The One Question They Could Not Answer

Clark County School District No. 161 — the supplemental levy, November 3, 2026

They are asking for another $500,000. Why that amount? Why the same $250,000 a year as every levy since 2016? Why could the district produce no page showing how they got to that number rather than some other one?

There is $1,305,525 in a forest fund with no target. Idaho law lets the trustees spend it on classes, teachers, full-time coaches, or anything else the ballot says this levy is for, whenever they decide it is not needed for land or buildings. And $637,330 more in the general fund, which the board may spend on any school purpose. [AF p165, X p151]

That is nearly $2 million already in the bank. They want $500,000 more. And a full year of funding is already approved, and there are two chances a year to ask, so nothing about this has to be settled in November.

Version 145

Compiled October 23, 2026. The nine summary pages that follow take about 14 minutes and should be enough to decide your vote. The whole document is about 266 minutes. It runs long because most of the back of it is the public record itself, the district's and the state's own papers and the law, reproduced so you can check me rather than take my word. The article itself is about two thirds of what you are holding; the rest is the record.

That is a long time to ask of anyone. What I can promise in exchange: every number here is worked out in front of you, every claim points to its source, most of them documents you can open yourself, and nothing is asked of you but that you follow it and decide. Disagree with me and you will still know more than you did. That is worth the time.

The papers at the back are there to check, not to read.

Nearly every fact here is followed by a letter and a page number in brackets, like this: [AF p165]. The letter is the document it comes from. The number is the page in this article where that source is set out. Most of them are reproduced word for word. A few, like the ten years of board minutes, are too long to print here, so the entry says what the record is

and where to find it, and the full files come with this article. Turn to that page. If I have something wrong, that is where you will find it.

Summary — this may be all you need

What the record shows

1. What is already in the bank — $1,305,525 in the forest reserve fund and $637,330 in the general fund at the close of the audited year. Nearly $2 million. [AF p165] Nobody hid it. The district's auditor reported both funds to the board on August 13, at the meeting where the levy was set. He said the general fund held about 2.9 months of operating money, against the 1.5 to 3 months he recommends, and that the forest fund held "a little bit of money saved up." [V p149] Later that same meeting, the board voted to ask this county for $500,000 more. The general fund has a range its auditor recommends, and it meets it. The forest fund has no target. Idaho law leaves its use to the trustees: they may spend it on land and buildings, or, whenever they decide it is not needed for those, on current expenses, which include teachers, coaches and classes. [X p151] Last year's budget planned to spend $857,544 of it, all on buildings, equipment and other large purchases, and none on a teacher or a coach. The district spent $10,266. [AF p165] The fund took in $239,685 that year, the year Congress renewed the federal forest program after more than two years without it. [X p151] That one year's income alone would pay two full-time coaches and a teacher, at this district's own pay scale plus my estimate for benefits, and leave about $22,000 over. The balance would pay all four positions in this article for more than four years. [AF p165, P p144] Ten years of minutes record no plan to hire a coach or a teacher with it. [Y p153] The question is not whether the money exists, or whether it may be spent on children. The board was told it exists the same night it voted, and the law says the choice is theirs. The question is why nothing in the record weighs it against the $500,000.

2. What this levy costs a family — about $6.87 a month on a $200,000 home. [G p134, L p140]

3. What that money could pay for — the whole levy raises $250,000 a year, and the forest fund took in $239,685 last year alone, the year the federal forest money came back. Every line on the ballot, salaries and supplies and food service and maintenance and transportation, is a school expense the forest fund could lawfully pay for, once the trustees decide the money is not needed for land or buildings. Two full-time coaches, a teacher for the children learning English, and a Spanish teacher would cost about

$284,431 a year, against a fund holding $1,305,525. [AF p165, A p128, X p151, P p144]

4. What it cost in 2021 — $13.88 a month, twice what it costs today. On the same $200,000 home, your share is half what it was five years ago. The school's $250,000 never moved, so it buys less every year. You pay less. The school gets less for its money. Nobody voted for either one. [Q p145]

5. What that same burden would fund today — about $420,000. The 2021 rate on today's property values raises $338,373 locally; add the state's $82,532. No ballot ever asked voters whether they would carry it. [Q p145]

6. What no document the district produced shows — how the board arrived at $250,000. Not for this levy, not the one before it, not the one before that. [D p131]

7. What ten years of their own minutes show — one hundred and fifty-seven meetings. The amount is recommended, agreed to or approved in a handful of short entries and in the resolutions the board adopted, and not one of them records how it was worked out. This year's is one sentence, from June 11: the superintendent "does not feel there is a need to increase the supplemental levy, but would like the see the wording change to more salary and benefits on the verbiage." [Y p153]

8. What the ballot itself shows — salaries up $30,000, maintenance down $30,000, supplies unchanged. The total is the same to the dollar. The pieces move. The total has not moved since 2016. [A p128, D p131]

9. What the board set as its goal, and this is the goal not the result — three eighth graders in ten proficient in mathematics. Seven not proficient. Unchanged for three years. In 2017-18 the same district aimed at five of seven. [N p141, AN p175] Is that acceptable to you? It is not to me.

10. What could not be found — in March 2019, reviewing its strategic plan, the board was told that "some areas do not have the goals from the past available." You cannot measure improvement against a target nobody can find. [Y p153]

11. What the state says about this district — it rates the district on four measures for 2025-2026. It meets the state's graduation goal. The other three are all "Does Not Meet State Goal or Target." Reading 35.3 percent, eighteen children of fifty-one, against a target of 54.6. Mathematics 33.3, seventeen of fifty-one, against 43.6. English learner

growth 29.2 against 65.8, which is less than half. Mathematics has climbed two years running and reading is six points lower than it was in 2021. [F p132]

12. What they could not staff with a fully certified teacher — from the minutes of October 2021, "an emergency condition still exists in filling the position of Secondary math teacher." [Y p153]

13. What one job covers — the district's handbook lists the same person under six titles: ESL, junior and senior high librarian, front office, homeless liaison, secretary, and athletic and activity director. [K p139]

14. What the county did while the school emptied — 794 people here in 2021, 783 in 2025. The county's figure is everyone, every age, with people moving in and out already counted. Fall enrollment in the district went from 121 in 2021-22 to 100 in 2025-26, a drop of about one in six. This is not a place emptying out. It is a school emptying out inside a place that is holding steady. [W p151, AB p161]

15. What happened the last two times this county voted — 93 percent in March 2023. Twenty months later, 74. A quarter of the neighbors who voted already said no, and the minutes record no one asking them why. [E p132]

16. What the record shows about how this board works — in ten years of minutes it recorded more than twelve hundred motions that passed and fewer than fifteen that record anybody voting against, which is fewer than one in eighty. [Y p153]

17. What happened the last time anyone counted whether our graduates were ready — in the plan for 2019-20, this district reported how many students met the college-ready mark on the ACT. In English the share fell 40.66 percentage points in one year. In mathematics, five of fourteen met it in 2017-18. Career and technical students graduating with an industry certification: zero percent, two years running. The state's form printed Not Required where a target for those counts would go. It did require a target for the percentage of students meeting the mark, and the district left that box empty. That November the state's own reviewer told the district it needed one. The plan the state holds sets none. No later plan the state holds reports that measure, and the state has made it optional. [AO p178]

18. What the state did when it read this district's plan — the Office of the State Board of Education produced eight completed review checklists

covering seven years. It could locate no plan for 2017 or 2021, and no review record for 2016, 2017, 2018 or 2021. The state's file names each school year by the year it ends, so its 2021 is the 2020-21 school year. The current plan was emailed to Boise on a Tuesday and accepted two days later as "in alignment with Idaho law. Congratulations!" Across all eight reviews, the figure 30.0, the board's math goal, does not appear, and neither do the words underperforming or Comprehensive Support, though the state has listed the junior-senior high school as Comprehensive Support and Improvement, Underperforming since November 2022. [AM p172, N p141]

What I conclude from it

A. A board that decides in advance what its voters will bear has not protected them. It has answered for them. Their job was to work out what the school needs. Ours was to decide whether to pay for it. They did both. The message from this board has been that the cost will stay low. [D p131, AQ p181] What this board, and the superintendent who answers to it, should be telling this county is why our kids deserve better, what it will take to get them ready, and why that is what the money is for.

B. They did not run out of time to ask us. Twenty-one regular meetings between the last levy election and the August 13 vote that put this one on the ballot, and the law lets any two trustees call more. [U p149, Y p153] They know how to ask people things — this summer they surveyed families about a preschool. [Y p153, V p149] The record shows no one asking us about $250,000 before it went on the ballot.

C. I asked twice whether I could ask a question. The chair shook her head, did not answer me, and went on to the vote. [V p149] That meeting had a public input slot near the start, before the levy came up. [AQ p181] Idaho law ties that right not only to the meeting but also to the item: a board shall hear public comment, if offered, prior to taking action on an agenda item. [U p149] I asked, on that item and before the vote, to be heard.

D. Five people hold these seats. Since December 2019 the minutes record the board filling six vacancies itself. It declared another this June, and a new trustee took that seat on September 10 with no election. [Y p153, AQ p181] And when only one person files for a seat, no election is held at all: the board declares that person elected. [AK p171] An election happens

here only when two people want the same seat, and that is the one thing that would test these judgments in front of the county.

E. Towns this size do better, and Rockland does it on less. Rockland taxes lower, spends about eleven thousand dollars less per child, put in writing in 2018 that about three in ten of its students in grades seven through twelve took dual credit, Advanced Placement or online Idaho Digital Learning courses, and has kept coaches nine years and twenty-eight. Bliss fields six teams with 110 students. One coach led Dietrich's girls basketball for sixteen years and won four straight state titles. [I p136, R p146, S p147] The minutes record no one here asking them how. That is the bar this school has to clear, and families here can choose. Fall enrollment in this district fell by about one child in six in four years while the county held steady. I can see why. A family weighing this school finds no published list of the classes their child could take. It does find a math goal of three in ten, and years with no girls basketball team. On the record, this board has not competed hard for them: not on learning, not on getting kids ready for what comes after high school, and not on the teams where kids learn to work with people they did not choose. When it had a chance to win families back, it voted to stop the bus that took them elsewhere. [AB p161, W p151, N p141, Y p153]

F. A team is career training, and this school goes years at a time without some of its teams. A graduate has to work with people they did not choose toward something none of them can finish alone, whether they go to college or straight onto a crew. A team is the one place in a small school where that is practiced under pressure: taking correction in public, playing a part that is not the starring one, leading equals, being depended on, losing Friday and showing up Monday. These are skills every job needs, and a school hands them out for the price of a coach. Section 33-320 now requires this district's plan to address college and career readiness. Its plan measures that by graduation, college tours and guest speakers, with the test-score target left blank and no count of who goes on to college. [AC p162, N p141, AO p178]

G. None of this is the teachers' doing. They did not write the plan that leaves the test-score target blank, set a goal at three in ten, or decide which years the girls would have a basketball team. Every one of those was decided above them.

H. Nothing in the part of Idaho law that sets out how school districts change or end requires this district to continue. The duty to provide

schools belongs to the legislature, and Title 33 sets out how districts are joined to others, merged, or closed. When part of a district is moved to another one, the state board must find that the move is in the best interests of the children. [Z p159] I would rather nobody ever asked that question here. Somebody will, if nothing changes.

I. The board is responsible. Not the superintendent, not the state, not the county, not the parents. Five people hold the authority to set what this district asks for and what it aims at. Under Idaho law they are the governing body and the superintendent is their employee. [M p140] Every number in this article, every goal left unmoved, every year the girls had no basketball team — all of it was theirs to direct or to leave alone, and they left it alone. The board has been in the room the whole time, whoever held the seats. It voted every levy. It accepted every plan put to it. It was told the scores, and the record shows it asking for nothing: in five years and about seventy meetings, the minutes record no request from this board for a worksheet, a plan to move a score, or an explanation of why $250,000. [Y p153] This board, right now, is responsible for fixing this. There is nobody else. A kid leaving this school, whether for college, trade school or straight to work, is counting on these five people. They answer to us. Even after 2028, the state will judge this district mostly by what the district says about itself. [AS p190] Most school board members across the country spend 11 to 50 hours a month on board duties. [AI p169] Do the work, or do not run again, so this county can elect people who will.

J. What I am asking for is the work, at whatever length it takes. What the school needs item by item, what each part costs, what the $1,942,855 already in the bank covers, why the answer is $250,000 and not some other number, what happens if the county gives less, and who worked it out. Every teacher in that building makes children show their work.

K. The state says a person cannot think critically about a matter without the knowledge to reason from. Approving a levy is that exercise exactly, and the record shows no analysis of the levy amount put before the trustees: no list of what the school needs, what each part costs, or how that compares with what it takes in. When the improvement plan needed goals, they were asked to supply them. [AA p160, Y p153] This is not about anyone’s capacity. Nobody was given the foundation.

L. The law changed this year, and the first plan under it is due the same year this levy begins. Section 33-320 now requires a strategic performance

plan of at least four years covering literacy, mathematics, graduation, each student's goals for after high school, growth, college and career readiness, outcomes for at-risk children, and the board's own performance in monitoring all of it. The board must review progress in public, quarterly. Starting with the state's first review in October 2028, a district that shows no progress on a majority of its goals has the state step in, and after three years the state reviews its operations and approves its calendar. Up to $6,600 is available for board training in exactly the skills this record shows are missing. [AC p162] Until that first review, the state is not coming to save our kids, or to make sure they leave school ready for life. The Department of Education found no law broken. It says it does not watch how a school board does its job, and knows of no state agency that routinely does. Even under the new law, the district is graded on goals and measures its own board approves. The State Board adopted the state's measuring tool six weeks after the legal deadline, and under it the district picks its own test and its own self-assessment is the main evidence. A letter from the state, or the school's accreditation, is not a passing grade for this board. [AR p183, AC p162, AS p190]

M. Who checks what, in plain words. Think of a restaurant. The health inspector checks how the kitchen is run: is it clean, is there a plan, does the cook taste the food and keep getting better? If so, a sticker goes on the door. The sticker does not say how many customers left full and happy. Accreditation is that sticker. Cognia, the outside group that accredits this school, checks a school against 31 standards. One group of them is about whether students are growing and ready for what comes next. But one sign of growth Cognia lists is meeting expectations "as defined by the institution," the school's own. Cognia calls its accreditation "designed for progress, not pressure." [AT p192] The state is city hall: it sends money, makes rules, puts low-scoring schools on an improvement list, and steps in when a law is broken. It found no law broken. [AR p183] The board is the manager the law puts in charge. We are the owners who elect it. So for any sticker, letter or report, ask one question: does this tell me how many kids leave here ready? The accreditation letter does not. The state's letter does not. The test results come closest. Last spring at the junior-senior high, 9 of the 25 students tested were proficient in math and 10 of 25 in English. [F p132]

N. What it all comes to is not a district that never tried. The 2018-19 plan's narrative runs nineteen pages, its targets call for a ten percent

increase on many measures, it lists sixteen college and career activities for grades nine through twelve, and says plainly that analyzing data had been a weakness the district meant to fix. The 2019-20 plan describes full-day kindergarten adopted for early reading and teachers paired to hold each other to the goals they set. [AN p175] Somebody meant it. The last of those plans covers 2019-20; the state located no plan for 2020-21; and from 2021-22 the plan's narrative document is one page whose only changes in five years, apart from the year labels and the state's form wording, are three corrected typos. [AN p175] What is missing is on the board's side of the table: in ten years of minutes there is no record of this board asking what happened to any of those targets. [Y p153] This is not the absence of an aim. It is an aim that was abandoned, and the file shows the year.

Every one of those comes from the record set out at the back of this article, or from what I saw myself in that room, and the back of the article says which. If you think I have any of it wrong, the papers are there. Read them, and tell me.

So what does a no vote actually do?

A no vote on November 3 is not a vote against a school. It tells five people to work out what these children need and come back and ask for it — even if that turns out to be more than $250,000.

And nothing closes. Nothing stops.

The levy voters approved in November 2024 is still being collected, and it runs through June 30, 2027. That money is approved and already coming in, and a no vote in November does not touch a dollar of it.

The teachers are paid. The buses run. The doors open in the fall exactly as they would have.

What a no vote buys is time, and the district does not pay for the election itself: Idaho law bars the county from charging a school district for the costs of conducting it. [T p147] Idaho law gives school districts two election dates a year, the third Tuesday in May and the Tuesday after

the first Monday in November. [T p147] The board’s next chance is May 18, 2027.

Idaho law also says every taxing district must certify its levy to the county by the Thursday before the second Monday in September. [T p147] That deadline is the same either way. A levy passed in May 2027 is certified in September 2027, the same month a levy passed this November would have been.

> **Not a dollar is lost. Not a day.**
>
> **The board simply has to show its work first.**

Every point in this summary is documented in the pages that follow.

Turn the page

But some of you will have enough now to stop here.

What is in here

Every section stands on its own. Read it in one sitting, or read a piece a night.

Part I — What they are asking

Somebody asked — 2 min · page 15

Two answers that hold up — 3 min · page 17

One answer that came back empty — 2 min · page 19

Part II — What they already have

Two buildings, and a fund the record never puts toward a child — 13 min · page 20

Where the state’s money comes in — 2 min · page 29

Part III — What it costs you

What this levy used to cost — 3 min · page 31

What the ballot says it costs, and what it costs — 2 min · page 33

If you have no children in that school — 4 min · page 34

Part IV — What ten years shows

What ten years of minutes show — 2 min · page 37

The night somebody told them why — 4 min · page 39

What happens to an idea here — 2 min · page 42

Five children and a mat — 2 min · page 43

The improvement plan is paperwork — 1 min · page 45

The plan that stopped being written — 3 min · page 46

What the state actually checked — 4 min · page 49

What they told the state about listening — 2 min · page 52

Wishing — 1 min · page 54

A page that cannot say anything — 2 min · page 55

A district that could not staff mathematics — 1 min · page 57

Told what worked, and what happened next — 4 min · page 57

The record of what this board asked for — 1 min · page 60

What the state says thinking requires — 1 min · page 60

The same shape, five times — 2 min · page 61

The law changed this year — 11 min · page 63

Part V — What it bought

What the district says it is aiming for — 8 min · page 70

What a team is actually for — 2 min · page 76

What is in the trophy case — 1 min · page 77

Two documents, and what each one shows — 1 min · page 78

Where does it show up in a child? — 3 min · page 79

The one time anybody counted — 4 min · page 81

The measure that does not exist — 5 min · page 84

A district that says what it is for — 3 min · page 87

Why I voted no two years ago — 1 min · page 89

What a better ask would look like — 12 min · page 89

Part VI — Who decides

Who gave them permission — 6 min · page 97

What the minutes say happened — 2 min · page 102

Who was supposed to decide — 3 min · page 103

Permission to think for yourself — 3 min · page 105

What the job actually takes — 3 min · page 107

Who serves whom — 1 min · page 109

Part VII — What I am asking for

They already have the vehicle — 2 min · page 111

What I am asking for — 3 min · page 112

What I wanted to know — 1 min · page 114

What I would like to see — 4 min · page 115

Part VIII — How to think about your vote

This is not about the teachers — 3 min · page 118

Do not let fear pick your vote — 1 min · page 120

What a no vote actually does — 1 min · page 121

It is all right to vote no — 1 min · page 122

And it is all right to vote yes — 3 min · page 122

Why one man in Kilgore wrote this — 2 min · page 125

What it comes down to — 1 min · page 126

Appendices: the sources, word for word

The papers at the back — page 128. Forty-six appendices, A through AT: the ballot, the state levy reports, the district audit, the district's written answer, the state report card, the improvement plan, the teacher pay scale, ten years of board minutes, the census figures, the statutes, and the rest. Most of them are there to be checked rather than read. A few explain how a figure was worked out.

