan Academy and even gaining credits through online programs like the Idaho Digital Learning Academy.

“20 percent of [Idaho’s students] attend a school of choice...”



We believe that K-12 education should provide personalized opportunities to meet the needs, interests and skills of individual students so that they can grow and succeed in college and beyond. We are so grateful to live and work in a state where families have an expanding number of options to choose the learning opportunities that best fit their child’s needs. This guide – and our online Choosing a School Guide – is written to help parents navigate these choices so you can connect your child to what works best for him or her.



A Note About the Numbers

The numbers in this guide are the most accurate and up to date we could cite from public and private sources. There are a few gaps in the data, however, which is why you will find an “approximately” before the number of students in online and alternative schools.

We weren’t able to source numbers from every alternative school or program in Idaho. Not all alternative schools or programs enroll students every year. Schools or programs with fewer than 10 students are generally not listed among the state’s numbers because of privacy concerns.

The state does not track private school enrollment; those numbers came from Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results from the 2011-12 Private School Universe Study published in 2013 by the National Center for Educational Statistics.

We hope you’ll consider these numbers as a snapshot in time of Idaho’s ever-evolving student population and its numbers.

Thanks to the support and assistance of the Idaho Department of Education, especially Kelly Everitt, communications specialist and Tina Polishchuk, advanced opportunity coordinator. Their support and expertise was critical in our ability to get the numbers that are shared throughout this report. Thanks also to the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation for its ongoing support and trust.



INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC EDUCATION IN IDAHO

Idaho's public school system was established by the Territorial Legislature in 1864. Lewiston Public Schools was chartered in December 1880 as the state's first public school district, while the Boise Independent School District followed soon thereafter in February 1881. School districts have provided Idaho's students with free public education ever since. By the early 1940s Idaho had 1,082 school districts, but through a series of consolidations, the number of school districts was reduced to 116 by 1961.

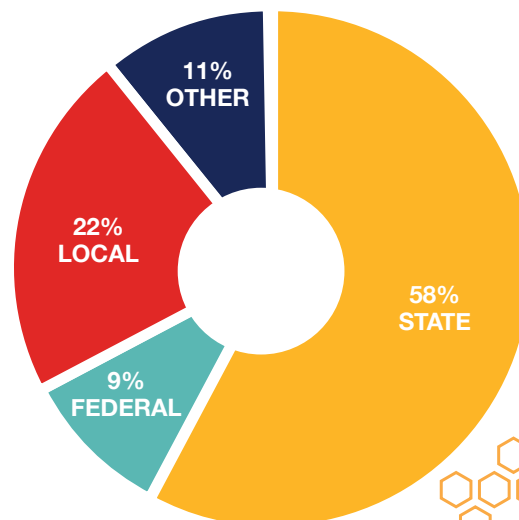
Today, Idaho's public school districts range from tiny Three Creek Joint Elementary School District, which has never served more than 18 students, to West Ada School District, which educates more than 36,000 students. In fact, West Ada's Mountain View High School, which enrolls more than 2,000 students, is by itself larger than 75 percent of the state's school districts.

Public schools are operated by locally elected public school boards, and receive money from various public sources (local, state and federal). School districts are organized around geographic lines, and as of April 2015 there are 115 districts in Idaho. A district may include only one school building or a number of public schools, based on population. For example, there are 18 districts in Idaho with only one school building, while the West Ada School District operates 53 buildings and an online school.

Idaho residents pay taxes to support the operation of public schools. Money for Idaho's public schools comes from state general and dedicated funds, local funds and federal funds. State funds pay for about 58% of public education costs, while federal sources cover about 9 percent. The rest is a mix of local dollars.

Every year, the Idaho Legislature decides how much state money public schools will receive; the Legislature also sets standards for how much teachers should be paid. The funding formula for Idaho's public schools is complicated. It's based on:

- » number of students enrolled adjusted for attendance
- » teacher salaries
- » a portion of teacher benefits
- » a portion of busing costs (if provided by the school)
- » some 25 other funding categories for specific items that schools might access



Sources of Idaho Public School Funding

(source: The 2014-2015 Financial Summaries of All Schools)

“West Ada’s Mountain View High School, which enrolls more than 2,000 students, is by itself larger than 75 percent of the state’s school districts.”

PUBLIC DISTRICT SCHOOLS

Public school districts can raise additional money by passing local public levies and bonds or by applying for federal and private grants or subsidies. Public schools also receive 50 percent of the Idaho Lottery’s net funds. Idaho public schools on average spend \$6,821 per enrolled student, but these numbers mask big differences across school districts. For example, Boise Independent School District spends \$9,487 per enrolled student while Nampa School District operates at \$6,809 per enrolled student. This discrepancy is largely the result of local property tax values. ZIP code often determines how much money is spent on a child’s education.

“Idaho public schools on average spend \$6,821 per enrolled student.”

HOW MUCH WILL I PAY IF MY CHILD GOES TO A PUBLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL?

Idaho’s public schools do not charge tuition. As a parent, you may be asked to provide a list of school supplies for your child, such as pencils, paper, crayons, binders and backpacks. These items are not required, but they are often strongly encouraged. Some schools have supply-sharing programs to help children and their families get the tools they need – be sure to check with your child’s school if you need assistance.

You’ll be expected to pay for your child’s lunch unless your student qualifies for a free or reduced-price subsidy. You may also be asked to offset costs associated with other activities, such as sports, band or field trips. These costs vary from school district to school district.

