

EDUCATION

KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ From very young ages, Idaho's children are not having the educational experiences they need for lifelong success
- ▶ Half of Idaho's incoming kindergarteners aren't prepared to succeed in school
- ▶ Idaho's underfunded and underperforming K-12 education system leaves many behind, leaving them at higher risk for poor health outcomes
- ▶ Post-secondary credentials are becoming increasingly important to securing a living-wage job
- ▶ Removing barriers to education can bolster the state's workforce while improving health

MORE THAN HALF OF
IDAHO'S KIDS
YOUNGER THAN

6
YEARS OLD

LIVE IN HOUSEHOLDS
WHERE BOTH
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ONLY 36% OF

3- & 4-
YEAR OLDS

WERE ENROLLED
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OR DAYCARE

High-quality educational experiences are vital to preparing young Idahoans for lifelong success. High-quality early childhood education programs (ECE) are not just for academic learning; they also improve children's critical thinking, ability to work with others, their health, and the health and economic well-being of their families and communities.¹⁹ While ECE can improve a child's opportunities for a better future, it can also offer parents improved job stability and overall economic security.^{20, 21, 22} When parents are confident their child is in high-quality and reliable care, they are able to focus on reaching the economic stability necessary to create healthy and nurturing homes. ECE programs can foster connections with families to ensure parents have the resources they need to create safe and nurturing environments at home. High-quality ECE investments have also shown to have high rates of returns to society with research showing reduced expenditures related to K-12 and increased savings for parents, businesses, and taxpayers.^{23, 24, 25} The National Forum on Early Childhood Policy and Programs, for example, found high quality ECE programs could yield a four to nine dollar return for each dollar invested.²⁶

However, from very young ages, Idaho's children do not have the educational experiences they need for lifelong success. Despite the advantages of a robust, high-quality ECE system, children in Idaho are not required to attend any kind of educational settings until they are seven years old. Idaho is one of five states that does not offer state-funded pre-k programs.²⁷ In 2018, more than half of Idaho's children under six years old lived in households where both parents worked.²⁸ In 2016-18, only 36% of three- and four-year-olds were enrolled in some type of early education (e.g., pre-school, daycare) — 12 percentage points below the national average.²⁹ Thus, while parents were hard at work, many children missed the opportunity of being in

¹⁹ McAllister Hall et al., "Social Determinants of Health in Idaho: Evidence-Based Models for Bridging the Clinical to Community Gap," Idaho Policy Institute, Boise State University and Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health, 2019.

²⁰ Julia B. Isaacs and Emily Roessel, "Impacts of Early Childhood Programs" First Focus & Brookings, 2008.

²¹ Taryn Morrissey, "The Effects Of Early Care And Education On Children's Health," Health Affairs, 2019.

²² First Five Years Fund, "Idaho: Federal Support for Early Learning & Care Opportunities," First Five Years Fund, June 1, 2019.

²³ Dana Charles McCoy et al., "Impacts of Early Childhood Education on Medium- and Long-Term Educational Outcomes," Educational Researcher 46, no. 8 (November 2017): 474-87.

²⁴ Rucker C. Johnson and C. Kirabo Jackson, "Reducing Inequality Through Dynamic Complementarity: Evidence from Head Start and Public School Spending," National Bureau of Economic Research, 2018.

²⁵ Sandra Bishop-Josef et al., "Want to Grow the Economy? Fix the Child Care Crises: Workers and Employers Feel Pain in Pocketbooks and Productivity," Council For A Strong America, 2019.

²⁶ "Early Childhood: High Return on Investment," Center for High Impact Philanthropy - University of Pennsylvania, accessed May 6, 2020.

²⁷ Meg Hassan, "NIEER's Annual Report Scores States on Early Childhood Education Programs," First Five Years Fund, 2019.

²⁸ "Mapping the Gap in Idaho," Child care Aware of America, accessed May 7, 2020.

²⁹ Kids Count Data Center, "Young Children Not in School," The Annie E. Casey Foundation, accessed May 7, 2020.



a high-quality ECE setting. Families face many barriers to enrolling their children in high-quality ECE programs.

These barriers center on the interrelated issues of affordability, accessibility, and quality. Beth Oppenheimer, Executive Director of the Idaho Association for Education of Young Children (IAEYC), summarizes these barriers, noting, “Half the state is a child care desert, so without state-funded preschool, the opportunities are just not there. If they do exist, many families cannot find or afford them.”

To illustrate this further:

- On average, the annual cost of infant care can range from \$6,264 for home-based care to nearly \$7,300 for center-based care – almost 10-12% of the median income in Idaho;³⁰
- Nearly half of Idaho lacks access to licensed child care programs;³¹
- In a focus group with members of the Plummer community, parents described making the tough decision between having one parent stay at home and leaving their children in a low-quality child care center.

