

Idaho Charter School Network Newsletter

Happy Holidays !!

December 2011

Building Authentic Partnerships

Palouse Prairie School of Expeditionary Learning was featured in University of Idaho School of Education Envision publication, *Expeditionary Learning: Elementary Education Students Partner with Palouse Prairie School Teachers*. PPSEL is a charter school in Moscow lead by principal Summer Clayton. "From the moment we opened our doors, the University was coming to us and asking for partnerships and internships. But Margaret (Prof. Margaret Vaughn) came to us and asked what we needed in relation to instruction, which was a first," said Clayton. "Up to this point, the partnerships seemed to be one-sided and took a lot of our energy. But Margaret has taken

the lead in helping meet our needs. Our teachers are getting professional development and a chance to engage with the U of I students. It's a real collaborative process."

On November 7, Vaughn's class, made up of all juniors and seniors, met at the school, prepared to learn about the workshop model of teaching and observe teachers in the classroom. Kindergarten teacher Jeneille Branen, a founding teacher at Palouse Prairie School, introduced the U-Idaho students to the teaching method and what was expected of them that day. "We expect you to just observe today, and to be respectful of each student," she said.

Vaughn and her class were eager to observe the expeditionary learning method in the kindergarten and 2nd – 3rd grade classes. Expeditionary learning promotes an environment that empowers children to be part of a community and is project-based.

"We offer kids an intimate environment and create structures that incorporate team building and character development in the classroom," said Clayton. "Kids learn how to create interpersonal relationships and how they fit into and contribute to a community."

Idaho was one of 10 states where eighth grade reading scores improved significantly over the past two years, according to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results.

It Happened in Texas Can It Happen Here?

On July 19, Governor Rick Perry signed into law [Senate Bill 1](#), giving financially-sound public charter schools access to the state's Permanent School Fund (PSF) bond guarantee. This will help schools construct and renovate school buildings. PSF is the state's \$25 billion, AAA rated endowment. Bonds with the PSF-guarantee will be rated AAA—the highest possible credit rating—saving charter schools throughout the state millions of dollars in interest costs. This legislation is an important and symbolic victory for charter schools in Texas and nationwide. The PSF enhancement is significant because charter schools will be able to finance growth at costs that are level with tradi-

tional public schools. **Savings from the PSF enhancement will be redirected to instruction and learning costs, putting taxpayer money to more efficient use.** To put these savings into perspective: the estimates of the cost-savings range from 200 to 300 basis points per bond issue. In order to qualify for the PSF guarantee, charter schools must meet the investment grade credit rating and accreditation standards. Putting up the state's endowment to back charter school bonds, the same way it is for traditional public schools, speaks volumes about the direction of the public school choice and public education in Texas.

Charters Outpace Traditional Public Schools in Idaho on the NAEP

NAEP is the only assessment that compares student achievement from state to state. It measures students in reading and mathematics in grades 4 and 8. Superintendent Luna serves on the National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees NAEP.

In 2011, for the first time, there were enough students tested in Idaho's public charter schools that NAEP could provide Idaho results for both charter and non-charter schools. NAEP does not sample virtual schools or online schools, so the NAEP 2011 results only show results from brick-and-mortar public charter schools.

In grade 4 reading, the public charter school average was 238, which was higher than the non-charter school average of 220. The charter school average for grade 8 reading was 289, which was higher than the non-charter school average of 268.

In grade 4 mathematics, the charter school average was 257, which was higher than the non-charter school average of 240. The charter school average for grade 8 mathematics was 311, which was not significantly different from the non-charter school average of 286.

From the Idaho State Department of Education <http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/naep/>



ICSN Planning
Charter Magazine -
For and About Charters
in Idaho

Do you want to recognize an outstanding teacher?? An outstanding student?? An Innovator?? A great project? We're looking for your stories to illustrate the amazing fabric of charter schools in Idaho. Looking for high school student interns to assist in writing content. - January and February 2012.

Photos of your outstanding moments, events and features of your school that you'd like to share. ICSN welcomes teacher support as we assemble this publication.

How does Idaho Compare?

Number of Public Charter School Students in U.S. Surpasses Two Million More than 400,000 Students on Charter School Wait Lists

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) announced December 7th that the number of students attending public charter schools across the nation has surpassed two million. Over 500 new public charter schools opened their doors in the 2011-12 school year, an estimated increase of 200,000 students. This year marks the largest single-year increase ever recorded in terms of the number of additional students attending charters.