How many public school districts does Idaho have?

115

How many public district schools does Idaho have?

674

How many students attend public district schools in Idaho?

274,046

PUBLIC DISTRICT SCHOOLS

WHY WOULD THIS TYPE OF SCHOOL BE A GOOD CHOICE FOR MY CHILD?

Public schools operated by school districts are by far the most popular option for American students. For many families, the locations of their homes are, in large part, driven by the quality of their local public schools. Public district schools pose few costs to parents, and many existing costs — such as school lunches — are eligible for federal subsidies. Public district schools also have the most established transportation network, making them a good option for busy working parents. Most school districts are also able to offer a host of extracurricular activities, including competitive sports programs.

“ZIP code often determines how much money is spent on a child’s education.”

// PUBLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL SNAPSHOT //

SANDPOINT HIGH SCHOOL

Where is it? **Sandpoint**

How many students does it serve? **1,000**

Grades: **9-12**

About Sandpoint High School (SHS): Sandpoint High School’s curriculum is focused on 21st Century skills that prepare its students for career and college. SHS emphasizes problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration and real-world application. Its curriculum is framed by the Idaho Common Core Standards, and in partnership with its community, SHS strives to develop well-rounded and passionate students and citizens.

For more information, visit sh.lposd.org.



PUBLIC INNOVATION SCHOOLS

In 2016, the Idaho State Legislature passed House Bill No. 570, which established the Local Innovation School Act. It gives local school boards the authority to create new innovation schools that are held to high academic and performance standards, but are allowed to operate independently from most state and local school district rules and regulations. The act allows for innovation through a carefully managed pilot for up to 10 innovation schools around Idaho each year for five years.

The first innovation school is scheduled to open in the autumn of 2017.

HOW DO PUBLIC INNOVATION SCHOOLS WORK?

Public innovation schools are part of the local public school district and operate under the locally elected school board and administration. Public innovation schools are schools of choice – children are enrolled based on their interest in the school’s particular academic or programmatic theme, not based upon where they live.

WHO PAYS FOR PUBLIC INNOVATION SCHOOLS?

By law, the school district must allocate the same resources to an innovation school as its other schools, and will allocate the funds with much more school-based control over time, people, and money. The district will also oversee expenditures in a broad way, ensuring compliance with all state regulations and fiscal controls, yet with maximum flexibility within these legally mandated structures.

HOW MUCH WILL I PAY IF MY CHILD GOES TO A PUBLIC INNOVATION SCHOOL?

Like all of Idaho’s public schools, public innovation schools will not charge tuition. You’ll be expected to have your child bring or pay for their lunch unless your student qualifies for a free or reduced-price subsidy. You may also be asked to offset costs associated with other activities, such as sports or field trips. These costs vary from school district to school district.

WHY WOULD THIS TYPE OF SCHOOL BE A GOOD CHOICE FOR MY CHILD?

Public innovation schools will allow parents to find a school program that works best for their situation by setting up their child’s education around a particular area of focus.

These might include:

- » serving a targeted population such as at-risk students or gifted students;
- » offering opportunities for community engagement;
- » offering different and flexible schedules; and
- » offering a creative use of online learning opportunities that blend classroom and home learning.

// PUBLIC INNOVATION SCHOOL SNAPSHOT //

TREASURE VALLEY LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

TREASURE VALLEY LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

For years, many students within the Nampa School District (NSD) have struggled academically. Compared to the state average on the 2015 Spring ISAT, Nampa scored well below other districts in reading and mathematics. Couple that with the needs of a 21st Century job market that demands highly competent and skilled workers, it was time for NSD to try something radically different to effect change in its schools.

SETTING THE COURSE FOR INNOVATION

In 2014, NSD brought in veteran Washington state educator David Peterson as superintendent. The district's goal – be the most innovative school district in Idaho. In addition to authorizing two public charter schools, NSD will soon be one of the first districts in Idaho to launch an innovation school, called the Treasure Valley Leadership Academy. The school is scheduled to open fall 2017, serve approximately 200 ninth and tenth graders, and will grow to about 600 9-12 students by 2021.



// PUBLIC INNOVATION SCHOOL SNAPSHOT //
TREASURE VALLEY LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

SETTING NAMPA'S OWN COURSE

Working closely with Dr. Eric Kellerer, director of the NNU Doceo Center at Northwest Nazarene University, and with planning support from the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation, the Treasure Valley Leadership Academy's goal is to empower all students to direct their own learning, develop grit and be future-ready. According to Superintendent Peterson, students will master competencies in four areas:

- » personal academic excellence
- » lifelong learning and citizenship
- » innovative thinking and action, and
- » transformational leadership

Students will be working on real-world problems and issues in their community. "We're very interested in the nonacademic piece of equipping our students with an understanding of social justice and making a difference for folks in their community, whether it's their family or a larger definition of community. We believe providing this high-quality, personalized learning experience tied to real-world issues will lead to extraordinary success for our students." said Peterson.

"One of the things we hear from high school students is that they don't believe what they're learning is relevant to real-world situations," added Dr. Eric Kellerer. "We want the students to connect the dots and we'll be working hard to build that into the curriculum."

IMPROVING HIGHER-EDUCATION SUCCESS

Treasure Valley Leadership Academy is also focused on student success and paving the way to higher education. "Our intent is that our students graduate with an AA degree," said Superintendent Peterson. "And because our students will be getting two years of college paid for by earning dual credits, we can show them that they can be successful in college and help lift the financial barrier to college."