The two longest sections are the one about the money already in the bank and the one about what a better ask would look like.

Part I — What they are asking

Somebody asked

On November 3, Clark County votes on money for the school. Two hundred fifty thousand dollars a year, for two years. Half a million dollars. [A p128]

In August I sent the district three questions in writing. [AP p180] They were plain questions, the kind anybody might ask before handing over that much money.

Two ballots in a row had promised money toward buying a school bus. Was a bus ever bought?

The district had built a steel bus barn that cost more than $350,000, and I could not tell from the published reports which pocket that came out of. What paid for it?

And the levy amount had been $250,000 since 2016 — through years in which average daily attendance fell from 142 to 93, a loss of about a third of the school. How was that number arrived at? [AB p161]

The district answered five days later.

Two of those questions were about paperwork, and both came back answered. The third was not about paperwork at all, though it looked like it.

Asking how a school arrived at $250,000 is asking what it thinks these children need. You cannot reach a number without first deciding what it buys. A full-time teacher for the thirty children learning English. A Spanish class in a school where more than half the students are Hispanic. [F p132] Coaches who stay. Whatever the answer is, the number falls out of it.

Be clear about what that word means, because it can be read two ways. Need does not mean the least a school can get by on. Any school can get by on very little. Keeping the lights on and the doors open is not the question.

The question is what it takes for a child from Dubois to sit down in a college class, or a trade school, or a job interview, and hold their own against a kid from Boise. That kid took the same test and applied to the same college. Nobody in that admissions office cares that our school is small, or that it sits a long way from anywhere.

A school in Boise plays 6A. Ours plays 1A. That is a count of how many students walk the halls. It says nothing about how smart they are or what they can become.

> **So need means this: what would it cost for our students to have what the best schools in Idaho give theirs?**

That is a question with a dollar figure attached. Somebody has to sit down and work it out.

So when there is no worksheet, it is not a filing problem. It means no record shows the question being worked through. Ten years of naming an amount, and nothing in the record setting down what it should buy.

A school board is asked to do one hard thing: decide what the children of this county should be able to do, then go ask the county to pay for it. A board that never does the first half is not budgeting carefully. It has stopped doing the job.

Two answers that hold up

This part matters, and it comes first.

The bus.

No bus was bought in the last three budget years. But money went into a Bus Depreciation Fund every one of those years — $20,000, then $16,500, then $13,500 — set aside, the district wrote, “to go towards the purchase of a bus.” [B p129]

The district also listed its fleet: five buses, numbered 99, 07, 15, 20 and 21. [B p129]

The saving was real. Here is what a voter could not have known.

The board put this on the ballot: “Maintenance and Transportation, including Bus Purchase — $140,000.” Read that in a voting booth. You would think a good share of $140,000 was going toward a bus. What actually went into the bus fund was between $13,500 and $20,000 a year. Between about a tenth and a seventh of that line.

Nothing a voter is likely to see would have told you that. Not the ballot, which gives one number for the whole category. Not the yearly levy report, which does the same. What went into the bus fund shows up in one place only: a table deep inside the annual audit, in a section on the district’s smaller funds. No voter reads that, and no one should have to.

Before anyone asks where the rest of that $140,000 went, the district’s own reports answer it. That category spent $611,817 across those three years. The levy supplied $420,000 of it. The state sent $8,674. The school covered the other $183,143 out of its general fund. Roofs, repairs, fuel, bus routes. The money is accounted for. [C p129]

The fund is older than the ballot language. It held $84,742 in July 2024. Only $20,000 of that went in during the years paid for by a ballot that named a bus. The district was saving toward a bus before any ballot mentioned one. [J p138, B p129]

The board named a specific thing, and neither the ballot nor the levy reports said how much of the money was for it.

Here are the three ballots, on the line in question. [A p128]

> *March 2023 — Maintenance and Transportation, including Bus Purchase: $140,000*
>
> *November 2024 — Maintenance and Transportation, including Bus Purchase: $140,000*
>
> *November 2026 — Maintenance and Transportation: $110,000*

No bus was bought in the three years through June 2026. The phrase came off the third ballot.

The money is already there. At the end of June the bus depreciation fund held $116,344, saved year by year under the two ballots that named a bus and in the years before them. [J p138] When this district sought a bus in 2018, the two bids it opened that September for a 72-passenger bus were $94,900 and $88,960. Its vehicle list shows buses bought in spring 2019 and fall 2021. [Y p153, B p129] If a bus is bought this fall, it is being bought with money already in the bank, not with anything the November ballot raises.

Which leaves the wording where it started. Two ballots named a bus. The board has now moved to buy one this school year, the last year of the second of them, starting with money already saved. [B p129] The third ballot does not name one.

The bus barn.

It cost $351,685.02. It was paid with federal money — $228,291.70 from pandemic relief funds and $123,393.32 from federal forest payments. Neither has anything to do with the levy, which is exactly why neither appears in the levy reports. [C p129]

The district also sent seventy-four pages of paperwork on the job. Quotes from more than one builder in early 2023. The signed contract. A change order form. The board picked Teton West in May. [C p129]

That answers where the money came from, and it checks against the district's own check registers to the penny.

One kind of paper was not among them: a public notice inviting bids. Getting quotes from builders and advertising a job in public are two different things, and this district knows the difference. In July 2018, buying a school bus, the board resolved that a trustee "will write up the requirements for the legal notice with specifications for the bus with bids required by September 10, 2018." A legal notice, a specification, a closing date. That was a bus. The barn cost nearly four times as much. [Y p153] Nothing in these pages shows that the job was ever advertised. Nothing shows whether a job this size required a public notice.

One answer that came back empty

The third question was where the $250,000 levy amount comes from.

I asked for any budget analysis, worksheet, staff memo, or recommendation used to reach that figure. Not just for this November's ballot, but for the two before it. I said plainly that if no such record existed, saying so was an equally good answer. No one had to create anything new.

No such record was produced. Not for the March 2023 ballot. Not for November 2024. Not for November 2026. [D p131]

What came instead was a history and a reason.

The history: the first supplemental levy here was in 2012, for $150,000. It rose to $250,000 for the 2015-16 school year. It has been $250,000 ever since. [D p131, E p132]

The reason, in the district's own words: the board "discussed the need to keep the levy amount the same or lower in cost for their tax payers."

It did explain why money moved between categories this year. A school officer grant ends in 2027. Salaries cost more. A bus purchase was already handled. Those are real answers about where the money goes.

> **But not one of them is an answer to how much is needed. They explain how $250,000 gets divided. Nothing explains why it is $250,000.**

Three levies. Half a million dollars each time. An amount unchanged since 2016. And no worksheet in the record showing how it was reached.

That is the whole of what they said about how the number was reached. No mention of what the school needs. No mention of what a dollar would buy. Just: hold it steady, or lower.

Hold it steady against what? Taxpayers here pay $82.44 per $100,000. They paid $166.58 in 2021, and that March they renewed the levy 103 to 10, or 91 percent. [Q p145, E p132] This county has already proved it will carry double what it carries now. So keeping it low does not appear to have been the limit. Nothing written down suggests anybody weighed a different figure.

Keeping the cost down is the wrong message to put first. What the board, and the superintendent who answers to it, should be explaining to this county is why our kids need better than they are getting, what it will take to get them ready for what comes after high school, and why that is what the money is for.

Ten years, and not one levy that named a class to teach, a team to field, or a person to hire. Ideas came up in meetings, and Part IV goes through them. None of them ever became a line on a ballot.

> **A board that only knows how to hold a number steady is not governing a school. It is minding a building.**

Part II — What they already have

Two buildings, and a fund the record never puts toward a child

Rockland puts 155 children under one roof. Clark County has 100 spread across two buildings. [I p136, AB p161]

Two buildings cost more than one. Two furnaces. Two roofs. Two sets of lights, insurance and water. And somebody cleaning both of them, every day, all year. That is not a theory and it does not need a study to see.

So what does the second building cost this district every year? I do not know, because the district has published no figure for it and its audit

does not break it out. But it is not nothing, and every dollar of it is a dollar not paying a teacher or a coach.

And it does not have to be all or nothing. That building separates easily, the lunchroom on one side and the rest of it on the other. I have been in it. If the kitchen and lunchroom are the only parts that cannot be replaced, keep them and close the rest. Heat one end instead of a building. Clean what gets used and lock what does not.

That is an afternoon’s worth of thinking, and it is worth real money every winter.

What does not appear anywhere in the record is that thinking written down. Not in the improvement plan. Not in a levy resolution. Not in the answer the district sent me. The school lost about a third of its attendance in ten years and the district kept heating and cleaning the same square footage.

> **Work the problem. Put the answer to the voters. Show your work.**

Now the other money.

Some money comes with rules. The federal government sends this county money every year because there is national forest here that nobody pays taxes on. Federal law says the money is for “the benefit of the public schools and public roads” of the county. [X p151]

Idaho law says who decides how it is spent. The school share may be saved and spent on school sites and buildings, and when the trustees decide it is not needed for those, “they may be expended for current expenses.” [X p151] Current expenses are what it costs to run a school: teachers, coaches, classes. The choice belongs to the trustees.

A school is a teacher explaining fractions. A school is a coach at practice in February. A school is a class that lets a senior earn college credit before she leaves. All of that is a school. So is the building, but the building is not the only thing on the list.

Three years ago the district took $123,393 out of that fund and put it toward a garage for the vehicles. [C p129] That was allowed. It was also a choice. They could have spent it on a person instead. Nothing in the law stopped them.

The audited statements for the year ended June 30, 2026 put that fund at $1,305,525, with nothing owed against any of it. [AF p165]

And almost none of it went back out. It began that year at $1,000,839 and ended at $1,305,525. That year was not a normal one: Congress renewed the federal forest program in December 2025, after it had lapsed for more than two years. [X p151] Of the $239,685 that came in, the district spent $10,266. The rest of the rise, $75,267, was money moved over from the general fund, which the audit lists as a reimbursement. [AF p165]

It was not for lack of a budget. The budget for that year planned to spend $857,544 from the fund: $707,544 on capital assets, meaning large purchases such as buildings, vehicles and equipment, and $150,000 on upkeep of buildings and equipment. Not a dollar was budgeted for a teacher or a coach. It planned to end the year with nothing left in the fund. It ended the year with $1,305,525. This year's budget allows up to $1,257,737 to be spent from it, and the district's July report does not say on what. [AF p165]

> **Ten thousand dollars spent out of a fund that took in two hundred and thirty-nine thousand. Four cents on the dollar.**

The general fund closed the same year at $637,330. Between the two, this district ended the year with $1,942,855 in those two funds after everything it owed. [AF p165] That is nearly eight years of the levy it is asking you to approve.

So let me ask the question plainly, because the record shows no one asking it.

Why is the school board asking taxpayers to approve another $500,000 property tax levy when over $1.94 million is sitting in the forest fund and the general fund? That is nearly four full levies — four times $500,000 — or roughly eight years of levies already banked. [AF p165] A full year of funding from the current levy is already approved, and there are two chances a year to ask for more. [T p147]

> **Surely we can hold steady, see what happens with the federal forest money, and let them come back and show us the hole when there is one. Surely?**

I am not asking that just to make a point, and I am not assuming there is no answer. Part of one is in the minutes.

The board has been told, more than once across ten years, that this money is not steady. In one meeting it was noted that “the forest funds fluctuate so much it is difficult to know how to plan,” and that Senators Risch and Crapo were trying to get the amount set at a stable level. In another a trustee reported that “the government has done away with the forest funds, but we have representatives working to keep it.” In another, that a rural schools bill had passed “which would give back forest funds, but amount could be reduced.” [Y p153]

That is a real reason to hold something back, and I will not pretend otherwise. Money that arrives unevenly should not be spent as though it arrives every year.

But look at what is missing from all of it.

Not one of those passages says how much this district should hold. Not one says what it is holding it for. Not one sets a floor, or a target, or a date, or a condition under which the money would be spent. They are updates on what Congress might do, delivered years apart, none of them tied to a decision here and none of them tied to a number. A weather report every few years is not a plan for the roof.

> **A reserve with no stated size and no stated purpose is not a policy. It is money piling up.**

And here is why the answer that the money comes unevenly does not carry this ballot.

Idaho law gives a school district two chances a year to ask its voters for a supplemental levy: the third Tuesday in May, and the Tuesday after the first Monday in November. [T p147] If the forest payments fall in 2028, this district can put a levy on the ballot in May of 2028, or in November, and the county can decide then, with the actual shortfall in front of it instead of a forecast.

> **A district that can ask twice a year does not need to take money now against something that might happen later. It needs to ask when it happens, and show us the hole.**

So the question stands, and it is the plainest one in this article.

> **Nearly two million dollars in the bank. A request for half a million more. And not one page on record connecting them.**

There is an answer coming to some of this, and it is worth dealing with now.

The district's auditor has already told this board how much money a school should keep in the bank. In October 2023 he said the district had about a month and a half of running money set aside, and that three months is what he recommends. [Y p153] On August 13 of this year, at the meeting where the levy was set, he said the general fund now holds "about a 2.9 month operating reserve," and that "we do recommend 1.5 to 3 months." [V p149] Worked from the audited totals it is a little over three. [AF p165] Either way it is near the top of his range or above it. That is a fair answer about that fund.

But look at what it answers and what it does not.

Telling a district how much to keep is not the same as telling it how much to ask for. Those are two different questions, and only one of them has an answer written down.

> **No document on record says what this school needs. They have only said how much they think it should keep, and how much they think we will pay.**

And three months is a rule of thumb. It is the same three months an auditor would give a district with eight hundred children, or eight thousand. It is not about this school, or these children, or this county. It does not put a price on one single thing.

So if the reason for $250,000 is that money has to be set aside, then say which money, and how much, and which part of the levy pays for it, and what happens to the ask once it is full. None of that is written down either.

And none of it touches the forest fund. In the record, that fund has no rule of thumb, no recommendation, no auditor's opinion, no target, and no purpose written down beyond the audit's note on how it is usually used. $1,305,525 held, $239,685 received that year, $10,266 spent. [AF p165]

> **A fund you can point to a rule for is a reserve. A fund nobody can explain is just money sitting there.**

There is one more thing they can point at, and it is in the audit.

The audit describes the forest reserve fund as one “used primarily for major capital outlay.” [AF p165] That matches the first use Idaho law names: school sites and buildings.

But the same law goes on. When the trustees decide the money is not needed for those, “they may be expended for current expenses.” [X p151] The audit describes what this district has done with the money. The law describes what the trustees may choose to do with it.

The same page puts the forest fund among the funds that hold money “legally restricted to expenditures for specified purposes.” [AF p165] So look at the restriction. Federal law says the money is for the benefit of the public schools and public roads, and Idaho law lets the trustees spend the schools’ share on current expenses. [X p151] That is a restriction a teacher fits inside.

And this district already treats it as money the operating budget can use. In June 2021 the board was told the district “might have to transfer $100,000 from forest funds this year to balance the budget.” Two months later it was told the district was “looking at a carry over this year instead of balancing with forest fund money.” [X p151] The money was not needed that year. The minutes record no one in that room saying it could not be used.

> **An auditor writing down what a district usually does is not a rule about what it may do. It is a description of the habit. The habit is what this article is about.**

So let me say plainly what that money could buy, because no document on record does.

Idaho law lets the trustees spend this money on current expenses. A teacher is a current expense. So is a coach, and so is a class. [X p151]

Here is what it costs to hire people. The salaries are the district’s own, from the pay scale it posts. [P p144] The cost of benefits is my estimate: 33 percent on top, about a third. No document behind this article splits salaries from benefits, so that part is mine and not theirs. If the district’s real rate is higher, these costs are low, and the district is the one who can say.

> *Two full-time coaches, one for the girls and one for the boys, with benefits: about $150,761 a year.*

A full-time teacher for the children learning English: about $66,835 a year.

A teacher for a Spanish class in this school, where fifty-three percent of the students are Hispanic and the school's handbook lists no foreign language class [F p132, K p139]: about $66,835 a year.

That is four people. Four salaries, with benefits, at what this district already pays. About $284,431 a year, every year.

> **The forest fund holds $1,305,525. It could pay all four of those people for four and a half years without one dollar of new tax. [AF p165]**

That fund took in $239,685 last year and spent $10,266. [AF p165]

> **What came in that year was most of what all four of those people would cost. What went out was four cents on the dollar.**

And now put the two things side by side, because this is the whole of it.

Here is what the ballot says the $250,000 is for. [A p128]

Salaries and Benefits for Teachers, Staff, and Administrators — $85,000

Classroom Supplies, Curriculum Materials and Food Service — $55,000

Maintenance and Transportation — $110,000

Read those three lines and ask which of them is not a school.

Salaries are a school. Supplies and curriculum are a school. Food service is a school. Maintenance and transportation are a school. Every line on that ballot is a school expense, and every one is a current expense the trustees could choose to pay from the forest fund. [X p151]

> **There is not one thing on that ballot the forest fund could not lawfully pay for, once the trustees decide to use it that way.**

So the arithmetic is plain.

The forest fund holds $1,305,525. The whole levy is $250,000 a year. That fund holds more than five years of the entire levy — every line of it, salaries, supplies, food, maintenance, transportation, all of it. [AF p165]

> **Now set that against the levy itself. The fund took in $239,685 last year, the year the federal forest money came back, and spent**

> **$10,266 of it. The levy this board is asking you to approve raises $250,000.**

They are asking this county for money to pay for things a fund they already hold could pay for. What that fund took in last year alone covers all but $10,315 of a year’s levy, without touching the balance.

I do not say that money should be spent down to nothing. Nobody should. I say that no document on record weighs the one against the other, and that a board asking for a levy while sitting on a fund that took in nearly as much as the levy raises owes this county that page.

I am not saying those four jobs are the right four. Somebody at that district should work that out and show us. Maybe it is three teachers and no coach. Maybe it is a welding program. Maybe it is something nobody has thought of, which is exactly what a plan is for.

What I am saying is that the money is there, it is allowed, and no page on record puts it next to a child.

Two more answers are worth heading off, because both sound solid and neither holds.

The first is that the board did the work, just not in public. Idaho law does not leave that open. Section 74-206 lists the only reasons a board may close a meeting, and it is a short list: hiring or disciplining a named person, buying property, records the law already keeps from the public, talking to a lawyer about a lawsuit, and a few more. Setting the amount of a levy is not on it. The law also requires that the motion to close a meeting name the exact subsection being used, and that the vote be written into the minutes. [AG p167]

So if the arithmetic behind $250,000 was done behind a closed door, the minutes would say which subsection allowed it. Read them. The minutes record many motions to close a meeting, and not one names the levy.

> **There is no lawful room for the board to have weighed this behind a closed door, and no record that anyone did the work at all.**

The second is that the district is audited every year and the audits are clean. They are, and this article says so. In August 2025 the auditor told this board the books balanced, the audit was clean, and the internal controls were in place. [Y p153]

But look at what an audit checks. It checks that the money that came in was recorded, that the money that went out was recorded, and that the district followed the rules for handling it. It is a check on the bookkeeping.

An audit does not ask whether $250,000 was the right amount to request. It does not ask what the school needs. No auditor is hired to answer that, and the minutes record no auditor here being asked to.

> **A clean audit says the money was counted correctly. It says nothing about whether anybody worked out how much to ask for.**

And that money is not safe. In May 2025 the board was told: “Forest Funds money came in and we received $11,564, the past two years we received $87,443 and $92,263.” Congress had let the program lapse. It renewed it in December 2025, only through federal fiscal year 2026, with the last payments due in 2027. That is the same season this levy would begin. [Y p153, X p151]

So the district knows the money is uncertain and nearly out of time. Here is what the board considered doing with what is left.