The interrelated challenges of poor affordability, access, and quality of early childhood education are magnified by traumatic experiences that negatively influence children’s future health and ability to learn. While some healthy levels of stress in a child’s life can develop resiliency, too much stress or exposure to stressful events can have damaging effects on a child’s health, behaviors, and life potential. The experience of trauma has a significant impact on educational outcomes. In a 2017 study, researchers estimated among Idaho’s youth 65% of learning disabilities, 45% of students with behavior problems, and 48% of students that have repeated a grade, were attributable to the way these types of trauma affect the brain.³² This increased burden of behavioral and educational difficulty poses a challenge for Idaho’s teachers, who may be under-resourced and inadequately prepared to respond to the intensive needs of these students. This can result in teacher burnout and retention issues at a time when retaining skilled educators is essential.

Given the lack of ECE opportunities and the high number of children who experience traumatic stress across the state, by the time children enroll in school, many are significantly behind their peers. About half of the state’s incoming kindergarteners are not ready to learn how to read.³³ Moreover, research shows achievement gaps between income classes develop between birth and age five and remain the same – or grow – through K-12.³⁴

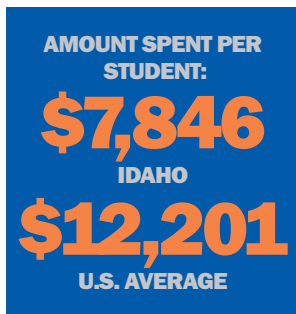
³⁰“Mapping the Gap in Idaho”, n.d.

³¹ First Five Years Fund, “Early Childhood Education in Idaho,” June 1, 2019, accessed May 21, 2020.

³² Patrick Sidmore, “Transforming Schools by Building: Trauma - Engaged Culturally Relevant and Community Driven Schools in Alaska,” 2019.

³³ Keven E. Cahill, John Topogno, and Lauren Butler, “Idaho at Risk: How Bold Leadership and Accountability Can Prepare Idaho for the Future,” J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation, 2019.

³⁴ Cahill, Topogno, and Butler, 2019



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DR. CHRIS MEYER,
Director of Education for
the Coeur D’Alene Tribe

Unfortunately, these children then enter an underfunded and underperforming K-12 education system that does not prepare them to compete in Idaho’s changing economy. Idaho has consistently spent less funding per pupil than other states, ranking second to last in 2017. That year, the state spent an average of \$7,486 per student, while the U.S. average was \$12,201.³⁵ While state education funding is low overall, students of color and rural students are particularly likely to attend underfunded schools. Idaho’s Center for Fiscal Policy reported,

“Districts with 15 percent or more students of color have less than half the property value compared with districts with fewer students of color. To raise \$1,000 locally per student, districts with more students of color would need to approve a tax rate more than double that necessary for districts with fewer students of color.”³⁶

Additionally, rural schools are being affected by declining enrollment as younger Idahoans are moving their families to more urban areas. Some rural counties like Clark County have high school enrollment rates as low as 53.5%.³⁷ As enrollment drops, so does funding, yet the cost of educating the number of children that remain stays the same. In addition to fewer classroom supplies, having less school funding leaves fewer resources to attract experienced teachers who help ensure lower rates of absenteeism and higher test scores. In 2017-18, the average salary of a teacher in Idaho was \$34,801, which is \$4,448 less than the national average.³⁸ Experienced teachers, affected by Idaho’s costs of living, are needing to choose between continuing their profession in the state and seeking more economically sustainable options.

In 2019, only 45% of students were proficient in Math and only 56% were proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) on the Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), with inequities by race and ethnicity, income, disability status, and language (see Figure 4).³⁹ The educational outcomes of the economically disadvantaged and students of color are so different that the state sets different targets for them. On the Math ISAT, for example, Idaho’s State Board 2019 target for Asian and Pacific Islander students was 64%, whereas Black students had a target of 35%.⁴⁰ Roger Quarles, Executive Director, JA and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation, highlights some of the negative consequences of these dramatically different targets, noting, “We set educational targets as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act. In order for the state to receive federal title money, we have to set specific goals by demographic sub-groups. Until we fix our expectations for all students, [students of color and low-income students] will continue to fall further behind.”

Without proper support through K-12, these students will continue to have negative outcomes through high school graduation and beyond. Schools may consider adopting a “targeted universalist” approach, where they set universal goals for all of Idaho’s students but develop targeted strategies for students of color and economically disadvantaged students to meet their needs. Dr. Chris Meyer, Director of Education for the Coeur D’Alene Tribe describes why such an approach is important, explaining, “Schools are contributing to how kids are struggling. We need schools to understand why kids aren’t on track, and we need serious intervention.” Ultimately, this approach would improve outcomes for the state as a whole.

Finally, in 2019, 80% of high school seniors graduated within four years. However, there is wide variability with county graduation rates ranging from 48% to 93%. Of those who do graduate, many are not prepared for post-secondary education, with more than a third of students who go on after high school needing remedial courses.⁴¹

³⁵ Kevin Richert, “Census Report: Idaho Ranks Next to Last in Per-Pupil Spending,” Idaho Education News (blog), 2019.

³⁶ Idaho Center for Fiscal Policy, “Public School Investment” Idaho Center for Fiscal Policy, accessed May 7, 2020.

³⁷ Idaho Department of Labor, “Defining Rural Idaho Presents Challenges,” Idaho@work, 2017.