"We believe providing this high-quality, personalized learning experience tied to real-world issues will lead to extraordinary success for our students."



// PUBLIC INNOVATION SCHOOL SNAPSHOT //

TREASURE VALLEY LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

A LIGHTHOUSE FOR IDAHO'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In addition to student success, the Treasure Valley Leadership Academy's goal is to also serve as a replicable model in its own district and throughout the state. "We want Treasure Valley Leadership Academy to be a lighthouse for our state's schools," said David Peterson.

"One of the reasons we wanted this to be a district school is that once an innovation school like Treasure Valley Leadership Academy quickly outgrows itself, parents will demand that they have an innovation school choice in their district," added Dr. Eric Kellerer. "We've already seen that happen in other innovation schools around the country and want to see that happen here in Idaho."

ABOUT NAMPA SCHOOL DISTRICT

NSD serves 15,000 students in 27 schools. Student demographics include 63% white and 30% Hispanic or Latino students, and 66% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The district also serves and supports 1,400 special-education and 1,000 homeless students.

For more information, visit nsd131.org.



PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

A charter school is an independently run public school that is granted greater flexibility in its operations in return for greater performance accountability. The “charter” establishing each school is a performance contract detailing the school’s mission, program, students served, performance goals and accountability metrics. As public schools, charters are free and open to all families. Charter schools are schools of choice. Students and parents have to make a proactive decision to attend a charter school. If the school does not meet their needs, they can leave and find another school that does.

“...charters are free and open to all families.”

HOW DO PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS WORK?

Charter schools are started and governed by parents, educators and/or school innovators, but to operate a charter school, a governing board needs to get approval from a charter school authorizer. In Idaho, school districts, the state’s public charter school commission and universities are the only organizations that may authorize public charter schools. Charters are required to adhere to the same state academic standards as district schools, and charter students must take the same state academic assessments as their district school peers. Both district and charter schools receive state academic report cards.

The charter idea in America goes back to the late 1980s. At the start, charters were seen as escape hatches for children who were stuck in schools that were failing, or that were simply not meeting the needs of particular students. In 2014, there were more than 6,700 public charter schools serving more than 2.9 million students in 41 states and the District of Columbia. Parental demand for charters far outpaces supply, with more than 1 million children’s names on waiting lists nationwide. The first charter schools opened in Idaho in 1999, and charter school growth has nearly quadrupled since then.

WHO PAYS FOR PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS?

In Idaho, public charter schools are funded by the state based on a formula (see **Introduction to Public Education in Idaho** for more information) that applies to all students. Like public district schools, the money follows the students.

Charter schools receive the same state and federal dollars that district schools receive. However, public charter schools are not allowed to raise local tax dollars and are prohibited from raising money by public bond or levy. This means that public charter schools cannot easily offset the cost of their facilities. The Public Charter School Facilities Equalization fund helps to close that gap, but even with that help public charter schools receive approximately 22 percent less per pupil on average than public district schools.

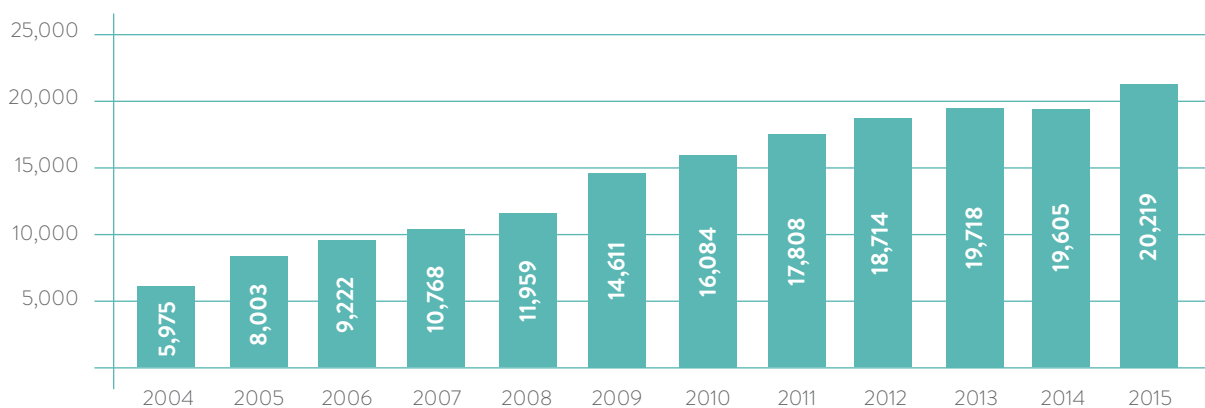
Public charter schools, like public school districts, are allowed to fundraise, and many do. Both charter schools and district schools are allowed to seek private and public grant dollars, and sometimes charter schools and school districts work together on grant opportunities.

PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

HOW MUCH WILL I PAY IF MY CHILD GOES TO A PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL?

Public charter schools are free, just like traditional public schools, but there may still be costs associated with your child's schooling. Some schools require uniforms, for example. If your child participates in sports, the school may or may not pay for expenses such as equipment or field maintenance. If your child's public charter school doesn't have access to a bus system, you may spend money on transportation costs. Some public charter schools make up for these expenses through volunteer participation. Be sure to ask the school's administrator about additional costs.

IDAHO CHARTER SCHOOL ENROLLMENT GROWTH



(source: Idaho SDE Charter School Growth Trends by Enrollment)

How many public charter schools does Idaho have?