In Idaho there are currently 43 charter schools attended by nearly 18,000 students. The market-share or penetration of charter schools in Idaho is just over 5% and our best estimates indicate that nearly 8,000 students

are on charter waiting lists. The number of charter school students as % of all public school students in Idaho has grown slowly from 4% in 2006 to 5.4% in 2011 a change of 1.4% . In contrast during the same 5 years, western states including New Mexico, Oregon and Utah had greater than 4% growth. NM went from 3.2% to 9% (up 5.8%); Oregon went from just 2% to 7.6 % (up 5.6%); Utah 3.9% to 8.2% (up 4.3%). When ICSN was asked by NPR's Adam Cotterell, "why is Idaho different?" I shared that new charter schools are challenged by funding and the availability and affordability of facilities. Additionally, our cap of 6 new schools per year and 1 per district per year may contribute to the slow growth, especially in those communities with the largest waiting lists.

Did you know we are on the web?

www.idahocharterschoolnetwork.com

Virtual Students May Get Equal Access to Military Opportunities

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools interim president and CEO Ursula Wright commented on the Defense Authorization Bill. "We are encouraged that this bill updates the military recruitment and enlistment policies to provide parity for online public school graduates. Virtual charter schools follow federal and state guidelines and must adhere to all accountability standards. Students graduating from these schools are equivalent to students graduating with a degree from a brick-and-mortar public school. We're happy to see the U.S. Congress taking the steps to ensure the Department of

Defense updates its policies."

Graduates of online public schools, operated either by charter schools or school districts, are currently considered Tier II candidates for the purposes of military enrollment—the equivalent of a GED—despite the fact that they fulfill all of the same graduation requirements established by their state of residence as their brick-and-mortar counterparts. This policy is a result of old attrition data being used to establish tiers; the Tier II category was established before online public schools even existed.

Online charter schools are increasingly popular and effective next generation learning models that can provide students with individualized learning opportunities. Today's technology facilitates these experiences, offering students direct access to content that will build their knowledge and skills, while simultaneously assessing performance, providing immediate feedback, and storing and tracking student data over time. It is important that policies, particularly at the federal level, support innovation as we move into the next frontier of education.



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HOW WILL WE CONTINUE TO SUPPORT HIGH PERFORMING CHARTER SCHOOLS IN IDAHO?

There are multiple roads to charter excellence. There are any number of national and local groups and many individuals working to support high quality, outstanding schools of choice in Idaho. National research points to strong leaders, outstanding teachers, robust parent engagement, highly effective governance, strong charter laws and highly effective authorizers as some of the most important contributing factors to a successful charter sector.

In the last issue of the ICSN Newsletter, I urged folks to think about charter contracts as one vehicle to support high quality. The National Model Public Charter School Law calls for Performance-based Charter Contracts that are created as a separate document from the charter and executed by the governing board and the authorizer. It requires the roles, powers and responsibilities for the school and the authorizer to be defined. It defines the academic and operational performance expectations by which the school will be judged and includes measures and metrics for student academic proficiency and growth, achievement, attendance, recurrent enrollment, postsecondary readiness, financial performance and board steward-

ship. It also provides length of term of contract and defined high-stakes reviews as well as any special requirements for unique charter environments such as virtual schools.

I would characterize the perspective of charter leaders in Idaho that I've spoken with as generally skeptical of charter contracts. I can understand many of their concerns in executing yet one more step before they can open a charter. Still, I think it is wise of us to continue to explore, examine and talk about charter contracts and other mechanisms to support quality, as our sector in Idaho continues to grow.

In the October ICSN Newsletter, I observed some activities and attempted to contextualize the charter contract option. I've heard from many charter leaders about their relationship with their authorizers and the many ways they are held accountable. This is not limited to the Charter Commission but includes many districts. It wasn't my intention to mislead anyone, but I made some assumptions and relied on some information without fact-checking multiple sources. Even a quote from a very reliable source is just one perspective and may not constitute

fact. I am committed greater diligence in checking all the facts in the future.

I have heard countless times from charters that meeting AYP and having a balanced year-end budget are the two biggest criteria reviewed by their authorizers. We know from groups like NACSA (National Association of Charter School Authorizers) that the practices of Authorizers can vary tremendously. I want to thank Tamara Baysinger, Director of the Public Charter School Commission for reminding me that the Commission "*endeavors to enforce compliance with all terms of the charter. . . extending well beyond AYP and ISAT results. Indeed, Idaho Code §33-5209 (2) (a) specifically mandates that an authorizer shall issue a notice of defect to a public charter school if the authorizer has reason to believe that the school has 'committed a material violation of any condition, standard or procedure set forth in the approved charter' separate from and in addition to the mandate for issuance of a notice of defect in response to a school's failure to meet any of the student educational standards identified in the approved charter.*" I applaud the Commission for their thoroughness in executing their duties.

Creating Leaders - Unlocking the Future

5TH ANNUAL IDAHO CHARTER CONFERENCE - MARCH 16, 2012

Save the Date!



Idaho Charter School Network