May 14, 2026, under the heading “Additional House Purchase for lot by Football Field”: “Discussed purchasing a manufactured home for the school lot with the forest fund money.” A motion passed to start checking into it. [Y p153]

None of the minutes about this house, in November 2024, May 2026 or June 2026, says what it is for. If it is meant to house a teacher, that is worth writing down, and worth putting before the voters being asked for $250,000 a year.

> **In ten years of minutes, that fund comes up as a cushion for the operating budget and as a way to buy a manufactured home. Not once does a minute say it should pay for a coach, a teacher, or a class.**

That is what this article keeps coming back to. Not that anybody stole anything. Not that anybody broke a rule. That when there was money and a choice about what to do with it, the answer on record was always a thing and never a person.

So why does nothing in the record show any of it going to a student?

I have looked for an answer and I cannot find one. I found no memo weighing a teacher against a garage. No minutes record a meeting where somebody argued for a coach and lost. No document shows anyone considered it and decided against.

That may be the answer. Not that this board chose buildings over children, but that nothing in the record shows children on the list to be chosen from. A garage is easy to picture. A roof is easy to price. A coach who stays nine years and knows which kid to ask is harder, and the record shows no one trying to put a number on it.

> **I am not going to tell you what is in anybody’s head. I can tell you what is in the record, and what is in the record is ten years of money going to things.**

Read the minutes for what gets a plan attached to it. In March 2024 the maintenance supervisor “presented the board with some plans for the Lindy Ross playground,” and the superintendent “would like to apply for the grant to build an enclosed walkway between the High School and the shop.” A walkway between two buildings got a grant application. A dual language immersion program, in a district where three in ten children are still learning English, got two mentions in 2019 and then silence. [Y p153]

> **The walkway had a plan. The children had a conversation.**

And sometimes a child pays for what is not offered. In December 2016 a student who had transferred in from Madison High School needed agriculture coursework to qualify for a college scholarship and to make a college livestock judging team. The minutes record the reason he could not get it here in eight words: “Since Clark County does not provide this program.” The minutes record the plan: he would take the work by distance from Madison High School, the school he had left. [Y p153]

Where the state’s money comes in

Two numbers run through this article and they need explaining, because the difference between them is the whole of the ballot question.

Start with what the district asked for. Two hundred fifty thousand dollars a year.

Spread that across every dollar of taxable property in Clark County — $203,131,987 of it — and you get $123.07 for every $100,000 of value. That is the figure printed on the ballot. It is not invented and it is not a trick. It is the whole levy divided among all the property. [A p128, G p134]

But that is not what anybody paid.

In 2023 the legislature created something called the School District Facilities Fund. It is filled out of sales tax and other state money. Every August the state divides it among the school districts according to how many children actually attend each one, and sends each district its share. [Q p145]

The law is specific about what happens to that money. It says the amount a district receives "must be deducted from a school levy that would otherwise have been paid by property taxpayers." The district does not choose. It comes off the top.

Clark County's share last year was $82,532.

So the arithmetic runs like this. The levy is $250,000. The state pays $82,532 of it. What is left, $167,468, is what gets charged to property in this county. Spread that across the same $203 million and you get $82.44 for every $100,000. [G p134]

> *$123.07 is the levy before the state's share comes off. $82.44 is the same levy after. The gap between the two is exactly what the state paid.*

One thing to be careful about here. That fund is not the state's main support for the school. The main support is much larger and is worked out a different way. It pays for teachers and buses and the rest. This fund does one narrow job. The law says it is paid in place of property tax, first toward school bonds and certain other required payments, and then toward levies like this one. Here, that means it holds property taxes down. It is a small piece of a big picture. [Q p145, AB p161]

Now back to the ballot, with that in hand.

The first thing it says is what the new levy will cost. That is a forecast. Nobody knows yet what the state will send two years from now, so $123.07 is a fair way to state it.

The second thing it says is different. It says the levy now being collected costs the same $123.07. Owners actually paid $82.44 last year. [G p134] The law tells a district to work that figure out from the expected levy rate, and it keeps any mention of the state’s share off the ballot unless a specific dollar amount is guaranteed. [H p135] So the ballot cannot tell you why the two numbers differ.

Part III — What it costs you

What this levy used to cost

The amount has not moved since 2016. What it costs the people paying it has moved a great deal.

> *2020-21 school year: $250,000 levied, all of it from local taxpayers. About $13.88 a month on a $200,000 home, which is taxed on $100,000 after the homeowner’s exemption. [L p140]*
>
> *2022-23 school year: $250,000 levied, all of it local. About $11.49 a month.*
>
> *2024-25 school year: $250,000 total, of which $53,764 came from the state. About $8.40 a month.*
>
> *2025-26 school year: $250,000 total, of which $82,532 came from the state. About $6.87 a month. [Q p145]*

Two things happened at once. The state began paying part of the bill under a 2023 law that sends each district a share based on how many children attend, and that share comes off the levy before anybody’s tax bill is figured. And property values here kept climbing. Both push the same direction.

> **This levy costs a Clark County family about half what it did five years ago. The board has asked for the same $250,000 every time.**

One more thing about who pays this, because those are property tax figures and not everybody in this county holds a tax bill.

If you rent here, you pay this levy too. Not on a statement with your name on it, but in what your landlord charges, because a property tax is a cost of owning the building you live in and it goes where every other cost

goes. Nobody sends you a notice about it and nobody asks whether you think it is worth the money.

And you vote on it. The statute that lets this district ask for a supplemental levy at all says it must be “approved by a majority of the district electors voting in such election.” [AJ p170] District electors. Not property owners, and not taxpayers. If you live here, are at least eighteen, and are registered, this is your question as much as anybody’s.

> **A renter in Dubois pays for this school and decides on it, and is the one person in this county nobody writes a number for.**

Now run it the other way. Take the rate people here were paying in 2021 — the rate they were paying when they renewed the levy that March, 103 to 10 — and apply it to what property in this county is worth today. Local taxpayers would put in $338,373. Add the state’s $82,532 and the levy comes to about $420,000. [Q p145, E p132]

> **The same burden this county already accepted in 2021 would fund a levy roughly $170,000 larger than the one on the ballot. [Q p145]**

No ballot ever asked voters whether they would carry it. No document on record shows anyone worked it out.

And the same $250,000 buys less every year. It was set for the 2015-16 school year and has not moved. Ten years of rising costs have come out of it quietly, without anyone voting for a cut, because a number that stays flat while everything around it rises is a cut.

Now ask the other half of the question. Not what it costs, but what it bought.

This district spends about $32,238 a year on each child. The state average is $14,950. [AD p164] More than double.

Much of that is arithmetic: a building, a bus route, a superintendent and a heating bill cost about the same whether they serve 85 children or many more, and here they are divided by 85.

But that makes the question harder, not easier.

If this county is already putting more than twice the state average behind every child, the honest thing to ask is what came back. The state rates this district on reading, mathematics, children learning English, and graduation. It meets the graduation goal. The other three are “Does Not

Meet State Goal or Target.” The board’s mathematics target has not moved in three years. Some years there is a girls basketball team and some years there is not. Football happens now and then, and when it does the boys play for a co-op with a school in another county. No state trophy has gone into the school’s trophy case since 1985. The district’s website has no list of the courses the school teaches.

> **Ten years of $250,000 bought a school that is smaller, still short of the state’s goal in reading, mathematics and English learning every year on record, and puts nothing on its website that would tell a family thinking about moving here what courses their child could take.**

And be clear about who paid for that. No voter ever chose to shrink what this school can buy. It happened by leaving a number alone for ten years while everything in it got more expensive. A dollar of that levy in 2016 bought more of a teacher’s time, more fuel, more of whatever a classroom needs, than the same dollar buys now.

> **A child who started kindergarten here in 2016 is starting tenth grade this fall. Every one of those years has been spent in a school whose levy bought less than the year before. Nobody was asked whether that was all right. It was not a decision. It was a number no one on record ever worked out.**

That is not waste. Waste can be cut. This is money spent without ever having written down what it was meant to accomplish, and that is worse, because nothing about it self-corrects. It simply continues.

What the ballot says it costs, and what it costs

The November ballot says the new levy will cost $123.07 for every $100,000 of taxable property, and that the levy now being collected — the one voters approved in 2024 — costs the same, so nothing will change. [A p128]

The state’s own tax records say the current levy costs $82.44. Idaho now pays part of local school levies — $82,532 of the $250,000 last year — so property owners here paid less than the ballot figure suggests. [G p134]

The ballot’s second statement, about the levy now being collected, is where a voter is left with the wrong picture, and not because anybody

broke a rule. The $123.07 is the whole $250,000 spread over all the property, with no state share taken off. [G p134] What owners paid last year was $82.44. A voter reading only the ballot would think the current levy costs half again what it does.

Here is that arithmetic on an actual house, step by step.

> *Take a house worth $200,000. The homeowner’s exemption takes half of that off before it is taxed, for the family living in it. That leaves $100,000 to be taxed. Last year’s rate was $82.44 for every $100,000 taxed. So the bill was $82.44 for the year, or about $6.87 a month. [L p140]*

At the rate the ballot prints, $123.07 for every $100,000, that same house would pay $123.07 for the year instead. About $10.26 a month.

A note on that house. The figure of $200,000 is a round number chosen to keep the arithmetic easy to follow. Your own place may be worth more or less. The county assessor’s figure is the one that matters, and the same arithmetic works at any value.

The ballot itself may not have been allowed to say more. Idaho Code 34-914 says no ballot question or official statement “shall include any information regarding state tax relief funds, unless a specific dollar amount of such funds is guaranteed to the taxing district.” [H p135] This district’s share is not a fixed, promised sum. It was $53,764 one year and $82,532 the next. [Q p145]

But that rule covers the ballot. In that section an official statement is a brief statement printed on the ballot itself, apart from the question. [H p135] The district also writes a pamphlet before levy elections, and has for years. [Y p153] A pamphlet could say it plainly: the levy is $250,000, the state paid $82,532 of it last year, local owners paid the rest, and the state’s help is not promised.

So here is the plain version. On that $200,000 house, the ballot tells a voter this levy costs $10.26 a month. Last year it cost $6.87.

If you have no children in that school

The county did not empty out. Census Bureau estimates put the county at 794 people in 2021 and 783 in 2025. In between it went up to 811 and came

back down. Four years, and the county lost eleven people out of almost eight hundred. The school lost one child in six. [W p151]

The school did.

Average daily attendance, which is what the state counts and what the state pays on, was 93 in 2023-24, 85 in 2024-25, and 93 again last school year, 2025-26. The state worked out the figures for 2020-21 through 2022-23 from enrollment under a temporary rule, so they cannot be set beside later years. Fall enrollment, counted the same way every year, went from 121 in 2021-22 to 100 in 2025-26. [AB p161]

> **About one child in six gone in four years, in a county that lost almost nobody.**

And the county's number is everyone. Every age. Births against deaths, people arriving against people leaving, the whole of it netted out to a loss of eleven people in four years. The school's number is children alone.

> **This is not a place emptying out. It is a school emptying out inside a place that is holding steady.**

So the explanation cannot be that Clark County ran out of families. Something else is happening, and I do not know what it is. Children may be being born here in smaller numbers. Families with school-age children may be the ones leaving while others stay. Or children may be living in this county and going to school somewhere else, which Idaho law permits.

And a child who never enrolled does not show up as a child who left. Some families here never sent their children to that school at all. Those children live in this county and do not appear in any count the district publishes.

So how many school-age children are there in Clark County, and how many of them are in that building?

> **Nothing the district publishes gives the answer. It is the single most important number about this school, and I could not find it published anywhere.**

This district has known its enrollment was falling and has said so out loud. In September 2022 the board was told "enrollment is down about 12 students this year." In June 2023 it was told the State Department of

Education “is no longer using enrollment formula, but going by average daily attendance, which means less money for the” district. [Y p153]

What follows either statement in the minutes is nothing. No projection. No analysis of where the children went. No plan. This district noted the number and moved to the next agenda item.

Some of the people reading this have no children in that building and are not going to. It is worth saying plainly what any of this has to do with them.

A school is the reason a young family looks at a house in Dubois instead of driving on to Rexburg. It is why a man thinking about taking over a place out on the highway believes he can raise children here. It is the difference between a county that keeps its people and one that ships them out at eighteen and does not see them again.

Then there is the plain arithmetic. The state’s share of this levy is worked out on how many children actually attend. Fewer children means a smaller share, and the neighbors who stay cover more of the same $250,000. [Q p145]

> **A school that holds families is not only better for the children in it. It is cheaper for the people who never set foot in it.**

That is also why the per-pupil figure looks the way it does. The building costs what it costs to heat. The bus runs the same route for 93 children as it ran for 142. [AD p164, AB p161]

Which turns the enrollment question around. Enrollment here is not only a measure of how the school is doing. It is part of how the school is paid for.

That has not bitten yet. So far the state’s payment has gone up, not down: Clark County’s share rose from $53,764 for the 2024-25 school year to $82,532 for 2025-26. [Q p145] But the state’s School District Facilities Fund depends on sales tax, and the legislature has changed the law behind it six times in three years. It is not a promise. [Q p145]

No levy reverses that on its own. Families leave over work and housing as much as over schools, and it would be dishonest to pretend a teacher fixes that. But a county has two honest choices in front of it. Decide this school is worth building into something families would move here for. Or admit it is managing a decline, and say so out loud.

> **Holding a number flat for ten years while the cost of holding it quietly fell by half is neither of those things.**

Put this year’s ballot next to the last one. [A p128]

> *2023 and 2024: salaries $55,000, supplies $55,000, maintenance $140,000. Total $250,000.*
>
> *2026: salaries $85,000, supplies $55,000, maintenance $110,000. Total $250,000.*

Salaries went up $30,000. Maintenance went down $30,000. Classroom supplies did not move at all.

Total: $250,000. The same to the dollar.

So somebody did work out that salaries needed more. They found the money by taking it out of maintenance. What the record does not show is anyone asking whether $250,000 was still the right number to start from.

> **The pieces move. The total has not moved since 2016.**

And that is the answer to anyone who tells you these three lines are what the school needs. If they were, the school has needed exactly $250,000 a year for ten years running, while enrollment fell from 150 to 100 and average daily attendance from 142 to 93, [AB p161] while every price in America went up, while the state changed how schools are funded. Nothing costs the same for ten years. Not a bus, not a teacher, not a roof.

> **These are not three needs that happen to add to $250,000. This is $250,000 divided three ways.**

Part IV — What ten years shows

What ten years of minutes show

I read the minutes. All of them.

The district publishes its board minutes going back to 2016. One hundred and sixty-one documents, about one hundred and seventeen thousand words. I reviewed all of them. Two are scanned pictures of pages, so a computer cannot read the words in them; those I ran through a program that reads

the words off a picture, to get at what they said. A full decade, which is exactly the period this levy amount has not changed. [Y p153]

I went looking for the moment somebody worked out what $250,000 was for.

On June 11 of this year, two months before the board adopted the levy resolution, under the heading “Supplemental Levy for November 2026 Election,” the minutes read in full:

> *Ms. Holden does not feel there is a need to increase the supplemental levy, but would like the see the wording change to more salary and benefits on the verbiage.*

Then a motion, a second, and it passed.

> **That is the entire discussion. Does not feel there is a need.**

And that sentence explains the ballot in front of you. “More salary and benefits on the verbiage” is the salary line moving from $55,000 to $85,000 and the maintenance line dropping from $140,000 to $110,000. [A p128] The wording changed. The total did not.

Go back and it is the same.

February 27, 2017: “A motion was made by Mrs. Small and seconded by Mrs. Mead to approve a supplemental levy in the amount of $250,000 to be on the ballot for the May elections. Motions passed unanimously.” No discussion is recorded. The next item is the superintendent selection process.

October 8, 2018, from the business manager: “Mrs. Woods recommended seeking a $250,000 levy.” December 10, 2018: “It was agreed by the board that a request for a $250,000 replacement levy will be put on the ballot in March.” December 14, 2020: “The school board directed Dr. Wilding to pursue renewing the $250,000 levy.” Each is a single sentence on the amount. None says where the figure came from.

October 2022: “Motion was made to move ahead and apply for the supplemental levy and work with law firm to match state guidelines.” The only preparation entered in the record is legal compliance.

January 2019 and January 2023: the board reviews a pamphlet, and a brochure. The record shows this district preparing to explain the ask. It does not show anyone deriving it.

October 29, 2020, from the auditor: the school “will want to have another supplemental levy.” The prompt to run it again comes from the accountant.

> **More than twenty levy items in ten years. Resolutions, ballot language, a brochure, a pamphlet, a law firm. Not one recorded figure derived from what the school needs.**

The night somebody told them why

Idaho’s transportation statute opens by saying what it is for. [AL p171]

> *To afford more equal opportunity for public school attendance, the board of trustees of each district, including specially chartered school districts, shall, where practicable, provide transportation for the public school pupils within the district, and pupils resident within adjoining districts annually agreed to in writing by the districts involved, under conditions and limitations herein set forth.*

Read the second half of that. A district may bus children who live in a neighboring district, but only where the two districts agree to it in writing, and the agreement is annual. West Jefferson’s buses had been coming into Clark County to pick up children whose families had chosen that school. Parents told this board it “had been done for years,” and the board’s own minutes speak of families “grandfathered in last year.” [Y p153]

On September 10, 2018, this board stopped it.

The staff’s reason was money. A staff member told the board that the loss of students to West Jefferson was “currently costing the district approximately $20,000 per year” and that this was “a huge loss for a small district.” The staff present opposed the buses. All felt the families “had made the choice to transfer their students to another district and should be expected to transport their own children because of that choice.” [Y p153]

Then the parents spoke.

> *Two parents voiced their concern about their children who had been bullied in the district and were happier in a different school. [Y p153]*

That is the minutes’ own sentence.

And it was not the first time this board had heard it. In April 2016, two and a half years earlier, a mother told them during patron input that she

had “transferred her son to West Jefferson because of bullying issues here.” Two other patrons backed her. A teacher described a program in Montana that helps students and teachers deal with bullying. Another patron asked the board to do what they could about the problem. [Y p153]

And in November 2017, the superintendent reported that West Jefferson had invited Clark County’s “elementary students in grades one through five to an anti-bullying assembly in Terreton.” [Y p153]

Ten months before this board voted to keep West Jefferson’s buses out, West Jefferson was inviting Clark County’s elementary children to its anti-bullying assembly.

Three options were on the table that night: leave the arrangement alone, stop it entirely, or let the families already being served continue and add no new ones. A trustee said she “was voted to the school district to protect it and its students” and could not support other districts’ buses coming in “to take our students to another district.” Another agreed. A third “voiced concerns for both sides.” A member of the public, whom the board had already accepted for a vacant seat a month earlier, said that if families keep leaving, “the school district will close which will in turn cause the community to disappear. The community must be protected.” [Y p153]

The board chose to stop it entirely. The motion passed unanimously. [Y p153]

Now hold that against the statute they were applying.

> **That provision exists to afford more equal opportunity for public school attendance. This board used it to make attendance harder.**

The same section says that in routing and running the buses “the primary requirements to be observed by the board of trustees are the safety and adequate protection of the health of the pupils.” Not enrollment. Not twenty thousand dollars. The pupils. [AL p171]

I understand the money. But a bus is not why a child leaves, and stopping the bus does not bring one back. It makes a parent drive.

As for protecting the community: a school closing would be the end of Dubois and everybody here knows it. But you do not protect a community by making it harder to leave. You protect it by being a place people do not want to leave.

Here is what a board that wanted those children back would have done that night.

Let the bus keep running. Those families had already decided. Nothing in the record shows that blocking the bus changed one mind. Stopping it only meant a parent driving instead.

Then find out why they went. Not guess. Ask. Somebody could have called every one of them in a week.