48

How many students attend public charter schools in Idaho?

20,219

PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

WHY WOULD THIS TYPE OF SCHOOL BE A GOOD CHOICE FOR MY CHILD?

Children are so varied in their needs and abilities that no single educational model works for all students in all circumstances. Charter schools allow parents to find a school program that works best for their situation by setting up their child’s education around a particular area of focus. These might include:

- » a particular teaching method, such as Montessori method or Core Knowledge;
- » a specific subject such as art, music or science;
- » theme-based curriculum such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate or language immersion;
- » serving a targeted population such as at-risk students or gifted students;
- » offering extended-day programs or creative use of online learning opportunities that blend classroom and home learning.

// PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL SNAPSHOT //

NORTH IDAHO STEM CHARTER ACADEMY

Where is it? **Rathdrum**

How many students does it serve? **434**

Grades: **K-11**

About North Idaho STEM Charter Academy: North Idaho STEM Charter Academy is dedicated to providing its students a challenging learning environment in science, technology, engineering and math, which maximizes individual potential and ensures students are well-equipped to meet the challenges in the world around them. “The greatest benefit is watching our students find their talents, take risks, accept challenges, and learn to think for themselves. They find out that failure is not a bad word - it’s just one step in the process toward success,” say school leaders Scott and Colleen Thomson. The school will add 12th grade and grow to 535 students in 2017.

For more information, visit northidahostemcharteracademy.org.



PUBLIC MAGNET SCHOOLS

Magnet schools are public schools that draw students from across a particular school district. Each school has a special focus, such as the arts, language, or science and technology. Unlike charter schools, a magnet school is part of the local public school district. But unlike traditional district schools that draw students from specific boundaries, magnet schools exist outside of zoned school boundaries.

“Public magnet schools offer children more choices within their school district.”

HOW DO PUBLIC MAGNET SCHOOLS WORK?

Magnet schools are part of the local public school district and operate under the locally elected school board and administration. Magnet schools are schools of choice – children are enrolled based on their interest in the school’s particular academic or programmatic theme, not based upon where they live.

WHO PAYS FOR PUBLIC MAGNET SCHOOLS?

Magnet schools are public schools and are funded using the same formula as public district schools. See **Introduction to Public Education in Idaho** for more information.

HOW MUCH WILL I PAY IF MY CHILD GOES TO A PUBLIC MAGNET SCHOOL?

Public magnet schools, just like all other Idaho public schools (district and charter), are free. You may be asked to supplement your child’s learning expenses by contributing school supplies or money for extracurricular activities.

How many public magnet schools does Idaho have?

23

How many students attend public magnet schools in Idaho?

12,317

PUBLIC MAGNET SCHOOLS

WHY WOULD THIS TYPE OF SCHOOL BE A GOOD CHOICE FOR MY CHILD?

Public magnet schools offer children more choices within their school district. They're also a great opportunity for children to immerse themselves in a specific discipline, such as the humanities or technology. Although the focus at magnet schools may be different than traditional public schools, students must still meet the same state and federal education standards. Students may also be exposed to more economic and cultural diversity among their fellow students than at a traditional neighborhood public school.

// PUBLIC MAGNET SCHOOL SNAPSHOT //

PIONEER SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

Where is it? **Boise**

How many students does it serve? **700**

Grades: **K-5**

About Pioneer School of the Arts: Pioneer is a K-5 magnet arts program that strives to foster a safe, supportive and intellectually stimulating learning environment. Pioneer's staff responds to the needs of all learners by differentiating instruction, integrating visual and performing arts, and instilling a lifelong love of learning. The school's instruction is a synthesis of traditional core instruction and innovative arts integration that supports the intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and artistic development of the "whole child."

For more information, visit westada.org/Domain/27.



PRIVATE, RELIGIOUS AND PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS

Idaho's first school was a religious school established in 1836 by the Presbyterian missionary Henry Spalding. The school was founded for children of the Nez Perce in Lapwai. Private, religious and parochial schools have long been part of Idaho's education landscape, offering a valuable alternative to the state's traditional public school system.

HOW DO PRIVATE, RELIGIOUS AND PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS WORK?

All religious and parochial (mostly Catholic) schools are private, but not all private schools are religious. In Idaho, a private school is any school that doesn't receive public funding (home schooling is not considered a private school). Religious schools are private schools that teach through a religious lens (in Idaho, these schools are often Christian) and incorporate faith into the curriculum. Parochial schools are religious schools that are part of a specific parish (such as Catholic schools).

WHO PAYS FOR PRIVATE AND PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS?

Idaho's constitution strictly prohibits any state or local public tax dollars from going to any private or religious schools. These schools charge families tuition. Private and religious schools may also receive outside funding from grants, religious institutions, fundraisers and donations. Parochial schools oftentimes receive money to operate from their local parish.

“Idaho’s constitution strictly prohibits any state or local public tax dollars from going to any private or religious schools.”

How many private and parochial schools does Idaho have?

Approximately 124

How many students attend private and parochial schools in Idaho?

Approximately 11,262

PRIVATE, RELIGIOUS AND PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS

HOW MUCH WILL I PAY IF MY CHILD ATTENDS A PRIVATE SCHOOL?

Tuition and fees are set by each school and vary wildly. In Idaho, tuition ranges from \$250 per student per year to up to \$25,550 per student per year. Some private schools offer tuition breaks for families that enroll more than one student, and some also have private scholarship assistance. The state of Idaho offers a tax credit for contributions to Idaho Educational entities, and this includes both private and public (district and charter) schools.