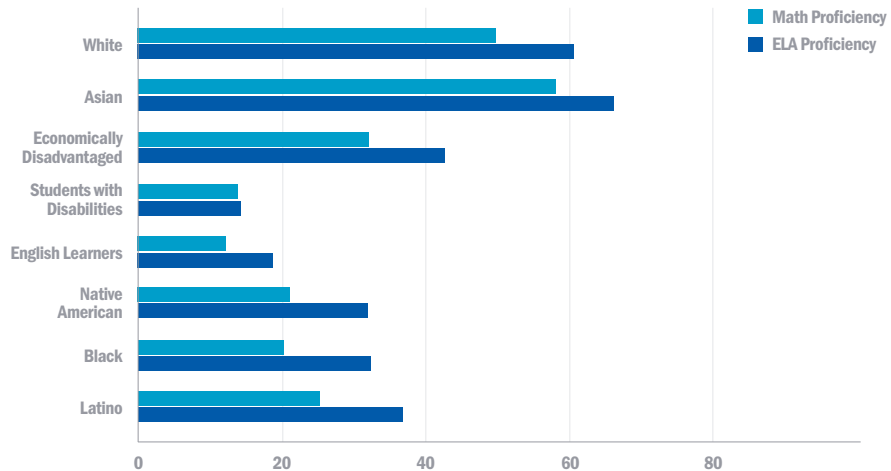
³⁸ National Education Association, “2017-2018 Average Starting Teacher Salaries by State,” NEA, 2019.

³⁹ “[Y]Our Idaho Education Report Card,” Idaho Ed News, 2019.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Cahill, Topogno, and Butler, 2019.

Figure 4. Math and ELA ISAT Scores, 2019



“When you look at the workforce needs, there is a disconnect [with educational programs]. There is more work that needs to be done to provide the education that the workforce is desiring.”

JANI REVIER,
Director, Idaho's
Department of Labor

IDAHO HAS THE SECOND-HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS GRADUATING FROM UNIVERSITIES WITH DEBT
71%

With performance gaps at the beginning of K-12 and lack of funding to address those gaps, Idaho's education system contributes to poor health and education outcomes. There is growing literature on the linkage between education outcomes and positive health outcomes.^{42, 43, 44} Education outcomes not only affect health by dramatically reducing earning potential. Education also is a predictor of individuals' ability to navigate health care systems and get the care they need. High school graduates have a far better chance of having basic health literacy, which allows them to know when and how to seek medical care. Students who do not graduate high school are more likely to self-report overall poor health and suffer from at least one chronic health condition (e.g., asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, hepatitis, or stroke).⁴⁵

As post-secondary credentials become increasingly crucial to securing a living-wage job, so will removing barriers for students to continue their education beyond high school and acquire the skills required by Idaho's employers. Similar to national trends, in Idaho it is becoming increasingly difficult to make ends meet without a post-secondary degree or certification. A recent study showed in Idaho that the average earnings of a bachelor's degree holder is 68% higher than that of a high school graduate.⁴⁶ In 2018, about 42% of Idaho's young adults held a degree or professional certificate. Post-secondary attainment falls far below the State Board of Education's goal of 60% of 25-34 year olds having a post-secondary degree, which is based on the portion of jobs that will require these credentials.^{47, 48} One of the barriers to achieving post-secondary degrees is affordability. Idaho ranks seventh in the nation for "sticker price" affordability for public four-year institutions, meaning students may have an improved likelihood of attending school because it is affordable. However, Idaho has the second-highest percentage of students graduating from universities with debt (71%).⁴⁹ In addition to the barriers of accessing post-secondary opportunities, post-secondary institutions need to adapt to teaching the skills required by Idaho's employers.

Idaho's employers and industries increasingly require workers with more education and technical skills. "When you look at the workforce needs, there is a disconnect [with educational programs]. There is more work that needs to be done to provide the education that the workforce is desiring," explains Jani Revier, the Director of Idaho's Department of Labor. Ensuring Idaho's children are given the preparation they need — starting in the first years of life — to succeed in the future workforce is imperative not only for students and their families, but also for the state's ability to attract new businesses and talent. In turn, higher educational attainment will also promote and maintain the health of Idaho's population.

⁴² Robert A. Hahn and Benedict I. Truman, "Education Improves Public Health and Promotes Health Equity," *International Journal of Health Services* 45, no. 4 (October 2015): 657–78.

⁴³ "Education: It Matters More to Health than Ever Before," Center on Society and Health at Virginia Commonwealth University, 2015.

⁴⁴ Healthy People 2020, "High School Graduation," Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2020.

⁴⁵ Healthy People 2020, 2020.

⁴⁶ John V Winters, "Idaho's Education Earnings Gap," Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2020.

⁴⁷ "[Y]Our Idaho Education Report Card," 2019

⁴⁸ "Five Questions about Workforce Needs in Idaho," J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation, accessed May 7, 2020.

⁴⁹ "Trends in Tuition at Idaho's Public Colleges and Universities: Critical Context for the State's Educational Goals," Idaho Center for Fiscal Policy, 2017.