Then write down what you learn, and what you are going to do about it. With a date on it. With a name next to each item, so somebody is answerable. With a report at the next meeting, and the one after that, so the county can see whether it is working.

That is not a big ask. It is a phone call, a page, and a line on an agenda.

And then go get them back. If a child left because of how she was treated at lunch recess, fix lunch recess and tell her mother it is fixed. If a family left because West Jefferson has classes this school does not, say which classes and what it would cost to offer them here. If they left because the coaching is better over there, that is a hard thing to hear, and it is also the most fixable thing on the list.

> **Winning a family back is harder than blocking a bus. It is also the only one of the two that works.**

None of that is in the record. There is no plan in these minutes. No date, no name, no report, no follow-up. The board voted to stop the buses and moved on to the bills.

Here is what is not in ten years of minutes. No motion on bullying. No request to the superintendent to find out how many families had gone, or why, or what it would take to bring them back. In 2016 the school did respond: new behavior rules at the elementary school, and a behavior program whose team training the board paid for that June. Nothing in the minutes ties either one to the families who had left. A teacher mentioned a Montana program once. West Jefferson invited the children to an assembly. In April 2025 a school resource officer counted “3 instances of bullying” in a routine report. The minutes record no action of this board’s own on that report. [Y p153]

> **They were told in 2016. They were told again in 2018. Both times a parent stood up in a public meeting and said a child had left because of how that child was treated here. In 2016 the recorded response was new behavior rules. In 2018 it was to stop the buses, and then pay the bills.**

And here is the part that ought to sit with a person. Those children still live in Clark County. Their parents still pay this levy. They pay for a school their children do not attend, and when they asked for a ride, this board said no.

What happens to an idea here

I want to be careful, because the first thing I thought when I read those minutes turned out to be wrong.

I expected to find that nobody ever proposed anything. That is not what is there, and it is worth going through properly, because the record is fuller than I thought.

Full-time kindergarten was instituted in 2019. A breakfast program in 2018. A teacher was reassigned to be curriculum instructional coach in 2019, the same summer the board approved moving toward training in Response to Intervention, a system for catching children who fall behind, and a curriculum director. A curriculum review cycle was adopted in 2021. That year the superintendent asked that one teacher come to each board meeting and talk about what they were teaching, and they did. Reading and math pilots were started in 2025, one of them borrowed from a district that had seen results with it. Money was spent on curriculum: nearly twelve thousand dollars on elementary math, sixteen thousand on language arts textbooks, computers for both labs.

And in January 2023 a teacher stood up and told the board something worth repeating. In her government class, seniors have to pass the civics test to graduate. She gave them a pretest at the start of the year and the highest score in the room, apart from one student repeating the class, was 26 percent. By the end of the semester, of twenty-one students, four had not passed. [Y p153]

That is a teacher measuring where her children started, teaching them, and measuring where they ended. It is the clearest example of that in ten years of minutes.

In May of this year the board was given a preschool proposal that reads like the thing I had been looking for all along: “Research shows that students who attend preschool tend to perform better academically, and there is a demonstrated need for preschool services within the community.” It set out staffing, and how high school students could serve as classroom aides and earn child development credit.

> **So this district knows how to write a proposal, and it knows what measuring looks like. It has done both. The record shows it doing neither for the $250,000.**

Here is what happens to the rest of the ideas.

In February 2019 the superintendent told the board she was pursuing a dual language immersion program for the district. She had visited other schools and districts to look at how it worked.

In May 2019 the minutes record that a state representative “will get information for her on establishing an immersion program in the district and possible funding for a program.”

Then nothing. Seven years of minutes and it never appears again. No decision. No report back. No vote to proceed or to stop. It simply left the record. [Y p153]

Three in ten children in this school are still learning English. The state says this district does not meet its goal for those children. A superintendent went looking at immersion programs and a legislator offered to look into possible funding, and there is no document showing what became of it.

> **The ideas are not missing. The follow-through is.**

Five children and a mat

There is a smaller story in these minutes that says the same thing in fewer words.

In October 2021 the board took up wrestling. [Y p153]

> *There are 4 boys and 1 girl interested in wrestling. The district would like to Coop with West Jefferson, whereas the school doesn't have the wrestling equipment. Concerns with co-op were taking away from the sports that we have at our district and the pull for students to go to West Jefferson School. Also discussed was giving variety and adding options for the students.*

The board approved that co-op. This board has approved nearly every co-op put to it: cross country, baseball, football, wrestling, with West Jefferson and with Watersprings and with Lima in Montana. [Y p153] Not every one goes through. The Idaho High School Activities Association, which runs high school sports in Idaho, denied a Watersprings football co-op, and the minutes record that Watersprings would appeal. [Y p153] But the refusals in this record do not come from this board.

So this is not a story about a board saying no. It is a story about what came up first, and about which neighbor it came up over.

In ten years of minutes, the worry that a co-op might pull students away is recorded twice, in October and November 2021. Not about Lima, in another state. Not about Watersprings, in Idaho Falls. About West Jefferson, the district next door, where families had already been leaving and had already told this board why. [Y p153]

Five children wanted a sport. The school did not have the equipment. And what got said first was whether letting them go would cost the district students. The children's interest, variety and options, is the last sentence in the paragraph.

Now look for the part that is missing.

There is no price. In ten years of minutes there is not one line about what wrestling equipment costs. No quote, no bid, no rental figure, nobody asking whether a neighboring school had a set going spare. The minutes say the school does not have it, and that is where the thinking stops.

This district knows how to price things when it wants to. It took competing bids from two dealers on a bus. It opened four competing propane bids in 2016 and three in 2023. It approved two thousand one hundred sixty-one dollars and ninety-two cents for weight lifting equipment, an exact figure with a motion behind it. [Y p153, J p138]

The minutes record nobody pointing that at wrestling.

And wrestling was not a one-off. The co-op came back in 2016, in 2019, and again in 2021. Five years, three approvals, and not once did anybody write down what it would take to have the sport here. [Y p153]

> **A district that will only offer what it already owns can never add anything.**

Five could have been ten the next year. That is how a program starts. The weight room equipment was not bought for a headcount. The playground equipment was not bought for a headcount.

And here is where it comes back to the ballot. The worry in that room was children being pulled to West Jefferson. The thing that answers that worry is a program here, and a program here has a price. Five levy elections since 2016, two hundred and fifty thousand dollars every time, and this is the sixth. Not one of them ever named a program it would pay for.

> **Five children asked for a sport their school could not offer. That is exactly what a levy is for. It has never once appeared as a number on one.**

The improvement plan is paperwork

Until this year, the state required this district to keep a continuous improvement plan. It is the document that says what the children are expected to learn and by when. Ten years of minutes show what it is treated as. [Y p153]

September 2022: “The continuous improvement plan was updated to comply with the regulations of the grant.”

August 2022: “The continuous improvement plan needs to be submitted to the state every year. Ms. Holden asked what the board would like to add as goals.”

June 27, 2016: the board voted to “approve the agenda as presented with the change to remove item 5. Continuous Improvement Plan.”

September 10, 2018: “Continuous Improvement Plan/Date for Elections: These items were tabled.”

May 14, 2018: “Ms. Gordon asked for a board volunteer to help work on the Continuous Improvement Plan during the summer.”

February 11, 2019: “It was noted that the updated Continuous Improvement Plan needs to be uploaded to the district website.” Later in the same minutes, in a reading of the board’s policies: “Policy 1315 requires that the Continuous Improvement Plan be posted on the district website.”

And then this, from March 11, 2019, about the board’s Strategic Plan, a separate planning document:

> *The board reviewed the Strategic Plan and were informed that some of the information was not available at the time of printing. Some areas do not have the goals from the past available.*

> **Some of the board’s own past goals could not be found. You cannot measure improvement against a target nobody can find.**

Required by the state. Updated to satisfy a grant. Tabled once and struck from an agenda once, with no reason recorded. Helped along by one trustee, the chairman, who volunteered his summer.

In 2026 the eighth grade mathematics goal is three children in ten, unchanged for three years. The minutes do not record what became of the older goals.

The plan that stopped being written

The state’s file holds the improvement plans it received from this district. Reading them in order shows something no single one of them shows.

You can date the moment the writing stopped.

2015-16. A template with the headings still in it. “Vision Statement: under development.” A heading reading “Message from the Superintendent” with no message. A heading reading “Paragraph about Idaho Testing,” which is the instruction to the writer, left in. Headings for Graduation Rate, College and Career Readiness, ACT Scores, SAT Scores, AP Courses and Dual Enrollment Coursework, with nothing under any of them. The document ends with the line “As such the School District #161 sets the following goals:” and no goals follow. [AN p175]

2016-17. The state can find no plan. [AN p175]

2017-18. Real targets. Five of the seven eighth graders proficient in mathematics. Six of seven in English. [AN p175]

2018-19. Nineteen pages. The literacy program described down to the size of a reading group. Sixteen college and career activities for grades nine through twelve, with more again for grades ten and eleven and for grade twelve. And an honest note that analyzing data had been a weakness they meant to fix. [AN p175]

2019-20. Eighteen pages. A structured intervention block called Power Half Hour, in its third year, running on four-week cycles: test, teach, help, test again, regroup. Full-day kindergarten, adopted on purpose for early reading. Two hours of reading in every elementary grade. Teachers meeting monthly around data boards. And this sentence: “Due to our lower IRI scores, K-3 Teachers are being asked to commit to the on-line professional development offered by the State.” [AN p175]

A district looking at a bad number and doing something about it.

2020-21. The state can find no plan. [AN p175]

2021-22. One page.

2022-23. The same page. 2023-24. The same page. 2024-25. The same page. 2025-26, the one accepted last September, the same page. [AN p175]

I compared them word for word. In five years, apart from the year labels and the state’s own form wording, the only changes are three typographical corrections: saught to sought, through out to throughout, and thee to the. [AN p175]

Somebody proofread it. Nobody rewrote it.

This is the document the statute calls a continuous improvement plan. The narrative half of it has not been improved, revised, or rethought in five years. It has been resubmitted.

And this is the board’s document, not somebody else’s. Idaho law at the time required the board and the superintendent to collaborate on it. [AN p175] The board votes to accept it. The minutes show the motion each year, and twice they show it accepted “with amendments” that the minutes never describe. [Y p153]

The board approved that page five times, as trustees came and went. It has not been rewritten since 2021.

The state thought about this. Every review form after the first opens with one question: did the district provide an updated narrative? And if the answer is no, the form has a path for it. A district that has nothing substantial to change may say so and be exempted from rewriting it. [AM p172] That is a sensible allowance for a small district with a steady program.

Clark County never used it. It did not tell the state it had nothing to change. It sent the page.

And because a document arrived, the reviewer answered the question the form asked. Updated narrative provided: yes. Seven times. [AM p172]

> **The form asks whether a narrative came in. It does not ask whether it is the same one that came in last year. So four times, the same page as the year before, with the year changed and, twice, a typo or two fixed, was recorded as an update, and nobody at either end had to notice.**

I want to be careful about where the fault sits. The reviewers answered the question in front of them, correctly. The district filed what the form asked for. Neither of them broke the rules they were working to.

And that is the whole problem. A system where a document can be sent in unchanged year after year, recorded as an update each time, and congratulated at the end of it, is not a system that finds anything out.

But do not let that carry the board.

Nothing in that form stopped this district from writing a new page. The exemption exists for a district with nothing to change. This district had plenty to change: a school under a state designation, a mathematics goal it had set at fifteen percent, three findings of does not meet, enrollment down from 121 to 100 in the years the page sat unrevised. It had five years of reasons to rewrite that page and it did not rewrite it.

> **The state built a form that would not catch it. That is the state’s failing. Sending the same page anyway, three years running after the state flagged the school, is this board’s.**

This county is entitled to expect better than a page that has not been rewritten since 2021. Not better than the law requires. Better than that, because the law is a floor and these are our children.

What the state actually checked

I asked the state for every improvement plan this district has filed since 2016, and for any record that anybody ever read one. The answer came back on September 18, and it is more interesting than I expected.

Somebody did read them. The Office of the State Board of Education produced eight completed review checklists covering seven years. [AM p172] It also told me, in writing, that no plan submission could be located for 2017 or 2021, and that no review record could be located for 2016, 2017, 2018 or 2021. [AM p172]

And it produced this. The superintendent emailed the 2025-26 plan to the state on Tuesday, September 16, 2025. Two days later the state wrote back. [AM p172]

> *Thank you for submitting a Continuous Improvement Plan for Clark County School District. We have completed a full review of your updated plan. This e-mail is to notify you that your Continuous Improvement Plan has been accepted by the Office of the State Board of Education and the version received on September 18, 2025, is in alignment with Idaho law. Congratulations!*

That is a real e-mail from the state, and if this board wants to answer this article in one sentence, that sentence is it. So it is worth knowing what the review behind it actually checks.

I read all eight checklists. They ask whether the boxes are filled. Did the district provide a narrative. Are performance targets set for each metric. Is a prior year of data included. Every one of those questions is about whether the form is complete.

Here is what does not appear anywhere in eight review checklists covering seven years.

The figure 30.0 does not appear. Neither do the words underperforming or Comprehensive Support, in the file of a school the state itself designated

Comprehensive Support and Improvement, Underperforming in November 2022. [AM p172]

And neither does the word rigorous.

That word is not mine. The Idaho Department of Education's own school improvement presentation lists a "SMART Goal" among its requirements for a school re-identified in this category, and defines the goals as "Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Rigorous, & Time bound." [N p141] The new statute says a plan must set clear and measurable goals. [AC p162]

Measurable appears in the state's own templates more than a hundred times. Rigorous appears in them zero times. [AM p172]

> **A target of three in ten, held for three years, is perfectly measurable. That is the whole of what the form asks. Nothing on it asks whether the target is any good.**

The reviewers did their job. There is no box on that form for this goal is too low, and no box for this school is under a state designation and the plan does not mention it. A person following the form correctly cannot flag either one, because the form does not ask.

> **The state did not decide this plan was good. The state confirmed it was complete. Those are different things, and only one of them is what a parent would assume from the word accepted.**

There are about a dozen reviewer notes in those seven years, and it is worth knowing what they say. In January 2019 two notes praise the advising plan ("Very good details," "A great deal of parent notification"), and two say the district used an outdated form and left out a target for the graduation rate. Twice more the state asked for a missing target: in November 2019, for a target on the share of students meeting the college ready mark, and in December 2021, for a target on the share who go on to college or training. [AM p172] The go-on measure later left the form. The college-ready one is still there, marked optional, with no target in any of the last four plans. I come back to that.

In the last four reviews there is exactly one note each, and it is the same note every time: the reviewer confirming that the district correctly explained why it cannot report its staff results. [AM p172]

> **Four years of state review of an underperforming school, and the only thing written down is that the district filled in the box saying the box cannot be filled in.**

So when somebody tells you the state approved this plan, they will be telling you the truth. What the state approved is a form with a mathematics target of three in ten on it, held at three in ten for a third year, for a school the state had already flagged. No record shows anyone at any level asking whether that number was good enough.

And the state’s file shows something the district’s website does not.

This goal moved once in the last five years, and where it moved from is worse than where it sits now.

For the 2022-23 school year, the target this board set for eighth grade mathematics was fifteen percent. It had been fifteen percent the year before that too. [AN p175]

Read that again, because it is easy to slide past. Not fifteen percent as a result. Fifteen percent as the goal. The number they were aiming at. A plan that says fifteen percent is a plan that expects eighty-five children out of every hundred to finish eighth grade unable to do eighth grade mathematics, and calls that success.

> **Four years ago this district set out to have six children in forty pass math, and wrote it down as the target.**

The next year they doubled it, to thirty. [AN p175] And then it stopped. Thirty percent for 2023-24. Thirty for 2024-25. Thirty for 2025-26. [N p141]

So two things are true at once, and both matter.

This board can move a number when it decides to. It moved this one, on this line, and doubled it. Whatever else is going on, it is not that nobody knew how.

And thirty percent is where they stopped. Three years at a target that still means seven children in ten finishing eighth grade below grade level in mathematics, in a district that spends thirty-two thousand dollars a year on each of them. [AD p164]

There is one more thing in the state’s answer, and it is stated in the state’s own words.

No Continuous Improvement Plan submissions were located for 2017 or 2021.

In two of the eleven years I asked about, this district does not appear to have filed a plan at all.

I want to be careful with that. The state says no submission was located, which is not the same as saying none was made. But the state is the place a plan goes, and if the state cannot find it, a citizen has no way to know one existed.

What they told the state about listening

There is one more document in the state’s file, and it is not a checklist. It is the plan itself, the part where the district describes, in its own words, how it involves this community.

Here is what it says, word for word, in the plan the state accepted last September. [AN p175]

On a monthly basis public input is sought by the Board at their regularly scheduled board meetings.

And:

Then by September of every year at the latest, during a regular publicized Board meeting the Board and Administration seek input from the district patrons in the direction or needs of the School District.

That paragraph has been in the plan filed with the state for five years running. [AN p175]

Now set it beside what happened on August 13 of this year, at the regular publicized board meeting where this levy was adopted, before September, in the window the district describes.

The meeting had opened with a public input slot, before the levy came up. [AQ p181] My question came during the levy item, after the resolution was read and before the vote. I asked twice whether I could ask a question. The chair shook her head. She did not answer me, and went on to the vote. [V p149]

> **The district tells the state it seeks public input monthly. A patron asked twice, on that item and before the vote, to be heard, at the meeting where the money was decided, and was not answered.**

I am not saying anybody lied to the state. But it is in a document this district filed with the state five years running, and the state accepted it each year, last year calling it “in alignment with Idaho law.” [AM p172]

And notice which meeting it was. Not a routine month. The one where four trustees voted to ask this county for half a million dollars.

And the plan says something else worth holding up.

It says the board seeks input from district patrons. Not parents, patrons. That word covers every registered voter and every property owner in this county, most of whom have no child in that school and all of whom pay for it.

So I looked for it.

A patron input item appears in the minutes of about half of the one hundred and fifty-seven meetings. That is a slot offered, and it is not nothing. But a slot is not an ask. [Y p153]

In ten years of minutes, there is one record of this board deciding to go out and ask the whole community what classes and activities it wants from its school. February 26, 2018: [Y p153]

> *Survey of Community: It was agreed that a survey needs to be done of the community to evaluate what classes and activities the community would like to see offered at the school. It was mentioned that soccer might be an interest as well as classes in robotics.*

It was agreed. There is no record in the roughly one hundred and twenty meetings since that it was ever done. A year later, a survey asked students which activities they wanted.

This district does run surveys. The board has reviewed several staff surveys. Students were surveyed on what activities and shop classes they want. In April 2020 the board voted to send surveys to parents and students. In June of this year the board put off a decision on a preschool until a survey of need came back, and twelve of its fifteen answers came from families with children that age. [Y p153, V p149]

None of those asked the whole county.

> **The district tells the state it seeks input from its patrons. In ten years of minutes the only survey of the whole county on record was agreed to once, in 2018, and the minutes record no sign it was done.**

Wishing

Read enough of these minutes and you stop looking for a plan, because you start to see what replaced it.

Wishing.

In November 2018, with enrollment already falling, the board chair “encouraged all involved to be more positive and help Clark County to become a magnet school which can draw in students and retain students.” [Y p153]

A magnet school. Not one page follows that sentence in any minute since. No plan, no cost, no measure, no mention of it again. Enrollment that school year was 122. Last school year it was 100. [AB p161]

In August 2022, asked what goals the district’s improvement plan should carry, the only item entered in the record was “even more open communication with staff, parents and community.” That was the goal on record. Not that a child would read better or do mathematics she cannot do now. Communication.

In January 2022 the teachers’ association surveyed staff on how they “feel the district is doing,” and the result reported to the board was “not a lot of negativity.” The board has reviewed several staff surveys since, and the minutes record no action on any of them beyond accepting the results.