WHY WOULD THIS TYPE OF SCHOOL BE A GOOD CHOICE FOR MY CHILD?

Private and parochial schools aren't bound by the same laws as public schools, which gives them the freedom to mix faith and education or to develop a nontraditional curriculum. Private schools are free of all state testing and academic accountability requirements. Idaho code does put legal parameters around things like compulsory attendance and minimum curriculum requirements.

// PRIVATE RELIGIOUS SCHOOL SNAPSHOT //

GRACE LUTHERAN SCHOOL

Where is it? **Pocatello**

How many students does it serve? **407**

Grades: **PK-9**

About Grace Lutheran School: Grace Lutheran School promotes excellence in education, nurturing children in an environment of compassion and reaching out with the love of Christ. The curriculum is focused on math, science, technology, English, social studies, foreign language, fine arts, music and Christian studies. The school also provides access to formal training and practice in fine arts, music, drama, performance and regular physical education. Grace Lutheran is opening a high school in the fall of 2017 and will grow to 490 students by 2018.

For more information, visit gls-pocatello.org.



ONLINE AND BLENDED LEARNING SCHOOLS

America's digital natives don't think twice about taking classes from a teacher in another state or meeting with an instructor and other students via Skype. But for those of us who are older, technology in the classroom can be a brave new world, let alone the idea of taking all K-12 courses online from home. Idaho has ever-increasing access to online and blended learning schools, connecting children around the state with an accredited education. Some online learning schools are operated as public charter schools, while others are operated by public district schools.

“Idaho has ever-increasing access to online and blended learning schools, connecting children around the state with an accredited education.”

HOW DO ONLINE AND BLENDED LEARNING SCHOOLS WORK?

Online schools are conducted entirely online — students do not attend a traditional brick-and-mortar school, but instead work with instructors and other students via the Internet. Some online-only schools supplement their classes with tutoring centers where students can get face-to-face help as needed. Students who are most successful in online programs have strong support at home from parents or others invested in their child's education.

Blended learning schools challenge students at their own level, combining individual and small group instruction in the classroom with powerful, interactive online programs.

WHO PAYS FOR ONLINE LEARNING SCHOOLS?

Idaho's online and blended learning schools are all public schools (either charter or district) and receive public school funding. See **Introduction to Public Education in Idaho** for more information.

HOW MUCH WILL I PAY IF MY CHILD GOES TO AN ONLINE OR BLENDED LEARNING SCHOOL?

As with public district and charter schools, online learning schools are free. These schools may not include extracurricular activities such as sports.

How many online schools does Idaho have?

13: 7 Statewide
2 Regional
4 District

How many students attend online learning schools in Idaho?

Approximately 7,885

ONLINE AND BLENDED LEARNING SCHOOLS

WHY WOULD THESE TYPES OF SCHOOLS BE A GOOD CHOICE FOR MY CHILD?

Online schools offer parents and students a lot of flexibility: Students can work from home at their own pace and on their own schedule. Students who aren't successful in a traditional classroom setting can benefit from online schools, as can students who are ill for an extended period of time and would otherwise be missing class. However, strong parental involvement is required for online-only types of learning environments — unless your student is particularly focused and driven, you'll want to assist him or her with their studies.

Blended learning schools offer technology to enhance and supplement the educational experience and allows for individualized learning with teacher and parent support.

// BLENDED LEARNING SCHOOL SNAPSHOT //

GEM INNOVATION SCHOOLS

Where is it? **Nampa, Pocatello and Statewide**
 How many students does it serve? **1,028**
 Grades: **Gem Prep Nampa (K-4), Gem Prep Pocatello (K-4), Idaho Distance Education Academy (I-DEA) (K-12 Statewide)**

About Gem Innovation Schools: Gem Innovation Schools is a charter management organization designed to meet the state of Idaho's need for more high-quality educational options, which prepare students for post-secondary success in college and professional technical careers by providing a high quality, personalized, relevant and rigorous education through teaching, innovative uses of technology and partnership with families. Founded in 2014, Gem Innovation Schools began as a high-performing, distance learning model and has a demonstrated record of student achievement and financial sustainability.

For more information, visit gemprep.org.

// ONLINE LEARNING SCHOOL SNAPSHOT //

INSPIRE CONNECTIONS ACADEMY

Where is it? **Boise, Statewide**
 How many students does it serve? **1,100**
 Grades: **K-12**

About INSPIRE Connections Academy: INSPIRE Connections Academy shares a common goal with parents: to ensure that students become productive, successful and confident adults. INSPIRE Connections Academy's full-time virtual school program helps online school students build on their individual strengths and interests in a setting that is safe and connected to a larger community.

For more information, visit connectionsacademy.com.

ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Alternative public schools, like magnet schools, were developed during the 1970s as educators sought new ways to improve graduation rates and improve at-risk student retention. Students at alternative schools get the specialized attention they need to succeed.

HOW DO ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC SCHOOLS WORK?

Alternative schools are public schools for at-risk students in grades 7-12. Students must meet eligibility criteria for alternative schools, but once they do they have the chance to earn a high school diploma in an environment that is tailored to their needs. Many of these schools focus on career tech programs such as health sciences, information technology, manufacturing, and hospitality and tourism.

WHO PAYS FOR ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

The majority of alternative schools, some of which are charter schools, are part of the public school system and are funded as such. See [Introduction to Public Education in Idaho](#) for more information.

HOW MUCH WILL I PAY IF MY CHILD GOES TO AN ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC SCHOOL?

Alternative schooling is free, just like any public school, but you may be asked to pay for your student's school supplies or participation in extra curricular activities.

How many alternative public schools does Idaho have?

66: 61 District
4 Charters
1 District Cooperative

How many students attend alternative public schools in Idaho?

Approximately 5,772

ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

WHY WOULD THIS TYPE OF SCHOOL BE A GOOD CHOICE FOR MY CHILD?

Alternative schools are designed for at-risk youth and feature smaller class sizes. Idaho defines an at-risk youth as a student who meets at least three of the following criteria:

- » Repeated at least one grade;
- » Has greater than 10 percent absenteeism during the preceding semester;
- » Has an overall grade point average of less than 1.5;
- » Has failed one or more subjects;
- » Is two or more semester credits per year behind the rate required to graduate;
- » Is a limited-English proficient student who has not been in a program more than three years.

A student may also attend an alternative school if he or she meets one of the following criteria:

- » Has a substance abuse problem;
- » Is pregnant or a parent;
- » Is an emancipated youth;
- » Is a previous dropout.



OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

KHAN ACADEMY

WHAT IS IT?

Khan Academy is a nonprofit, online education tool that was founded by hedge fund analyst turned educator Salman Khan in 2006. It is open and free for use by anyone. Khan Academy in Idaho is the nation's first statewide pilot, and is working with 48 schools, with more than 200 teachers and 12,000 K-12 students, to provide a more personalized learning experience for students.

“IDLA students can also study at their own convenience rather than attending class at a particular time.”

WHY WOULD MY STUDENT BENEFIT?

Khan Academy courses run the gamut, from humanities to the sciences, but educators in Idaho have been excited about the way Khan Academy can be used for math. Khan Academy programs meet students at their own level, allowing them to work at their own pace and give direct feedback to instructors. Instructors can then use that information to better help students. Students may also use Khan Academy to supplement or reinforce their learning, independent of guided instruction.

For more information, visit khanacademy.org.

IDAHO DIGITAL LEARNING ACADEMY

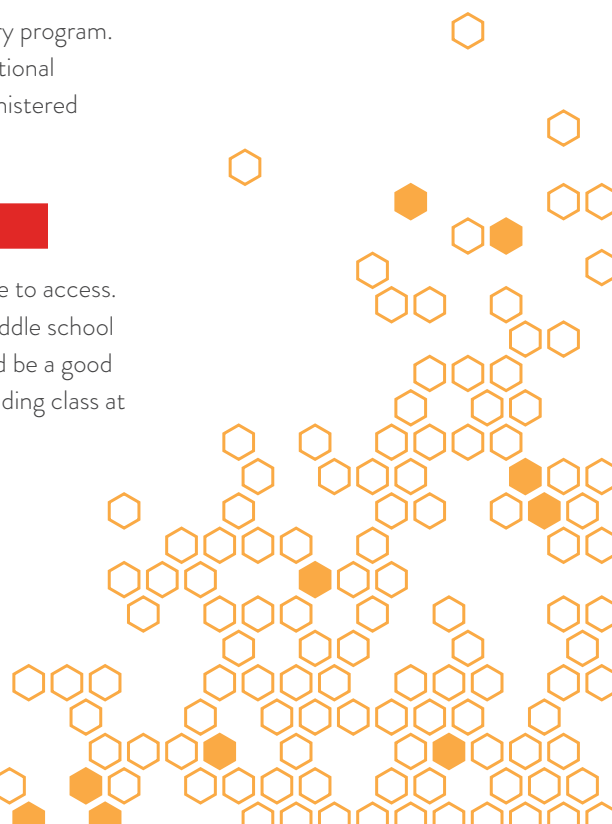
WHAT IS IT?

Idaho Digital Learning Academy, or IDLA, is an online, statewide public secondary program. It was established by the Idaho Legislature in 2002 to bolster high-quality educational opportunities throughout the state, especially in rural areas. In 2014, IDLA administered more than 20,000 course enrollments across the state.

WHY WOULD MY STUDENT BENEFIT?

Students enrolled in IDLA have access to courses they may not otherwise be able to access. Students no longer have to rely solely on their schools' course offerings — if a middle school student would like to take an advanced-level math class, for example, IDLA could be a good choice. IDLA students can also study at their own convenience rather than attending class at a particular time.

For more information, visit idahodigitalllearning.org.



OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

IDAHO PTECH NETWORK

WHAT IS IT?

PTECH stands for Pathways To Early Careers. Originally inspired by a public school in Brooklyn, New York, the Idaho PTECH Network is an innovative network model uniquely adapted to Idaho’s rural landscape. The program began in 2014 and has provided services to over 400 students from 18 high schools located all over Idaho.

Idaho PTECH Network bridges the gap between education and industry by providing students with the credentials and skills needed to secure well-paying jobs in Idaho’s high growth industries while giving businesses access to a qualified pipeline of employees. Idaho PTECH Network designs learning programs based on the needs of Idaho’s high growth, high value industries. These companies are seeking skilled workers in fields like computer coding, web development and other technology sectors. Idaho PTECH Network also works with companies in aerospace and other advanced manufacturing sectors as well as health care.

Students receive the skills they need, employability skills that industry values, and personalized coaching support. Idaho PTECH Network students connect and engage with PTECH industry partners on field trips, online forums and events such as Hackfort and industry meet-ups. When they complete the training, Idaho PTECH Network students have the skills they need to start work — and an entry-level job that offers the first step to financial independence and a meaningful career.