> **Positivity. A magnet school. Communication. Not a lot of negativity.**

Every one of those is a wish. Not one of them has a page behind it. No figure, no timeline, no cost, nobody accountable, no way to know a year later whether it happened.

Wishing is not a plan and saying a thing is not doing it. A board that wishes and an administration that wishes and a community that would rather hear wishing than arithmetic is how a school ends up with a mathematics goal of three children in ten, unchanged for three years, while everybody agrees things are going pretty well.

A page that cannot say anything

Every improvement plan has a section on staff performance. The state asks two things: what share of a teacher’s students will hit their targets this year, and what share hit them last year. A goal, and then a result to check it against.

Clark County fills in the goals. Kindergarten through grade five, music, science, English, social studies, career and technical courses, mathematics. Seventy-five percent against each, raised to eighty for six of the twelve groups in the current plan. [AN p175]

Now look at the column where the results go. Every line, every group, every year, the same two words are typed in it: n size. [AN p175]

That is the state’s shorthand, and here is what it means. When a group of teachers is smaller than five people, the state’s form says not to report their result, because in a group that small anybody could work out which teacher had which number. So instead of a figure, the form takes the words n size, meaning the group is too small to report.

It is a sensible rule and this district did not write it.

But Clark County has about sixteen teachers in the whole district. The plan itself says every group on that page has fewer than five, so the rule fires on every line, every year.

Five plans. Twelve or thirteen entries each. Not one reportable result in five years. [AN p175]

So what does that leave a citizen?

The district writes down what it wants each teacher’s students to achieve. Then the record never shows the answer. The box where the answer goes says too small to report, and it has said that every year for five years.

No parent can know whether a single one of those goals was met. The minutes do not show the board being told. If the district knows, nothing in the record shows it saying so in public.

> **Five years of setting goals for teachers, and five years of a blank where the answer should be. No record shows anyone checking.**

It is worth knowing what the review checklists were checking. Six of the eight ask whether the staff performance section has been filled in. The reviewer marks an X for yes. The first, in December 2021, left that box unmarked and told the district to type “n size” if its groups were under five. Once the district did, every review after that marked an X. [AM p172]

> **The district wrote targets in one column and “n size” in every box of the other. The state looked at that page and marked it complete. It was complete. Every box had something in it. Not one of those boxes told anybody anything.**

The rule is the state’s, and it protects teachers, which is a fair thing to want. But a rule that hides the result does not make the result unknowable. It makes it unpublished. The district knows what its own children scored. It has the assessments. Nothing stops a board from asking, in a meeting, how the year went against the goals it set.

In ten years of minutes, there is no record of anyone asking. [Y p153]

And that is what it comes to for a citizen.

The goals exist. The results exist somewhere inside that building. The one thing that would connect them, a board asking out loud in a public meeting how the year went against what we said we wanted, does not appear in ten years of this district’s own record.

People in that building are working, and two sections on, this article sets out what the district itself reports about it. What is missing is the checking. The work of setting results against the goals, and doing something about the answer, is not in the board’s record.

> **A goal nobody checks is not a goal. It is a sentence in a file.**

A district that could not staff mathematics

October 2021, from the minutes:

> *an emergency condition still exists in filling the position of Secondary math teacher and the Clark County School District #161 Board of Trustees approve the continuation of the Alternative Authorization*

An alternative authorization is what Idaho allows when a district cannot find a person with the right state certificate for a position. The minutes show this district using them repeatedly, in one meeting for three hires at once: a superintendent, a counselor and a science teacher. [Y p153]

This is the same district whose written goal for eighth grade mathematics was fifteen percent that year, and is three in ten now, unchanged for three years.

> **A district that could not staff mathematics set a mathematics goal of fifteen percent, then three children in ten, and left it there.**

Those two facts belong next to each other. Nowhere in ten years of minutes are they placed next to each other.

The minutes record that the teacher holding that authorization was making progress toward the endorsement, the state's approval to teach that subject. The minutes also record the fix: a class she would finish by December, and the district applying for the endorsement on her behalf. The failure is not that this happened. It is that the minutes never set it beside the goal.

Told what worked, and what happened next

On January 11, 2024, the superintendent gave her report. After notes on the Juul settlement, the score table arriving in the gym, a bus drill and the sports schedule, she told the board this. [Y p153]

> *Our district showed the most growth compared to other districts since we started the CSI-Up program with a 55% math growth.*

Here is the next sentence of the minutes.

> *She asked the board when they would like to do board training and it was decided to try in March.*

That is the board’s entire recorded response to being told the district led its comparison group in mathematics. The minutes record no one asking what the number measured, what produced it, or what it would cost to do more of it.

I do not know what that fifty-five percent counts. The minutes do not say, and it is not a figure I can find in anything the state publishes. That is not a criticism of the person who said it. It is the point: the board was given a number with no definition and no source, about the most important thing in front of them, and the minutes record no one asking what it meant.

And there is one number in this record that has moved, steadily, for four years, and I have not given it its due.

Math growth. The share of children making the progress the state expects of them in a year. Growth is not measured on every child: to see whether a child improved, the state needs this year’s test and last year’s. A kindergartner has no last year. A senior does not sit the test. So growth covers about a third of the school, the grades in the middle. [F p132]

> *2021-22: five children of thirty-four. Fourteen point seven percent.*
>
> *2022-23: eleven of thirty-one. 2023-24: twelve of thirty-one. 2024-25: fourteen of thirty.*
>
> *2025-26: eighteen of thirty-four. Fifty-two point nine percent.*

Thirteen more children making adequate progress in mathematics than four years ago. In a school this size that is most of a classroom. Small numbers jump around, and thirty-four children is a small number. But four straight years of movement in the same direction is not noise. Something is working, and whoever is doing it should be told so.

What the school says is working. The plan the district files with the state explains part of it. Students who “show growth and who score proficient” on the spring state test are paid money. The plan calls this a “monetary incentive.” It says the money comes from “outside funding sources.” That is not the levy, and the plan does not say who pays. It says the payments were made in 2022-23 and 2023-24, that lower-performing students raised their scores, and that after the spring 2025 tests the payout was the largest yet. It also says each student now sets goals with an assigned teacher. And it ends with the most honest sentence in the

file: “Our growth has increased overall, but we still have a ways to go.” [AM p172]

What the board did with that news. The board owns this plan. It voted to accept it. This is the plan’s whole entry in the minutes of September 11, 2025:

> *Continuous Improvement CIP*
>
> *Motion was made to accept the 2025-26 Continuous Improvement Plan with amendments by Mr. Strong, seconded by Mr. Raya. Motion passed. [Y p153]*

A heading, a motion, a second, and passed, the same as the year before. The minutes say “with amendments” and never say what they were. The minutes record no question at all: not what the program costs, not who pays for it, not what happens if that money stops.

Why the minutes matter here. Minutes are how the public finds out what its school board did. This board writes small things into them. In January 2016 it recorded a $1,250 gift from citizens for the library and supplies. In March 2021 it recorded the meat company that processed the school’s beef giving $100 and some chicken, ham and bacon to the school’s food program. Those are good things to write down. [Y p153]

The program that pays students for their test results is not in any of the one hundred and sixty-one board documents. Not a motion, not a report, not who pays for it. [Y p153] A citizen could learn about it only from the improvement plan itself, on the district website or from the state.

I do not say that breaks a law. I looked for a rule that requires it and could not find one. I say a board that writes down a gift of bacon can write down a program that pays its students money.

> **A program that pays public school students money, and that the district says is working, appears nowhere in the minutes of the board that runs the school.**

Why this belongs on a ballot. By the district’s own account, this works. But it runs on outside money, and outside money can stop. If it does, nothing on the record says what would pay for it.

So here is a question for the four trustees who voted to ask us for $250,000 a year: what would it cost to keep this going with money this county votes for? No document answers that. It is not priced in any plan, in any minute, or on the ballot. [Y p153]

> **This district found something that works, left it running on someone else’s money, and asked us for half a million dollars without a word about it in the minutes or on the ballot.**

That is what I mean when I ask for the work. Not a form. A page that says: here is something that raised scores for the children furthest behind, here is what it costs, here is what happens if the outside money stops, and here is what we are asking you to pay for.

That page would be worth voting yes on.

The record of what this board asked for

This board used to do more than it does now, and the minutes show it.

In 2016 and 2017 trustees handed out papers asking what an ideal school would look like. They called work meetings on goals. They proposed the board evaluate itself. They suggested goals be set to evaluate testing results and create job descriptions. Whether any of that came to anything is a separate question, and mostly the minutes do not show that it did. But somebody was asking. [Y p153]

Read the last five years and that stops.

The board approves. It seconds. It accepts. It is asked what goals it would like to add to its own plan. The minutes since 2021 do not record this board asking the district for anything that would show it the work.

Not a worksheet. Not a plan to move a score. Not an explanation of why $250,000. Not once.

> **These minutes are the public record of what this board did. If a thing is not in them, then as far as this county is entitled to know, it did not happen.**

What the state says thinking requires

There is a phrase in the Idaho content standards worth holding against the record. It is written about children. [AA p160]

> *We cannot think deeply, productively, or critically about a matter if we have little foundational knowledge of it.*

The state's position is that critical thinking is not a trick to be taught in isolation. It comes from knowing enough about a thing to reason about it. Gather what is known. Weigh it. Reach a conclusion you can defend to somebody who disagrees.

That is not only how a student should be taught. It is how the work of a school board is done.

Approving a levy is that exercise exactly. What does this school need. What does each part cost. What do we already have. What is left. Here is the number, and here is why it is that number and not another one.

Now hold that against the sentence quoted earlier, the whole of what this year's minutes record about the amount: the superintendent does not feel there is a need to increase it, but would like the wording changed.

A feeling is not a conclusion. An instinct that is never written down cannot be checked by anybody, including by the person who had it.

And notice what the record shows the four trustees who voted in June and August had in front of them to reason from. No analysis of the amount. No list of what the school needs or what each part of it costs. No comparison of what the school needs against what the levy raises. When the improvement plan needed goals, the board was asked to supply them.

By the state's own account, that is the condition under which critical thinking cannot happen. Not because anybody lacks the capacity for it. Because the minutes record no request from the board for that foundation, and no such foundation is on the record.

> **The state's own standards say a person cannot think critically about a subject they have not been given knowledge of. This board has been working that way for ten years.**

The same shape, five times

Read enough of these minutes and you stop noticing individual failures. You start noticing a shape.

A thing gets raised. It sounds right in the room. Nobody writes down who does what by when. It never comes back in the minutes.

Here is that shape, five times, all of it already set out earlier in this article and all of it from the district’s own minutes.

A mother says her son left because of bullying, in April 2016. Two others agree with her. A teacher describes a program that might help. The school answers with new behavior rules. Two and a half years later, two more parents say the same thing. In ten years the minutes record no motion on bullying, and nobody assigned to find out how many families had gone. [Y p153]

Five children want to wrestle and the school has no equipment, in October 2021. The board approves a co-op and never once, in three separate years, writes down what the equipment would cost. [Y p153]

The improvement plan needs goals, in August 2022. The superintendent asks the board what it would like to add. The plan is updated the next month to comply with a grant’s regulations. The mathematics target moved once, the next year, and has not moved since. [N p141, Y p153]

A trustee wants the district to be more positive and become a magnet school. No definition of a magnet school, no cost, no step, no date, nobody named. [Y p153]

A board asks this county for a quarter of a million dollars a year. Five levy elections since 2016, and now a sixth, the same figure each time, and not one page showing how anybody arrived at it. [D p131, E p132]

Five subjects. Bullying, athletics, the improvement plan, the magnet school, and the levy itself. The same shape every time.

Now notice what is missing from all five. Not money. Not effort. Not good intentions.

> **A date. A name. A number. A report back. Together those four turn a wish into a plan, and none of the five has all of them written down.**

This is not a hard standard. A person running a hay operation keeps better records than this, because a person running a hay operation has to answer to a bank in the spring.

There is a reason a business runs on plans and deadlines and status meetings, and it is not that businessmen are more disciplined than school trustees. It is that a business answers to somebody every month. Customers who go elsewhere. A bank that wants the numbers. An owner who asks what happened to the money.

A school board answers to an election, and in this county an election mostly does not happen. [AK p171]

That is why the plan matters more here, not less. When the check on you is weak, the only thing left is writing down what you said you would do and letting people see whether you did it.

Any one of those five could be an oversight. A busy month. A thing that fell off an agenda. Five of them, across ten years, through several superintendents and several chairs, in five different subjects, is not an oversight.

> **It is how this board works. And on November third they are asking this county to fund another two years of it, without showing us the work that would prove otherwise.**

The law changed this year

In 2026 the legislature repealed the statute that governed improvement plans and wrote a new one in its place. Section 33-320 no longer asks for a continuous improvement plan. It requires a strategic performance plan, covering at least four years, adopted by the board and submitted to the state by the first of October. [AC p162]

The required contents are not vague. Literacy. Mathematics. Graduation rates. Each student’s own goals for after high school. Student growth as well as proficiency. College and career readiness at the high school level, which this district’s plan measures by graduation, college tours and guest speakers, with no test or college-going measure. Outcomes for at-risk and economically disadvantaged children, which in a school where nearly six in ten are counted by the state as economically disadvantaged means most of the school.

And one more, written into the statute as a required focus of the plan itself: local school board performance and stewardship of monitoring

student performance. In plain words, how well the board itself keeps watch on how students are doing.

> **The board’s own performance is now part of the plan the board has to write.**

Then subsection (8). At least quarterly, the local governing board must review, discuss and approve progress reports on two or more key areas of the plan, at a regular or special meeting. Four times a year, in public, on the record.

There are consequences attached now, and they escalate. If the department finds a district has not shown progress on a majority of its goals, the state superintendent must step in with support, a review of budget and curriculum, recommendations, and a list of high-performing districts of similar size and makeup to learn from. After two years in a row, the department takes approval over the district’s money for re-teaching students who fall short on state tests, its teacher training budgets, and its textbooks and lesson materials. After three, it conducts a full review of how the district is run and takes final approval of the school calendar. And a district that does not submit its plan on time may have part of its funds held back until it does. [AC p162]

There is money in it too. Up to $6,600 per district is distributed for board and leadership development training, and to qualify the training must cover strategic performance planning, finance, ethics, governance and superintendent evaluations. That money is available to this board.

The statute also has a provision that could have been drafted with this district in mind. A district may apply to use other ways of measuring student success if a quarter or more of its students are in special education, homeless, economically disadvantaged, in an alternative high school, or learning English. This district reports fifty-nine percent from low income families, thirty percent learning English, seventeen percent with disabilities and five percent homeless. It is far past that threshold, and it can ask. [AC p162, F p132]

There is a way to read the state’s three findings against this district that I did not see until the law changed.

The state says this district does not meet its goal in English language arts. Does not meet it in mathematics. Does not meet it for the children still learning English. [F p132]

Now set that beside what the new statute requires a plan to contain. Literacy. Mathematics. [AC p162]

> **Two of them are the same things.**

The third, English learners, is one of the groups the law says can qualify a district for other ways of measuring success. The state has already published its judgment on all three, and the judgment is the same on each one. This district does not come to the new law at a standing start. It comes to it having been told, in writing, by the state, that it is not meeting the goal in reading or in mathematics, two areas the law now makes mandatory.

The trigger in subsection (11) is a district that has not demonstrated progress in achieving a majority of the goals in its own plan. Those plan goals are the board's own, not the state's. But on the state's published findings, this district starts the new law short of the state's goal in all three areas.

> **A first plan is due in 2027-2028, and on the state's own published findings this board would begin it having met the state's goal in none of the three.**

In a letter dated September 5, I asked the State Department of Education, among other things, for every plan this district has filed since 2016, and for any record that anybody ever read one. The State Board of Education answered on September 18, and it answered properly, with records for the years it had, in writing, at no charge, and with the gaps identified. I have no complaint about how they handled it. What they sent is in the document folder that accompanies this article, and Appendix AM sets out the key parts. [AM p172]

In a second letter with the same date, I also wrote to the State Board of Education, which section 33-116 places in supervision and control of every district in Idaho, asking it to determine whether this school conforms to the accreditation standards it sets. Both letters are in the document folder that accompanies this article. The Board replied that the Department of Education is best equipped to answer most of that request, and that it had asked the Department to respond. [AM p172]

The Department answered for both on October 19. Its letter is Appendix AR, in full, with the key passages of the four documents it linked to. [AR p183]

It found no law broken and no reason for the state to step in. This article claims neither. But breaking no law is the lowest bar there is. A school can clear it every year and still send a graduate to college unready.

It also said three things a voter here should know. The Department “has no records indicating that Clark County School District No. 161 has been notified that it was not demonstrating progress toward the goals” in its plans. In the last ten years it has not exercised any “extraordinary supervisory authority” over this district under section 33-116. And it does not check whether this board monitors progress toward its own goals: “Monitoring of local board governance activities is not a function performed by the Department, nor is the Department aware of any state agency that routinely collects or reviews such information.” [AR p183]

Under the new law the first plans are due October 1, 2027, and the Department’s first formal evaluation of a district’s progress comes in October 2028. [AR p183]

Idaho runs its schools on local control. The state leaves the work to the board, and under the new law even the state’s measure of progress must give “determinative weight to locally approved goals and alternative success measures.” In plain words, the board is graded against goals and measures it chooses for itself. [AC p162]

That is how a school can carry a state improvement designation since 2022, with the state’s own staff working alongside it, and the Department can still have no record of ever telling the district it was not making progress toward the goals in its own plan. [AR p183]

The Department’s letter does not say the state fell short. It says, in the words quoted above, that the Department does not watch how a board governs and knows of no state agency that routinely does. [AR p183]

So do not wait for the state to save our kids, or to make sure they leave school ready for life. It found no law broken. It does not watch how this board governs. Its first formal evaluation of progress under the new law is two years away, and even then the district is graded on goals and measures its own board approves. [AR p183, AC p162]

If anyone tells you the state says this school is fine, look at what the state actually said. It said no law was broken. It did not say our kids are learning what they need. And it said it does not watch how our board

does its job. A letter like that is not a passing grade. Our board cannot hide behind it.

> **That puts the job where this article has put it all along: on the board, and on the people who elect it.**

The same response reports what the school has done well, and it belongs here. The state's school improvement coordinator wrote that the high school met Idaho's exit criteria in English language arts, that its mathematics proficiency rose 7 percent in a year, and that if 2026 had been a year when the state redrew its improvement list, it would have met all of them. Exit criteria are the marks a school must reach to come off the state's improvement list. The school missed the mathematics mark in 2025, which is why it stayed on. These marks are not the state goals described above, which the district still does not meet in reading, mathematics, or progress for English learners. Counted in students, the groups are small. At that school, the junior-senior high, 25 students took the state math test last spring and 9 were proficient. If the 7 percent means 7 percentage points, that is about two students. The state does not publish that school's math figure for 2024-25, the year before, so the public cannot check the rise. In English language arts, the school did meet the bar for leaving the improvement list in 2025. Even so, last spring 10 of its 25 students were proficient, 40 percent, well short of the state's goal for the district, 54.6 percent. The school is accredited through June 30, 2032. [AR p183, F p132]

Accreditation is not a passing grade either. It comes from Cognia, an outside group that accredits schools. Its letter says the school has kept up "compliance with Cognia accreditation standards." [AT p192]

Cognia publishes what it checks. [AT p192] Its current standards, in effect since July 1, 2022, number 31, in four groups: the school's culture, its leadership, how involved students are in their own learning, and whether students are growing. That last group does ask whether students are ready "to successfully transition to next levels of learning." But one of the signs of growth it lists is students meeting expectations "as defined by the institution," which means the school's own. Nothing in the Cognia pages and documents I read sets a share of students who must be ready. Cognia calls its accreditation "designed for progress, not pressure." A school is reviewed on its practices and on

whether it keeps improving. The result is an accreditation status and the number of years it lasts.