WHY WOULD MY STUDENT BENEFIT?

- Idaho PTECH Network is free and offers an educational pathway for students seeking a career in high growth industries in Idaho. Idaho PTECH Network students receive support and guidance throughout their time in the program, including help from a remote coach and access to internships and job shadows, and a job recruiter. Idaho PTECH Network also provides laptops and support for online coursework.

For more information, visit idahoptech.org.

“Idaho PTECH Network students have the skills they need to start work — and an entry-level job that offers the first step to financial independence and a meaningful career.”

OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

STEM EDUCATION

WHAT IS IT?

STEM is short for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. STEM education became a hot topic in the mid-2000s, when several national academies raised the alarm that America's students were falling further behind their peers internationally in these subjects. Businesses joined the call by pointing out that they were forced to recruit overseas because American students simply weren't qualified.

Over the past decade, the federal government and states have joined the private sector in investing millions of dollars into STEM education efforts. Students can begin incorporating STEM into their education as soon as kindergarten with the help of state, federal and private programs, or by attending a school that specializes in STEM education.

In 2015 the Idaho Legislature established the STEM Action Center. Its mission is to coordinate and promote science, technology, engineering, and math initiatives and education across the state. The STEM Action Center works with diverse groups including industry, business, education, libraries, and non-profits to provide educator professional development, student competitions and grant support for STEM education in public schools, libraries and non-profit afterschool programs.

WHY WOULD MY STUDENT BENEFIT?

STEM education prepares students for the jobs of the future, many of which will rely on STEM's core subjects. And there is a shortage: According to the U.S. Department of Education, only 16 percent of high school seniors are interested in going into STEM fields. But STEM courses are also great for students who love to learn by doing — many STEM opportunities showcase how STEM works with hands-on experimentation.



COLLEGE CREDITS AND ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

WHAT COLLEGE CREDITS AND ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES EXIST FOR STUDENTS?

Advanced Opportunities are available in all public district and charter high schools around the state. These opportunities include classes that are Dual Credit, International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement, and Career and Technical Education courses. These programs are implemented with the intent to assist students in making a smooth transition to their future career aspirations.

IS THERE FUNDING AVAILABLE TO HELP PAY FOR THESE COLLEGE CREDITS AND ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES?

Often, students who choose to participate in these programs will encounter costs associated with college tuition, exam fees, and more. Through the Fast Forward program, and the Idaho State Department of Education, students in grades 7-12 who attend an Idaho public school have an allocation of \$4,125 to use toward the cost of overload courses, dual credits, and examination fees.

“Through the Fast Forward program, and the Idaho State Department of Education, students in grades 7-12 who attend an Idaho public school have an allocation of \$4,125 to use toward the cost of overload courses, dual credits, and examination fees.”

FAST FORWARD FUNDING LIMITATIONS

Students attending an Idaho public school in grade 7-12 have access to \$4,125 to use towards the following activities:

1. **Overload Courses:** High school classes that are in excess of their regular school day. Students can use up to \$225 towards the cost of each overload course. Definitions of full credit load may vary between districts and charters.
2. **Dual Credits:** Courses that are transcribed on both the high school and college transcripts. Students can use up to \$75 toward the cost of each credit.
3. **Examinations:** Students can use funds to pay for college-credit bearing and professional certification exams. These include AP, IB, CLEP, and PTE exams.

Students who fail a course paid for by these funds cannot continue to participate until they pay for and pass a “like” course. Students who fail an exam can participate at the discretion of the school district.

All students who access Fast Forward funding will need to sign a participation form that will be kept by the local school district.

For more information, visit sde.idaho.gov/student-engagement/advanced-ops.

COLLEGE CREDITS AND ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

SCHOOL SUPPORT

Availability of Advanced Opportunities options and processes will vary from school to school. In addition to the typical Advanced Opportunities, some school districts and charters will also have mechanisms for students to “test out” of a course. Talk to your local district to learn more about these options. If the availability of Advanced Opportunities is limited in particular areas, students can still access Advanced Opportunities through various online options such as IDLA and post-secondary institutions around the state.

EARLY GRADUATION

Early Graduation Scholarships are available to any public school student who graduates at least one full year early. These scholarships are roughly \$1,500 and can be used at any Idaho public post-secondary institution. Students can use it within two years of graduating from high school. This scholarship is administered through the Idaho State Department of Education.



OPEN ENROLLMENT

WHAT IS OPEN ENROLLMENT?

Idaho allows open enrollment, which offers students and parents more school choices. Students may choose to attend schools that aren't in their neighborhood but in their district (intra-district enrollment) or schools outside of their district (interdistrict enrollment).

How and when can I move my child from one school to another? That depends on your school district's policies. First, you'll need to get an open enrollment application from your child's current school district. Open enrollment applications may be submitted any time during the school year, but many school districts have submission and review deadlines. Check with your local school for deadlines.

Once your application is submitted, the school district has the authority to give priority to some admissions over others. According to Idaho Code, parents must fill out an open enrollment form annually to keep their students at the schools of their choice.

WHAT ARE WAITING LISTS, AND HOW DO I GET ON THEM?

In-demand schools, especially public charter, magnet, and private or parochial schools, often have waiting lists of students that the school can't yet accommodate. Waiting lists vary from school to school and even class to class — kindergarten and first grades often have longer waiting lists than ninth or 10th grades, for example. If you'd like to get your child on a school waiting list, contact the school directly and ask for its waiting list policy. Once your child is on a waiting list, he or she may be entered into a school admissions lottery.