Cognia's letter gives one review score, from June 2019: 292 on its Index of Education Quality. A superintendent's column that Cognia republished on its own website describes that index. It runs from 100 to 400. A score from 250 to 300 is the middle of three levels, which the column calls "Improve" and calls a good range. A score of 300 and above is the top level, "Impact." [AT p192] The letter gives no score from the newest review. The board's minutes say that review happened this spring: it was submitted in March, the interviews were in April, and on July 9 the superintendent said "we passed the accreditation and should get the report back to us in the next 4-6 weeks." The minutes of August 13 and September 10 do not record that report coming back to the board. The report, and its score, are fair things to ask the board for. [AR p183, Y p153, AQ p181]

Think of a restaurant. The health inspector's sticker on the door says the kitchen is run the right way. Accreditation is that sticker. It does not say how many customers left happy.

So here is a test anyone can use, even a 13-year-old. For any sticker, letter or report, ask: does this tell me how many kids leave here ready? Cognia's letter: no. The Department's letter: no. The state test results come closest: the 9 of 25 in math and 10 of 25 in English above. [F p132]

> **A letter from the state and a sticker on the door are not the numbers. Show us the numbers, and show us the plan to make them better.**

The Department's letter also says that some of the "cited statutes, requirements, and references" were "inaccurate or did not align with current law." It does not say which. On October 19 I asked the Department to name each one and give the correct one. In the same email I told it that every section I had cited matched the current law. That was not fully right.

Since then I have found five errors of my own in my September letters. Both letters described section 33-320 as amended in 2026, but in 2026 the old section was repealed and a new one written in its place. The letter to the State Board said the law requires progress on the plan to count in the superintendent's evaluation; an earlier version of the law said that, and the current text does not. The request to the Department asked for section

33-911 payments back to 2015-16, but that section dates from 2023. The same request cited section 74-103(4) for the duty to give the legal authority for a denial; since 2022 that duty has been in 74-103(5). And it named the Public Records Act as sections 74-101 through 74-126, as my October 19 emails also did; since 2022 the Act has run through 74-127. Four came from working from the earlier law instead of rereading the current text. I treated the new section 33-320 as the old one with changes. The evaluation rule was in the old section, not the new one. And until 2022, section 74-103 put that duty in subsection (4), and the Act ended at 74-126. The other one, the 33-911 request, I simply did not check. On October 21 I wrote to the Department to correct all of them except the Records Act range, which I found after that email. My October 19 email also said the district had not answered an August 23 records request for the evaluation dates. I drafted that request but never sent it. If either agency shows me another error, I will correct it and say so. [AP p180]

On October 19 I also asked the State Board, separately, for the matrix the law required it to adopt by September 1, 2026. The State Board answered on October 20. The matrix is the form the state will use to judge whether a district is making progress. The State Board’s records office wrote that the State Board “voted to approve the matrix” at its October meeting. The agenda put that item on October 15, six weeks after the September 1 deadline in the law. The State Board’s explanation: “the timing of Board meetings resulted in it not coming to the Board until the October meeting.” But the State Board held a regular meeting on August 12 and 13, before the deadline, and the matrix was not on its agenda. The Department’s own committee had met on it from May to July. [AS p190]

The Department’s letter of October 19 said only that the matrix had not been used yet. It did not mention that the State Board had voted on it four days earlier. [AR p183, AS p190]

Here is what the matrix does. The district picks the test it will be measured by: the state test, a local test, or some other test. The district writes its own targets, starting with the 2028-29 school year. And the district grades itself: its own yearly self-assessment is “the primary evidence” of whether it made progress. [AS p190]

So even after 2028, the state will judge this district mostly by what the district says about itself. The real check on this board, now and later, is the board itself, and the people who elect it.

Two parts of the matrix help citizens. Every quarter the board is to review its progress in public, and the matrix asks it to record the date, which measure it discussed, and a “Summary of Conversation.” Ask to see that record. And college and career readiness can no longer be measured by how many students fill out the FAFSA (the federal form for college money), make plans for after high school, or apply to colleges. Those “will not be considered.” [AS p190]

Watching all of this is real work, and it is the board’s job. A National School Boards Association survey found 63 percent of board members spend 11 to 50 hours a month on board duties. The Oregon School Boards Association says “a substantial time commitment is required of board members beyond meeting and meeting-preparation time.” [AI p169] This board should do that work, or not run again, so this county can elect people who will.

Part V — What it bought

What the district says it is aiming for

There is a document on the district website called the Continuous Improvement Plan. Until this year the state required it. In it, the district writes down what it is trying to achieve and puts a number on each goal.

It is worth reading, because it answers the question this whole article has been circling. Not what does the school need to get by. What is it aiming for?

Here are the district’s own targets, from its own plan. [N p141]

> *% students who score proficient on the grade 8 Math ISAT — 2023-24 target: 30.0%. 2024-25 target: 30.0%. 2025-26 target: 30.0%.*
>
> *% students who score proficient on the grade 6 Math ISAT — 2023-24 target: 25.0%. 2024-25 target: 25.0%. 2025-26 target: 25.0%.*
>
> *% students who score proficient on the grade 8 ELA ISAT — 40.0%, 40.0%, 40.0%. [N p141]*

Read those numbers twice.

The district's goal for eighth grade math is that thirty children out of a hundred can do it. Which means the goal, written down and approved, is that seventy cannot. In sixth grade the goal is twenty-five out of a hundred.

> **And not one of those targets has moved in three years. Not by a single percentage point.**

The plan explains the thinking. It says: "we felt that small gains in percent would be reasonable and show growth being made. These percentages are also attainable which is important when setting goals." [N p141]

But there are no small gains. The numbers are the same numbers. Three years of the same page.

One line is worth looking at on its own. Under the goal headed "All students will be college and career ready," the plan lists a measure of the percentage "of students who meet the college ready benchmark on the college entrance exam."

That box is empty. No target, in any year. The one measure on the page that asks directly whether our graduates are ready for college was left out. [N p141]

It is worth being plain about why that matters. Students from small Idaho schools do get into strong universities, and some get into elite ones. It is not common, and I do not think it happens without a school that expects it. But it happens, and it happens in towns no bigger than this one.

I know that because of a school in the north end of the state, and the reason I know anything at all about that school starts on a basketball floor.

In 1975 the Clark County boys went to the state basketball tournament in Lewiston. We beat Carey in the first game. We beat Elk River in the second. We lost to Deary in the championship and came home second in Idaho.

Lewiston is a long way from here — the far side of the state, most of a day in a bus — and I did not go. I waited in Dubois for word, the way most of the town did. My sister was there — a freshman, on the drill team and in the pep club — and I remember what it was like waiting to hear.

A good many people who will vote on this levy in November remember it too. Somebody in this county had a brother on that floor. Somebody rode a bus to Lewiston. Somebody heard about that final at the supper table for a month afterward.

> **That is what a school can put into a town, and it is still here fifty years later.**

So years later, when I read a newspaper story about a girl from Deary who got into Harvard, that name meant something to me. What stayed with me was not that she got in. It was what she did afterward.

She wrote back. A diary of sorts, every month or so, sent home to her old school, telling the students still sitting in those desks what it was like. So every kid in that building got to read, in her own words, what had happened to somebody from Deary.

I have not been able to find that article again. Take it as one man’s memory and nothing firmer. But I have thought about it for years, because of what it must have done to the boy two grades behind her who read it.

> **That is what a school that expects something looks like. Not a program. Not a line on a budget. One student who got further than anyone had any right to expect, and a school that made sure every child still sitting there knew it.**

Deary is a real place and its numbers are public. A town of about five hundred and thirty. One school for grades four through twelve, 151 students this past spring. On the state’s report card, 65 percent of its students tested proficient in mathematics, against 43 percent statewide, and 57 percent in English, against 54 percent. [0 p143]

I am not putting Deary’s test scores against ours, and no one else should either. Where a large share of students are still learning the language a test is written in, the score measures two things at once and reports them as one. That is a limit of the test. It is not a statement about any child, and it is not a reason for a school to expect less.

What Deary shows is narrower and still worth something. A school of that size, in a town of about five hundred and thirty, puts its whole middle and high school class schedule on its website: Pre-Calculus, Chemistry, Data Science, Psychology, Welding and Fabrication, Animal and Veterinary

Science. A family thinking of moving there can see what their child could take. Size did not stop it. [O p143]

Clark County writes down nowhere that a child from here might go as far as that girl from Deary did. Not because no child here could get that far. Because nothing the district publishes says that any child here should.

Many graduates from here will go to the College of Southern Idaho, or BYU-Idaho, or Boise State, or the University of Idaho, or into a trade, or straight to work. There is nothing whatever wrong with any of that, and most families here would be glad of it.

The question is narrower. Does this district ever write down that some of its students could go further than that, and then set a number for it?

It has not. The line that would measure it was left out.

There is more in that document, and some of it the district should be given credit for. It set a target that every student would tour a college campus before graduating, and hit it at 100 percent. It brought in speakers from at least five industries, and hit that too — twenty different presenters in one day, one year. Students in grades one through five get an extra half hour of reading or math support daily, at 100 percent. Someone found outside money to pay students who show growth and score proficient on the spring state test. That is real work and it is being done. [N p141, AM p172]

But it is worth looking at what those targets actually measure.

Every one of them can be met by holding an event. Did the bus go to the campus? Did the speakers come? Was the extra half hour on the schedule? Those are questions a school answers by scheduling the thing, and a school that schedules it can hit 100 percent every time. It should.

None of them asks whether a student came back from that campus and applied anywhere. None asks whether one of those twenty presenters changed what a child thought was possible for herself.

> **The one measure on that page that would have told you something like that is the one they left out.**

A district can set a target it controls entirely, or a target that depends on whether a child learned something. This one met all three of its

targets of the first kind, and on college readiness left the target of the second kind empty.

And be fair about the numbers themselves. With six or eight children in a grade, one student is worth about twelve to seventeen percentage points. A target in percent is a blunt instrument at this size.

Which cuts the other way too. If one child moves the number that far, then raising a goal by one child is not a hard thing to write down. Nobody wrote it down.

One more piece of that plan, in the district’s own words: “Clark Jr. Sr. High was identified as CSI-UP November of 2022.” [N p141] That is a state and federal designation. It means the school was identified among the lowest performing five percent of Title I schools in Idaho, the schools that get federal money because many of their students come from low-income families. In 2025 the state kept the school in that category, not because it was again among the lowest five percent, but because it had not yet met Idaho’s standard for leaving that category in mathematics. It met that standard in English language arts. [AR p183] Among its requirements for a school kept in that category, the state’s own school improvement presentation lists a goal that is specific, measurable, attainable, rigorous, and time bound. [N p141]

The district’s plan says its targets are attainable. It does not use the word rigorous, which means demanding. And the numbers have not moved.

And one thing should be said plainly, because it sits underneath all of this. A school does not get to point at the town it serves as the reason it aims low. These are the children of this county. Three in ten of them will finish school speaking two languages, which is more than most adults here can do. That is not a hardship the district is enduring. It is the student body it was hired to teach.

A target of thirty percent does not describe those children. It describes the people who wrote it down.

No one person did this. A superintendent proposes; a board approves. This plan has been approved, in something close to this form, for years, by boards made of different people.

So who is this board serving?

Not the children. Their own math target says three in ten and has not moved in three years. The state rates this district on reading, math, children learning English, and graduation. It meets the graduation goal and does not meet the other three.

Not the parents. A family cannot find out from anything this district publishes what classes their child can take. Some years there is no girls team to sign up for.

Not the taxpayers, whatever the district's answer says. Taxpayers here paid $166.58 per $100,000 in 2021 and voted for it. [Q p145] You do not protect people from a burden they already carried and approved.

And not itself. Five unpaid volunteers, no salary, no benefit, nothing gained.

So the honest answer is that it is not serving anyone in particular. It is serving the number. Keeping $250,000 where it has been since 2016. That is the whole of the plan, and in ten years it has not slipped once.

A board serving the children would be telling this county something else: not that taxes will stay low, but why our kids need better and what it will cost to give it to them. That is the case for a levy. The record shows no one making it.

I graduated from this school in 1982 and never stopped paying attention. My mother worked in the district office for years after I left, so this school stayed a supper-table subject in our house long after I was done with it. A niece and a nephew came through after that, and both played.

Nothing in this account came from any of them, or from anyone else inside that building. It came from public records and published sources — the district's own papers, the state, news reports, and my recording of a public meeting — and from my own memory where I say so. That is why the key passages are reproduced at the back, and every public record is in full in the document folder that accompanies this article.

The seats on this board have turned over many times in those years. Some of the people who sat in them were my neighbors. One or two taught me.

What has not turned over is the way the job gets done.

A number carried forward because it was last year's number. A goal left at thirty percent because thirty percent was already written down. A course list nobody published. A team nobody staffed. A worksheet no minute records the board asking for.

Every one of those is a small thing. Not one of them would matter much on its own. Together, repeated year after year across ten years of records, they are the whole of what this account has found.

> **This habit is older than any of the five people holding these seats now. They inherited it. It is still theirs to end, and nobody else can.**

What a team is actually for

There is a reason for team sports that has nothing to do with trophies, and I think it gets missed here.

Ask what a graduate has to do the week after they leave. Whether they go to Boise State or to a shop floor or straight onto a crew, the answer is the same. They have to work with people they did not choose, toward something none of them can finish alone.

That is not a thing you learn from a textbook. There is exactly one place in a small school where a young person practices it under pressure, in front of people, with something at stake.

A team teaches a child to take a correction in front of everybody and keep playing. To do a job that is not the starring one because the job needs doing. To speak up when they see something the others do not. To depend on somebody and be depended on. To lead people who are their equals, which is harder than leading people who work for you and is most of what a foreman or a shift lead or a project manager actually does. To lose on Friday and show up on Monday.

And it reaches the quiet ones. A shy kid on a team has to talk, because the play requires it. That is worth more to that child at twenty-five than almost anything that happens in a classroom.

> **These are skills every job needs. A school hands them out for the price of a coach.**

Now read what the district says it is for. Its own handbook says of varsity programs that “being competitive and winning competitions is the ultimate goal,” though “not a ‘win at all cost’ philosophy,” and that “the safety and welfare of athletes is most important.” [K p139]

That is aiming at the wrong thing. Winning is what happens some Fridays. The rest of it happens every day at practice, and it happens whether the season ends nine and nothing or nothing and nine.

There is also a legal point here now. Section 33-320, replaced this year, requires every plan this district files under it, starting with the first one due October 1, 2027, to focus on several things, and one of them is college and career readiness at the high school level. [AC p162] Under the goal headed “college and career ready,” its current plan measures readiness by graduation alone; a separate advising section adds college tours and guest speakers. Its one test measure has no target, and it has no college-going measure. [N p141, AO p178] And in the years there is no team, the surest way a small school builds career readiness is not available to the children who would most benefit from it.

> **A county that cannot field a team is not just short a scoreboard. It is short the only classroom where these things get taught.**

What is in the trophy case

In October 2018 the athletic director’s report to the board took up high school girls’ basketball. The minutes record the options it raised: it may be “necessary to form a co-op for high school girls’ basketball with Watersprings or to allow the girls to play with the boys.” [Y p153]

In a school whose trophy case holds a state volleyball championship won by girls from this town, the choices on the table were send them to another county or put them on the boys’ team.

> **Hiring somebody to coach them is not among the options in those minutes.**

Thirty-three years earlier the girls of this county went twenty-three and nothing and won the whole state. In 2018 the question on the table was whether the girls would have a team of their own.

There is something in that trophy case no budget line will ever hold.

If you went to school here — and many people reading this did — you walked past that case every day for years. Go read the dates on it sometime. It told you something back then, and it still says the same thing. People from this town, out of families like yours, went somewhere and won.

That is not a small thing to hand a child in a place this size. It may be the largest thing.

Those children are the people voting on this levy now. That is how it works in a town like ours. What a school gives a child comes back thirty years later as a vote. A town keeps paying for a school it is proud of, long after its own children are grown — and it stops when the pride runs out.

That is my view, and I cannot prove it. Here is what I can say.

Nothing the board has published shows that anyone asked the question. Not what a child here should be able to do. Not what a child here should carry out the door and keep. Only what the tax bill should come to.

Two documents, and what each one shows

Beside the ballot, there are two documents to weigh. One the district did not produce when asked: any arithmetic behind $250,000. And one that does exist, the improvement plan, whose math targets have not moved in three years.

Picture a man at your door.

He needs eighty dollars. You ask what for. He gives you three categories — some for this, some for that, some for the other thing. Fine so far. Then you ask how he got to eighty. He says eighty is what he asked for last time, and the time before. He has worked hard not to ask for more.

He is not lying to you. He may be an honest man with a real need. But he has not answered the question, and eighty dollars is not a small thing to hand over on the strength of habit.

That is the position Clark County voters are in, with more zeroes.

A number no one can rebuild is a number no one can be wrong about. If the district needs $310,000, no one can show it. If $190,000 would do, no one can show that either. The figure cannot be checked or defended or fixed. There is nothing to check it against.

And this is not a busy office that has not gotten to it yet. Everything else asked for in the letters of August 14 and 17 came back within five days, in detail, with the papers attached. The district can produce records when records exist. Asked for this one, it sent none.

Where does it show up in a child?

Read ten years of these minutes and you will meet a great many programs.

Gear Up. Title I. Twenty-first Century. ESSER. CTE. IDLA. The IRI and the ISAT. Reports given. Grants applied for. Trips approved, vans rented, motions passed and seconded. Gear Up alone comes up more than two dozen times in ten years. [Y p153]

Now try to find, anywhere in those ten years, a sentence that ties any of it to what happened to a child afterward.

The minutes record the arranging. The grant applied for, the trip approved, the van rented. All of that is real work and somebody did it. What they do not record is the other end: a student who went to college, or finished a career program, or left here able to do something they could not do before.

I could not find one. The closest are a January 2018 report that several students would graduate with more than ten college credits, and a March 2023 chart of student growth. Neither says what happened to those children afterward. [Y p153]

The minutes record Gear Up college trips planned or approved: ninth through twelfth graders to Utah State, and tenth and eleventh graders to colleges in Idaho. They do not record whether one of those children went to college. [Y p153]

That is not the district’s fault alone. Grant programs report to the people who fund them, not to a county. But this board is not the funder. It is the body that answers to us, and in ten years of its own minutes

there is no line in which somebody stood up and said: here is what we tried, and here is what happened to the children we tried it on.

So a citizen sits down to answer a simple question. Is this worth it?

And there is no way to answer it. Not because the answer is bad. Because the answer is written down nowhere this county can read it.

The district publishes its audits, its contracts, its payroll, its check registers. You can find out to the penny what this school spends and who it pays. What you cannot find out is what any of it produced.

> **A county that is asked for half a million dollars is entitled to know what the last two million dollars of levy money bought. Not how it was spent. What it bought.**

Now, the measure that would answer the question. Ask what percentage of students leave here ready for college or a career, and you find something worth sitting with.

Idaho publishes ninety-four measures for this district and its two schools. Not one of them is college and career readiness. The state publishes who enrolled in advanced courses, who graduated, and how they scored on state tests. Nothing measures whether a graduate was ready for anything. [F p132]

And most of the district’s own figures for advanced coursework are not published. The state keeps them back, which is called suppression. Advanced coursetaking is suppressed every year from 2020-21 through 2025-26. Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate enrollment show only a star, with no number and no reason given, in the only two years they are listed, 2020-21 and 2021-22. Dual credit stops after 2021-22 at four students of seventy-seven. [F p132]

Suppression is usually a privacy rule. In a school this small, a number can identify a child, so the state withholds it. That is a good reason and it is not the district’s doing.