WHAT ARE SCHOOL LOTTERIES, AND HOW DO THEY WORK?

Many schools use lotteries to decide which students will attend — in fact, Idaho's public charter schools are required by law to do so. Lotteries are random drawings. Each school has its own lottery deadline and drawing; check with your school for a lottery application and submission information.

If the number of applications to a charter school exceeds the capacity of the school, all applicants will have an equal chance of being admitted through a random selection process or lottery. There are certain preferences that must be applied before the lottery is conducted. For example, Idaho Statute allows a charter school to give enrollment preference to children of founders, provided that this preference does not exceed 10 percent of the student body. There is a separate list for siblings of an enrolled charter school student. Those students that were not chosen to attend the charter school by the lottery process are placed on a waiting list. Once a space becomes available, the charter school will contact the first name on the waiting list to fill the empty spot.

OPEN ENROLLMENT

HOW AND WHEN DO I ENROLL MY CHILD IN SCHOOL?

All Idaho children between the ages of 7 and 16 must be enrolled in school. Kindergartners must be 5 years old by Sept. 1 of their first school year.

Depending on your school's policy, you may be required to provide some or all of the following information:

- » Your child's birth certificate
- » An immunization certificate signed by a physician
- » School transcripts
- » Information about your child's special needs
- » Proof of guardianship
- » Proof of residency

Schedules vary from school to school, so check with your school for key dates. Many schools allow you to enroll your child up to two days before the start of the school year, but it's best to check well in advance to ensure a smooth start for your child.



GLOSSARY: COMMON WORDS AND ACRONYMS

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Advanced Placement | Advanced Placement, or AP, courses were created by the College Board and offer college-level instruction to high school students. Students may sit for an AP exam, and depending on the colleges they wish to attend, their AP scores may allow them to test out of introductory classes or qualify for a more advanced course. Students do not have to take an AP course to sit for an exam. |
| Blended learning | Blended learning combines in-person, classroom learning with online coursework. |
| Credits | Credits, otherwise known as course credits, credit hours, credit units or units, are used by educational institutions to measure the value of a class, seminar or workshop. |
| Dual credit | Students who are enrolled in dual credit courses study for higher-education and high school credit at the same time. |
| Enroll | The act of joining a school, course or class. |
| I-DEA | Short for Idaho Distance Education Academy. |
| IDLA | Short for Idaho Digital Learning Academy. |
| Mastery-based Learning | Refers to systems that use learning standards to determine academic expectations and define “competency” or “proficiency” in a given course or subject area rather than grade level. |
| Online learning | An educational method in which students take courses or classes entirely online. Online learning can also refer to educational tools such as Khan Academy. |
| Parochial school | A private school with a religious or spiritual focus. |
| Personalized learning | Accelerating student learning by tailoring instruction to the individual needs, skills and interests of each student. |
| Public innovation schools | Schools that operate independently from most state and local school district rules and regulations. Innovation schools are created by local schools districts and overseen by their local school board. |
| Private school | An independent, non-public school that is not part of a school district. |
| Public school | Schools mandated by the Idaho Constitution, paid for with public dollars, and free and open to the public. |
| Public charter school | A public school established, or chartered, by a group of parents, educators and/or community members, overseen by an independent board. |
| Public magnet school | A public school that “attracts” students from throughout a school district with a specialized curriculum. |
| PTECH | Short for Pathways in Technology Early College High School. |
| School district | A local body, governed by a school board, that regulates public schools in a particular area. School districts can include one school or many. |

GLOSSARY: COMMON WORDS AND ACRONYMS

STEM

Short for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math education.

Unschooling

An educational method that focuses on learner-centered and student-driven learning. Students learn through their experiences including play, personal interests and curiosity, internships and work experience, books, elective classes, mentors, and social interaction.



RESOURCES: FURTHER READING

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Idaho Charter School Network: idahocsn.org
 Idaho Public Charter School Commission: chartercommission.idaho.gov
 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools: publiccharters.org

IDAHO EDUCATION

Idaho Ed News: idahoednews.org
 Idaho Ed Trends: idahoedtrends.org
 Idaho Schools: idaho.gov/education/k12.html
 Idaho State Department of Education: sde.idaho.gov
 J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation: jkaf.org
 Rural Opportunities Consortium of Idaho: rociidaho.org
 STEM Action Center: stem.idaho.gov

INNOVATION SCHOOLS

Local Innovation School Act, House Bill No. 570: legislature.idaho.gov/legislation/2016/H0570.pdf
 Bluum and Talking Innovation Schools With Representative Wendy Horman:
bluum.org/talking-innovation-schools-with-representative-wendy-horman

PARENT RESOURCES

Advanced Opportunities in Idaho: sde.idaho.gov/student-engagement/advanced-ops
 Choosing a School Guide: bluum.org/parents
 Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children: idahoaeyc.org
 Idaho Digital Learning Academy: idahodigitallearning.org
 Idaho Loves to Learn: idaholovestolearn.org
 Idaho Parent Teacher Association: idahopta.org
 Idaho PTECH Network: idahoptech.org
 InsideTrack: insidetrack.com
 Khan Academy: khanacademy.org
 National AfterSchool Association: naaweb.org
 National School Choice Week: schoolchoiceweek.com
 Next Steps Idaho: nextsteps.idaho.gov
 One Stone: onestone.org



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