But the district’s own improvement plan sets a goal headed “All students will be college and career ready,” and under it there are three measures. Only one is filled in.

The graduation rate, with a target of one hundred percent both years. [N p141]

The other two are marked optional in the state's template, and both are blank: the five-year graduation rate, and the percentage of students who score high enough on the college entrance exam to count as ready for college. [N p141]

Optional is not the same as unimportant. The district was free to leave them blank, and it did. That leaves a goal about being ready for college measured only by whether a child finished high school. That number is a hundred percent nearly every year. So the goal reports as met, and nobody has to find out whether anyone was ready.

What is left is graduation. Five of five. Seven of seven. Thirteen of thirteen. [F p132]

> **Everything this county is told about whether any of it worked is that they finished.**

A program is not an outcome. A grant is not an outcome. A trip is not an outcome. A child who leaves here able to do something is an outcome, and that is the one thing on this list the district no longer reports.

The one time anybody counted

This article has been asking the same question from its first page. How many children leave here ready?

This district answered it once, in the plans on file, and then stopped.

The combined plan for 2019-2020 reports how many students met the college-ready mark on their entrance exam. Not a goal. A result. [AO p178]

> *ACT English. From 2017-18 to 2018-19, the plan records a change of minus 40.66 percentage points.*
>
> *ACT Mathematics. 2017-18: five students of fourteen.*
>
> *SAT Mathematics. No change from 2017-18 to 2018-19.*
>
> *SAT English went the other way: up 30 percentage points.*

Career and technical students graduating with an industry certification: 0.00 percent in 2017-18. 0.00 percent in 2018-19.

Five of fourteen in mathematics. In English, a fall of forty points in one year.

That is the last report on college-ready test scores in any plan the state could find, and it was seven years ago. The state located no plan at all for 2020-21.

Now look at the column where a target should be. For every one of those lines, the state’s form printed the same two words. [AO p178]

Not Required.

No goal was set for any of them. The form did ask for one target here, for the percentage of students meeting the college-ready mark. The district left it blank, and that November the state’s reviewer wrote back that it needed one. [AO p178]

> **The last time a plan on file reported it, the share of students meeting the college-ready mark in ACT English fell forty points in one year. No plan on file has reported it since, and the county has not been told.**

I have been careful all through this article about small numbers, and these are small numbers. In a class of fourteen, one child moves the figure about seven points. But it is the district’s own figure, in the district’s own plan, filed with the state.

And it is the only direct answer to the question on this ballot that exists anywhere in eleven years of documents.

There used to be a second measure, and it is worth knowing what happened to it.

The Go On rate. The share of a graduating class that goes on to college or training within a year. In that same 2019-20 plan the district reported it: four of ten from one class, ten of sixteen from the next. About half, within two years. [AO p178] The 2021-22 plan reported it once more: four of six within a year, six of nine within two. [AO p178]

In December 2021 the state reviewed this district’s plan and marked one item only partly done. The note reads: “You did not create 2021-22 Performance Targets for the Go On Rates (1 year or 2 year). While you are not required to set Performance Targets (goals) for the number of students who will go on, you do need to set targets for the % that will Go On.” [AO p178]

The district set them. Eighty percent within one year, seventy within two. [AO p178]

Then the state took the measure out of the template. It appears in every version through 2021-22 and in none after. [AO p178] That is not this district's doing and I am not going to lay it at their door.

Track what the state asked for and you can watch the question change. Dual credit was last asked for in 2016-17. Advanced opportunities, industry certification and the summary of its college and career advising program in 2020-21. The Go On rate in 2021-22. The college-ready test score is still on the page, marked optional, and has been blank since. [AO p178]

This district did not do that. The state did.

But be careful what follows from it. A form getting shorter is not permission to find out less.

In 2019-20 this district got to pick what it would be judged on, and it picked three things. [AO p178]

How many seniors filled out the form to get money for college. Sixty-four of every hundred did. Thirty-six did not.

How many applied to any college or training program at all. Eighty-two of every hundred did. Eighteen did not.

Percentage of seniors who have visited a college campus. A hundred of every hundred.

Two of those three came in below the targets the district then set for the next year, by three points and by one. That is a school finding out something hard about itself and writing it down.

From 2021-22 to today, it picks two things. [AO p178]

> *All students will tour at least one college prior to their graduation*
>
> *Guest speakers from at least 5 different industries will present to 9-12 grade students*

The money form is gone. The applications are gone. What is left are two things. The campus tour has come out at a hundred percent in all five years reported, and the speakers in four of the five. The one miss was the speakers, at 85 percent in 2021-22.

> **They stopped counting the money form and the applications, kept the campus tour, and added speakers. Neither of those can show whether a student went on to anything.**

Nobody made them. The form has a blank line that says: pick what you want to be measured on. They picked the money form and the applications once. They have not picked them since.

> **The state made it optional to find out what happens to these children. This board made it optional too. The children are owed better than a form that got easier.**

The measure that does not exist

There is something no test measures, and this county has no way to know it.

What the graduates found when they got where they were going.

Every young person who has walked out of that building knows it. They know what they had and what they were missing. Nothing in ten years of minutes records anyone asking, and no plan proposes it. [Y p153]

I have said little so far about my own years in that school. Here I have to.

So I will answer for one of those graduates.

I graduated from this school in 1982, second in my class, salutatorian, with a scholarship to Utah State. By every number this district publishes about itself, I am a success. I am inside the graduation rate.

I was not as prepared as I should have been. Mathematics was hard. Chemistry was hard. English was hard, and that one surprised me. And underneath all three, the thing I was least ready for was thinking a problem through on my own, being handed something with no worked example in front of it and having to find the way in.

It took me a while to understand what had happened, and when I did it was this. What I had been taught in high school was how to memorize. How to hold something in my head long enough to get through Friday’s test, and then let it go. I was good at that. It is why I was second in my class.

Memorizing does not last, and it does not carry. In Dubois it was enough, because the test came Friday and the material came Monday and the distance between them was short. At Utah State the material did not come with the answer attached. A professor would build on something from three weeks

before, and I would find that I had passed the test on it and kept nothing. I had the grade and not the thing the grade was supposed to stand for.

That is the difference between memorizing and understanding, and it does not show up on a transcript. A student who understands can be handed a problem he has never seen and get somewhere with it. A student who memorized needs to have seen it before. I had been trained for the second one and sent off to do the first.

I do not know how anyone in that building teaches today, and I am not making a claim about it. What I know is that a grade can be earned without the thing the grade is supposed to stand for, and that when it is, nobody finds out until the student is somewhere else and it is too late to fix.

I made it up. I made it up by working harder than the people around me who had not needed to, and by learning, at nineteen, how to actually learn something. That worked out. It worked out because I could, not because I arrived ready.

And college was only where I found out. It was not where the account settled.

The habits I carried out of that building were older than high school. They came from elementary and junior high and they were worse there. Wait to be told, learn the shape of what the test wants, do not go looking past it. Those followed me into a career, and they cost me for years. I was decades unlearning them, and some of it I unlearned the hard way, in front of people who were paying me.

Which is why I am not going to tell you somebody could fix this with a survey. Ask a graduate at twenty-two what he was ready for and he will tell you about his freshman year. He does not yet know what he was not taught, because he has not yet run into it. I could not have answered this question at twenty-two. It took me well into my working life to be able to.

That is the trouble with the only measure that would really tell us anything. It can take well into one’s career to come in, and by the time it does, the board that owed us the answer has been gone for years.

And there is one more thing, and it is the part I think about most.

I played every sport this county offered. I was on teams for years. And in all of it I never once had a coach whose profession was coaching. They were teachers handed a stipend, a small extra payment, and an extra job they had not been trained for. Most of them were decent men doing their best with something that was not theirs to do well.

The last one I can think of who was the real thing was Barry Berg, who took the 1975 boys to second at state. That was seven years before I graduated, and I am still using him as the example, which tells you something.

Here is why it matters, and it is not about trophies.

Everything I ended up most needing in my career, a real coach teaches. How to work with people you did not pick. How to carry a piece of something you cannot finish alone. How to keep going at a thing that is not working yet, in front of everybody, and adjust instead of quit. How to be told you were wrong by somebody who wants you to be better, and take it.

Nobody sat me down and taught me those. I learned them at forty, on the job, at my own expense and my employer’s. A coach who knew what he was doing could have taught me most of it by seventeen, for the price of a salary, on a court in Dubois.

Which is why I think this district has never taken the measure of what a team is worth, or of what real coaching is. It treats a coach as a supervisor for a season, a stipend bolted on, filled when somebody can be found, opened again the next year. It is not a season. It is the only place in that building where a child learns to work with people she did not choose toward something she cannot finish alone, and that is the thing an employer will pay her for at twenty-five.

I did all right. I am telling you it could have been considerably better, and that the gap has a name and a price, and that the price of a full-time coach is a number this board has never put on a ballot. [P p144]

I am not telling you any of this to complain about a school I am fond of, forty-four years later. I am telling you because I am the best case. Second in the class, scholarship in hand, and still behind. If that was the experience at the top, it is worth asking what the experience was in the middle.

And notice which subjects those were. The state’s three findings against this district in 2025-2026 are English language arts, mathematics, and

progress for children learning English. [F p132] Forty-four years apart, the same two subjects.

> **Nearly all of them graduate. That is the whole of what this county knows, and it is one man’s word against nothing.**

A district that says what it is for

It would be easy to read all of that as a story about a small district that cannot do any better. Before anyone settles on that, it is worth looking at another one.

There is a district in Power County called Rockland.

Rockland has 155 students, kindergarten through twelfth grade, all under one roof. It plays 1A ball. It is as far from anywhere as Dubois is. [I p136]

It is not a twin. Rockland has about half again as many students and heats one building instead of two. Both of those help it. Keep them in mind.

It spends less per student than Clark County does. Twenty-one thousand one hundred twenty-six dollars a year, against Clark County’s thirty-two thousand two hundred thirty-eight. Worked out the same way for both, from the same state files, for the same year. [AD p164]

In its 2018 recruiting flyer, Rockland said roughly three in ten of its students in grades seven through twelve took a dual credit, Advanced Placement or Idaho Digital Learning course each year. [I p136]

Clark County offers those courses too. Its own handbook says dual and college credit classes are open through Idaho Digital Learning and online. They are offered off campus in Idaho Falls too. What the district does not publish is how many of its students take them. Rockland put its number in writing. Clark County has not. [I p136]

The difference is not that Rockland asks its taxpayers for more. It asks for less. Both districts run a supplemental levy and neither carries a bond, and on the state’s own levy report Rockland’s supplemental rate is $58.11 per $100,000 against Clark County’s $82.44. [I p136]

So the difference is not the money. Rockland asks its people for less and gets it.

The difference is that Rockland put a number on what it offered, in the flyer it used in 2018 to recruit a superintendent. [I p136]

> **Rockland’s families are not more generous than Clark County’s. Their district put a number in writing that anyone can hold it to.**

Clark County does not print that number.

But Clark County’s number exists, and the state has it. Here it is.

> *Concurrent enrollment and dual credit, Clark County District. 2020-2021: 20.31 percent, 13 students of 64. 2021-2022: 5.19 percent, 4 students of 77. [F p132]*

Thirteen students taking a college course one year. Four the next, out of a larger group. That is not a decline. That is a program falling over.

And the state’s figures break it down further, which is worth reading slowly.

> *Of the 45 Hispanic students in 2021-2022, one took a dual credit course. Of the 12 English learners, none did. Of the 9 students with disabilities, none did. [F p132]*

One child of forty-five. None of twelve. None of nine.

> **In a district where more than half the students are Hispanic and three in ten are learning English, four children went through the college-credit door, and one of them was Hispanic.**

Nobody hid this. It is on the state’s report card, which anyone can read, and it has been there for four years. No plan mentions it. No minute records a board member asking about it. The only reason it appears in this article is that a neighbor went looking.

Nothing here says Rockland is a better school. A test score comparison between the two would not measure what people think it measures. Three in ten students here take that test in a language they are still learning, which means the test is partly measuring English while it claims to measure math. That is a fact about the test, not about the children sitting for it. A student working a math problem in a second language is doing more than the score shows, not less.

What Rockland shows is narrower and harder to argue with. A small far-off district had about three in ten of its students in grades seven through twelve taking dual credit, Advanced Placement or Idaho Digital Learning

courses, by its own 2018 account, and put the number in writing. It does not ask for more money than we do. It asks for less.

Why I voted no two years ago

Most people who vote against a levy are saying it costs too much. That was not my reason two years ago. Mine was this:

> **“You should ask for more than $250,000 if you want to see our school improve and grow. Why didn’t you?”**

That is not a complaint about taxes. It is a complaint about ambition.

The district’s own answer suggests the question lands. Asked how the amount was set, it described a discussion about holding the cost to taxpayers steady or lower. [D p131]

The board did talk it over. The district’s answer describes discussions in June and July. What it does not describe is a calculation — anyone sitting down with what the school needs and arriving at a figure.

Which raises the obvious question. If the ask should have been bigger, bigger for what?

What a better ask would look like

Bigger for what, then. Here are three answers, and none of them requires guessing at anything. All three come from the district’s own papers.

One. The children learning English.

Three in ten students here are English Learners. The state measures whether they are gaining ground. Its finding here is plain: English Learners Achieving English Language Growth toward Proficiency, 29.2 percent against a state target of 65.8, “Does Not Meet”. [F p132]

Now look at how the work is staffed. In a school this small, everyone carries more than one job. One person teaches music and band to every grade, kindergarten through twelfth. The math teacher also runs the business program. A third teaches farming and science and runs the yearbook. That is ordinary, and it is not a complaint.

Band was my favorite class in high school here. It is still taught by one person for every grade, and I notice that.

One line on that list is different, because the state has already said it is not working. The district's own handbook lists the position this way:

> *Erica Perez, ESL/Jr. and Sr. High Librarian/Front Office/Homeless Liaison*

The same handbook lists the same person a second time, in the administration section rather than the teaching one:

> *Erica Perez, Secretary/Athletic/Activity Director*

Six jobs, one person. English for the students learning it. The library for the junior and senior high school. The front office. Homeless liaison duties. Secretary. And athletic and activity director. [K p139]

Everywhere else on that list, doubling up is just small-school life. Here it sits next to a state finding that most of these children are not making the growth the state expects.

That is not a comment on the person doing it. It is a comment on the arrangement.

And the district already knows that early matters. Its plan sets reading targets for kindergarten and grades one, two and three. It committed that students in grades one through five would get an extra half hour a day of reading or math help, and it hit that at 100 percent. The structure is there. What is missing is a person to run the language part of it. [N p141]

Here is what that person costs, from the district's own teacher agreement, posted on its website. A first-year teacher starts at $50,252. The top of the scale is $72,227. Add benefits at my estimate of 33 percent on top and a starting teacher runs about $66,835 a year. [P p144]

Set that beside the levy. The whole salary and benefits line on this November's ballot is $85,000, one of the three lines that make up the $250,000. And another $82,532 a year, the same amount the state now pays toward this levy, would cover one more teacher with about $15,700 to spare.

> **One full-time teacher for the children learning English, starting in the elementary grades. About $2.74 a month on a $200,000 home. That is a levy a voter could weigh.**

Two. Spanish, and the courses no one counts.

Fifty-three percent of the students here are Hispanic. Three in ten are still learning English, which means they already speak another language. The district's handbook lists every subject area a student must pass to graduate, and names every teacher with the subjects they carry. No foreign language appears in either. The words Spanish, foreign language and world language do not appear in that handbook at all. [K p139]

Think about what that means. Districts all over the country spend real money trying to produce students who speak two languages. This one has them walking in the door, and its handbook lists no Spanish class at all.

A Spanish class would serve both ends of the hallway at once. The children who arrive speaking English would leave with a second language, worth something in almost any job they will hold in this valley. The children who arrive speaking Spanish would learn to read and write it properly.

One teacher. In a school this size, perhaps the same teacher who takes on the English language work. The cost worked out below counts three positions, the teacher for the children learning English and the two coaches; a separate Spanish teacher would add about $66,835, for the $284,431 in the summary. [P p144]

Something else turned up while I was looking for those course listings, and it has been sitting in my mind since.

There is no published course list.

I went through the district website looking for what classes a student here can take. There is no catalog. No master schedule. No list of any kind, for any grade. Nine teachers have pages on that site and most of them are empty. The ones that are not show K-12 music, a media arts class that puts out a student newspaper, and a college prep page made up of links to two free websites.

I am not saying the classes are not being taught. Band plainly is — the music page names the method book the students are working out of. The point is narrower than that, and it is this.

> **A family thinking about moving to Dubois cannot find out from anything this district publishes what classes its school offers. Neither can a student here deciding whether to stay.**

Every school has a schedule. It cannot ring a bell without one. Posting it would cost nothing and take an afternoon.

So why is it not there? I do not know. No minute in ten years records anyone asking for one.

But I keep coming back to the other thing that is not there. If someone sat down to work out what this school needs, the first line would have to be a list of what it teaches now. What is offered. What is not. What another class would cost. I could not find that list anywhere the district publishes, which may well be why, when asked, the district produced no worksheet either. You cannot price what you have never counted.

There is a phrase every child in that building knows.

> **Show your work.**

A student who writes 30 on the page and nothing else gets no credit, even when 30 happens to be the right answer. Not because anyone thinks she cheated. Because an answer nobody can follow is not yet an answer. It is a guess that came out correct, and next time it might not.

That is the whole of what is being asked here, and it is being asked of five people whose school asks it of these children every single day.

The same goes for the college classes the handbook offers through Idaho Digital Learning. Rockland, in 2018, put in writing how many of its students took them. [I p136]

Clark County publishes no number. A levy could name one — what the participation rate is now, what it should be in two years, and what it costs to get there.

Three. The teams.

This one is personal, so I will say it in my own voice.

In 1980 the girls basketball team brought home the consolation trophy, fourth in the state. The next year they came back with third. [O p143]

Ten years after those boys came home second in basketball, the Clark County girls won the state volleyball championship. They beat Camas County

in the first match. They beat Greenleaf-Friends Academy in the second, a team that had not lost a match all year. Then they beat Shoshone twice running to take the title, and finished the season 23 and 0.

I was in Nampa for that one. The setter went quick to the middle, the middle hitter put it away, and it was over.

> **It was the first team championship this county had ever won in any sport.**

The basketball boys had come within one game of a title in 1975. These girls, on a volleyball court ten years later, finished it.

That trophy is still in the case at the school, with the others from those years. Anyone can walk in and read the dates. It was a school about this size, in this town, with these families.

My mother took a video camera to Nampa that week and recorded the whole run. Her battery died just before championship point. She made copies for everyone anyway, and somewhere in this county those tapes are still sitting in closets — every match, right up to the one moment nobody got.

A town that would haul a camera across the state to Nampa is a town that cared. It has not had another one to record in forty-one years.

The district's handbook still names winning as the goal for varsity programs. [K p139]

What it has not done is ask anyone to pay for it. Coaching costs money. So do travel, gear, and the assistants that let a small school field a real team. None of it is named on any ballot.

In ten years of minutes, coaching money comes up as its own item only a handful of times. The first is March 2016, funding for an additional track assistant. It came back in April resolved this way, in the district's own words: "Only one assistant will be paid and the other two will be considered volunteers." Four years later, under the heading "Assistant Coach Stipends," a superintendent told the board it looked as though the assistant coaches "have not been paid in the past" and that he would like to correct that. The next month the board approved a coaching stipend schedule, and in March 2021 it hired a junior high track coach "with a stipend depending on participation of students." [Y p153]

Now there is another. On September 10 of this year the board approved cross country as a new team sport, with a stipend for its coach. It is a good decision. [AQ p181]

And this is not about trophies for their own sake. Here is what the ask would be, and it is two people.

> **Two coaches. One for the girls, one for the boys. Both full-time, and paid enough that somebody good takes the job and stays in it.**

Not a stipend bolted onto a teaching load. A real job. The two of them would serve as co-athletic directors as well, which means somebody is running the thing. Scheduling officials. Arranging travel. Watching eligibility. Building a youth program so a seventh grader turns up already knowing how to play.

A stipend buys you somebody willing. A salary buys you somebody qualified, and it buys you the same person three years running. In ten years of minutes, coaching positions here are opened, filled, and opened again. [Y p153]

And a coach does more than run practice. A good one goes and gets the kids. He talks a boy into turning out who was not going to. She keeps a girl from quitting in January. He tells a seventh grader she has a shot at something, and she believes him, because he was there in September and he is still there in May.

None of that happens on a stipend that starts in November.

You can see it here without looking anywhere else. The girls turn out for volleyball and they play. The boys mostly do not turn out. Same school, same families, same town, and different results depending on the sport.

> **That is not the children. That is whether it is anybody’s job to go get them.**

Now look at who was doing the coaching at Rockland. The boys coach was in his ninth season. The girls program was run for 28 years by one man, who stepped down at the end of the 2022-23 season. [I p136]

> **Twenty-eight years in one job. That is somebody who knew which kid to ask.**

All of it at a school of 155 students, in a district that spends less per child than this one and taxes its people at a lower rate.

And Rockland is not the only one. Out in Lincoln County there is a school called Dietrich, 154 students in one school. One coach led its girls basketball program for sixteen years and won four straight state titles, 2011 to 2014. [S p147]

Sixteen years. Twenty-eight years. Nine seasons. Three programs in two towns, and the same thing sitting underneath all of them.

But hold on to that, because it runs the other way and that is the part worth sitting with.

When I was in school here we were bigger than Dietrich. I know because we played them — football, basketball, track. Good kids. We had more students than they did, and more than most of the schools in this account.

> **We were the big school once. Today we are the small one.**

And here is the part I would rather not write. Even when we were the biggest of them, we were not much good. Two trips to a state final in fifty years that I can point to. One of them we lost.

So do not let anyone tell you this is about being a small school. We were the big school and it did not help. The size was never what was wrong.

Which is why Bliss is the one to look at hardest. It has 110 students, ten more than this district, and the state association lists six teams there. [R p146]

Clark County last reached a state tournament in March 2016, in boys basketball. My nephew was on that team. It won one game of three. The district's own minutes record the cost: $2,588 for lodging at the Quality Inn and $1,444.37 in daily meal and travel money (per diem). [Y p153] In some of the years since, this district has not put a girls basketball team on the floor at all. The minutes show girls' coaches hired in 2016, 2017, 2019 and 2020, and in November 2024 no high school girls' team that year. [Y p153] Football happens now and then, and when it does it is through a co-op with a school in Idaho Falls. Some years there is none at all. That is my own account of my own county, and anyone here can tell you whether it is right.

> **The three trophies in that case from 1980 to 1985 were all won by girls from this town.**

A county whose girls have a team in some years and not others is not short of girls. It is short of somebody whose job it is to find them, coach them, and still be there the year after.

There has been the odd individual and relay result at state in track over the years. Very rarely. A kid here and there, a relay now and again, and long stretches with nothing.

Track is worth pausing on, because it is the one sport where being small should not matter. You do not need eight boys or a deep bench. One quick kid scores. Four make a relay. What you need is somebody who knows how to find them, teach them, and keep them coming back.

That is four different things and none of them happen by accident. Somebody who has coached the event before and knows what good form looks like. Somebody who has been at it long enough to have seen a kid like this one before. Somebody who mentors, who a fifteen-year-old will listen to in February when it is cold and she is thinking of quitting. And somebody whose job includes walking down the hall and asking a boy to turn out who was not going to.

> **A stipend does not buy those four things. It buys a person willing to supervise a practice.**

Track and field has been thin here for years, and it is not because this county is short of fast children.

And there is a format built for schools this size. Eight-man football. This county used to play it. Now the boys go to another county to play for somebody else’s team, in the years there is any football at all.

There is also a question the minutes raised and then let drop. In February 2018 somebody mentioned that soccer might be an interest. A year later a survey asked students which activities they wanted, and soccer came first. The minutes said “efforts will be made to implement this program in the future.” Soccer does not come up in the minutes again. [Y p153] Fifty-three percent of the children in this district are Hispanic. Soccer is the game most of the world plays. This district does not offer it.

Look at what Bliss fields, out in Gooding County, with those 110 students: boys basketball, girls basketball, boys track, girls track, boys soccer, girls soccer. [R p146]

Two schools about the same size, in the same years. One changed what it offered. The other kept football on the books and now plays it now and then, in a co-op, in another county, in the years it plays at all.

I am not saying Clark County should drop football for soccer. I do not know what these children would choose today. The one time the minutes record students being asked what activities they wanted, in 2019, soccer came first, and nothing followed. That is the point. Bliss decided. This district has not.

One fair note about Bliss. It does not run those six programs with full-time coaches — the activities director coaches three of them himself. So Bliss is not proof that you need what I am asking for. It is proof of something plainer, which is that a school of 110 can field six teams if it decides to. Rockland shows what happens after that, when the same coach is still there nine years later, or twenty-eight. [R p146, I p136]

From the district's own salary schedule, two coaches paid at step P3 of the scale run about $150,761 a year once benefits are added at the estimate above. Add a full-time teacher for the children learning English, at roughly $66,835, and those three come to about $217,600. [P p144]

On a $200,000 home that is $8.93 a month on top of the $6.87 being paid now. Call it $15.80 a month, all in.

> **This county was paying $13.88 a month for this levy in 2021, and voted for it. Today's levy plus two coaches and a teacher for the children learning English comes to about two dollars a month more than that.**

I think teams that win give children a reason to stay. That is my opinion and I cannot prove it. What can be shown is this. About one child in six has gone from this district's schools in four years. And no levy in a decade has named one thing meant to bring those children back.

Part VI — Who decides

Who gave them permission

The district's own answer says the board discussed keeping the amount "the same or lower in cost for their tax payers." [D p131]

Look at what actually made the cost lower.

The levy has been $250,000 since 2016. The board has not reduced it once. What fell was the local share, because the state's facilities payment grew: $53,764 for the 2024-25 school year, $82,532 for 2025-26. [G p134, Q p145] A family pays about half what it paid five years ago on a home of the same value. Rising property values did about half of that, and the state's payment did the rest. The board did none of it.

And here is the part that ought to be said plainly. The number this board put on the November ballot is $123.07 per $100,000. That is the levy before the state's share comes off. The number people actually paid last year was $82.44. [G p134]

> **The lower cost came from the state and rising property values, not the board, and the ballot says the current levy costs more than anyone paid.**

I am not saying the $123.07 estimate for the new levy is wrong. Nobody knows what the state will send two years out, and $123.07 is a defensible way to state it. But the ballot also says the existing levy "currently costs $123.07 per $100,000." That is not what anyone paid. They paid $82.44. [A p128, G p134] The law keeps the state's share off the ballot unless a specific dollar amount of it is guaranteed. [H p135] It does not stop a board from telling its voters some other way that the state's money is why their bill fell. The minutes record no such word to voters.

Four trustees sat in a room and decided what this county could afford.

Nobody asked us.

That decision was never theirs to make. Idaho law does not let a school board set a supplemental levy on its own. [AJ p170] It has to come to the voters. The division of labor is not complicated. Their job is to work out what the school needs. Our job is to decide whether we will pay for it.

They did both jobs. They decided what we would pay, and then worked backwards to three lines that fit inside it.

A number has to go on the ballot, and that is the board's job. But there are two ways to arrive at one. You can work out what the school needs and ask for it. Or you can guess what people will vote for and ask for that.

The first is doing the job. The second is guessing at a poll they never took.

In ten years I have never once been asked whether $250,000 was all I was willing to put in. Neither have you. The board settled that for us at its own meetings, without asking us, and has gone on settling it every two years since.

> **A board that settles in advance what its voters will tolerate has not protected them. It has answered for them.**

And nothing stopped them from asking.

This board meets every month. Idaho law says so. [U p149] The same law lets any two trustees call a special meeting at any time, and requires the board to hear from anyone in this district who wants to speak, at every regular meeting. It also gives any resident the right to request that an item be added to the agenda.

The resolution was adopted August 13, 2026. Count backwards. They held twenty-one regular meetings between the last levy election, in November 2024, and this vote. [Y p153] Twenty-one chances to put a page on a table and say: here is what we think this school needs, here is what it costs, tell us what you think.

They could have held a public forum. They know how, and they have thought of it before. In May 2017, with a levy on the ballot, the minutes record that “it was agreed that there is not enough time to set a town meeting regarding the levy.” Instead board members were “encouraged to speak to the public and let them know the levy is simply a renewal of the existing levy and will not increase taxes.” [Y p153] They could have sent a survey home in backpacks. This summer the district surveyed this community about a preschool program and got fifteen responses back. [Y p153, V p149]

> **They did not run out of time to ask us. They had twenty-one months and a meeting in every one of them.**

This board does take public comment. The minutes show it. In June 2019 a patron told the board she was frustrated with the open gym policy. In October 2018 three patrons addressed a change that stopped West Jefferson buses crossing into the district. Students have come and presented. [Y p153]

I was there on August 13.

It is a small room. The board sits at a table along one wall and there are chairs for anyone who comes, and most months almost nobody does. That night the auditor was on speakerphone, telling four trustees the district's books were clean. A new principal introduced himself and said he was excited to be here. Somebody mentioned a unicorn would be at the first day of school, and that there would be cotton candy.

Then a trustee read the levy resolution out loud, the whole of it, the way you read something into a record. Two hundred fifty thousand dollars a year for two years. The three lines. The question as it will appear on the ballot. Nobody interrupted.

When it stopped I asked whether I could ask a question. I asked twice.

> **The chair shook her head. She did not answer me, and went on to the vote.**

That reading was the motion. A second, a vote, and it passed. The meeting went on to bus routes.

I was not thrown out. Nobody was rude to me. It was not a dramatic moment and I am not going to make it one. The agenda for that night lists Public Input as item two. [AQ p181]

That is the whole of it. A man in a chair in a small room asked twice whether he could ask a question about half a million dollars. He got a shake of the head, and then four trustees voted, and then they moved on to where the bus stops.

> **They take comment. They did not take it on the levy, the night they voted to put half a million dollars on a ballot.**

And that agenda line, Public Input as item two, is not the answer some people will think it is.

Read what the law actually requires. It does more than require a comment period. It also says a board "shall hear public comment, if offered by a member of the public, prior to taking action on an agenda item." [U p149]

That right attaches to the item. Not to a slot near the top of the meeting.

There is a plain reason for that, and anyone who has sat through a meeting knows it. You do not know what to ask until you have heard the thing. The resolution was read aloud that night, the whole of it, the three lines and

the ballot question. A person who had walked in at five-thirty could not have framed a question about it at item two, because at item two nobody had read it yet.

By the time the question existed, item two was long past.

So set the words against the night.

The law: a board shall hear public comment, if offered, prior to taking action on an agenda item.

That night: a member of the public asked twice, on that item and before the vote, to be heard. The vote went ahead.

I am not going to tell you what a court would make of that, because I do not know and I am not a lawyer. I will tell you the two sentences do not sit together, and that anyone can read them and see it.

> **A comment period held before an item is read is a comment period on nothing. The statute puts the moment where the question actually forms, which is after they have said what they are about to do and before they do it.**

There is one more thing about how these chairs get filled. Since December 2019 the minutes record the board filling six vacancies itself. It declared another this June; a letter of interest was read in August, and the new trustee was sworn in on September 10. [Y p153, AQ p181]

Add that to what this county already knows about its ballots, where the names are often unopposed and sometimes absent altogether.

I have watched this county’s ballots for a long time, including the years I was living elsewhere. Most seats here go uncontested, and not only school board seats. Some years there is no name on the ballot at all, and the seat gets filled the way these seven were.

> **A levy ballot is very nearly the only time this county gets asked anything at all.**

And on the one question we do get to answer, the amount was settled in advance, at the board’s own meetings, before anybody asked us.

What the minutes say happened

The minutes are the record this county keeps of a meeting after the people in the room have gone home. So I read the minutes of August 13 against the recording I made that night. [AQ p181, V p149]

Idaho does not require a board to write down everything said. The law requires minutes to show all members of the board who were there, "all motions, resolutions, orders, or ordinances proposed and their disposition," and the result of every vote. [AQ p181] Short minutes are lawful. I am not saying the clerk wrote anything false.

But here is what a person reading only those minutes would not know.

The question. The minutes list Public Input and say "No report." That is accurate for item two. Nobody spoke at item two. What the minutes do not show is the request to be heard, made at item 4(f), after the levy resolution was read and before the vote. That is the moment the law protects. [U p149]

> **A record that shows only item two shows a quiet room. It was not a quiet room.**

The money. The auditor reported on both funds that night. The general fund closed the year at $637,330. The forest fund, which the audit puts at $1,305,525, held what he called "a little bit of money saved up." [V p149, AF p165] Neither balance is in the minutes. The minutes keep one line on reserves: the district "has an operating reserve of 2.9 months, which is the recommendation…" What the auditor said was a range: "we do recommend 1.5 to 3 months." [V p149, AQ p181] At 2.9 months the general fund is near the top of that range, not short of it.

The seat. Item 4(c) on the agenda was the Zone 1 opening. On the recording, a letter of interest for that seat is read aloud and a motion to accept it is spoken. Whether that motion was seconded or voted on cannot be told from the recording. The minutes do not mention the item at all. The September minutes record the new Zone 1 trustee being sworn in. [AQ p181, V p149]

The cost. The minutes say the levy "will cost the tax payers less this time than the previous levy." The ballot adopted in the same motion says the cost per $100,000 "is not expected to change." [AQ p181, A p128] On

the recording the board was told both things. The minutes kept one. The ballot says the other.

None of this is a scandal. But put the four together and they are the parts of that night a voter would most want to know: the money already in the bank, a seat on the board, what the levy costs, and a question asked before the vote.

On September 10 the board voted to accept those minutes. The September minutes record no change to them. [AQ p181] That was the board's chance to fix the record, and the board's job.

> **The next board, the next reporter and the next voter will read the minutes, not the recording. If the question is not in the minutes, then as far as the record goes, it was never asked.**

Who was supposed to decide

A supplemental levy is not a budget the board sets. It is a question the board puts to the people who will pay it.

The district's answer, quoted above, describes what happened instead: the board weighed keeping the levy "the same or lower in cost." [D p131]

The board weighed the burden on the voters and settled the amount. The voters were handed the result.

That is not the same as asking.

I could find nothing published that shows what the school needs. No figure for a full-time teacher for the children learning English. No cost for a Spanish class. No coaching budget. No target for how many students should take college courses. Voters were given one number and three broad headings. They had no way to tell whether the number was too high, too low, or right.

> **A voter cannot decide whether the amount is worth paying if the amount is the only thing they are shown.**

It is worth knowing what is actually being decided for you. The homeowner's exemption takes half a home's value off the tax rolls, up to

$125,000, for the family living in it. [L p140] So a home assessed at $200,000 is taxed on $100,000.

At the rate charged last year, that home paid about $82 toward this levy for the year. Six dollars and eighty-seven cents a month. That is one line on a tax bill that also carries the county, the roads, and the rest, and for some households it is still real money. But that is the figure.

Now put it beside what the board said it was weighing. That is what was being protected.

And here is what the other road costs. A levy of about $332,500 — large enough that, after the state's share, taxpayers would pay the $123.07 per $100,000 already printed on the ballot — would run that same home $123.07 for the year instead of $82.44. That is $10.26 a month rather than $6.87 — three dollars and thirty-nine cents more.

Across the county that is $82,532 a year in additional money for the school, which is the same amount the state is paying now. The officer the district says it must start paying for in 2027 costs $67,745 a year under the current agreement. [D p131] Spread across the county's $203 million of taxable property, that comes to about $33 a year on a home taxed at $100,000. About $2.78 a month. [G p134]

None of that was ever put to voters. The board decided the answer instead, and the answer it reached was to protect a household from roughly the price of a gallon of milk a month.

People here may well have paid more. No one in Clark County has been asked that question in ten years, so no one knows what the answer would have been.

That is what a ballot is for. The board answered it in a meeting instead.

And one more thing about who is supposed to decide, because Idaho law is not vague about it.

A superintendent does not run a school district the way an owner runs a store. Idaho Code 33-513 lists employing a superintendent among the powers and duties of the board of trustees. The superintendent is, in the law's own words, "the executive officer of the board of trustees with such powers and duties as the board may prescribe." The board sets the job. Not the other way around. [M p140]

The same law asks something else of the board, and it is worth knowing about. Every year, by June 1, the trustees must complete “an annual, written formal evaluation of the work of the superintendent.” It has to name strengths, weaknesses, and where the board thinks improvement is called for. [M p140]

That is a job the board cannot hand to anyone else. It is one of the few places where Idaho law tells the five neighbors on that board, in writing, that they are in charge and must say once a year how it is going.

The minutes record the board accepting a superintendent evaluation in February 2023, January 2024 and February 2026. For February 2022 they record a motion to accept one, made and seconded, with no result written down. For 2025 they record the forms handed out in December 2024 and no evaluation accepted. [Y p153] What any of those evaluations says is not in the minutes. Who first wrote down the figure of $250,000 before the board voted on it is a fair thing for any patron to ask.

One more thing about these five people, and it is said in their favor. They are not paid. Idaho Code 33-507 makes it unlawful for a trustee to accept any reward or compensation for serving, except as that section itself allows, and Idaho Code 33-506 provides for payment of actual expenses for travel to, from, and attending meetings. Serving on that board costs a person time and gains them nothing. [M p140]

Which is exactly why a document like this one exists. Nobody can fire a trustee. There is no pay to dock. Short of a recall, the only tools anyone in this county has are an election when one actually happens and the right to read what the district writes down. That is the whole toolbox. It is why what gets written down, and what does not, matters as much as it does.

Permission to think for yourself

There is a way of thinking about these offices that this county has drifted into, and it is worth saying out loud.

A school board seat is not a rank. Neither is a superintendent’s office. They are not honors given to people who have done well here, and nobody should assume the holder knows best. They are jobs. The work of them is to find out what children need, cost it, write it down, and bring it to the people who pay for it.

If a person wants that job, the job is to learn what it takes. Read the statutes. Read the budget. Learn what a plan looks like and how to tell whether it worked. And then show that work to this county, so we can judge it. Nobody is owed a seat, and nobody is owed the benefit of the doubt on a half-million-dollar question.

Five people hold these seats. Since December 2019 the minutes record the board filling six vacancies itself, and a seventh trustee took a seat on September 10 with no election. Three more trustees took seats between elections in 2020 and 2021 with no appointment vote in the posted minutes. [Y p153, AQ p181]

Idaho Code 33-504 says a board shall appoint to a vacancy a person qualified to serve, within ninety days of declaring it. [AH p168] The minutes record six such appointments. For the seventh, they record no appointment, only the oath.

And there is a second way into one of these chairs that never reaches a voter either. If only one person files for a seat, Idaho Code 33-502B says no election shall be held for that position, and the board itself, or its clerk with the board’s written permission, declares that person elected. [AK p171]

An election happens here only when two people want the same seat.

> **Either way, it means the one thing that would have tested these judgments, a contested election in front of the county with the record on the table, never ran. A person who comes to a seat that way owes this county more proof of the work, not less. The check that would have supplied it did not happen.**

Now look at what the record shows about how the work goes once they are seated.

In ten years of minutes this board recorded more than twelve hundred motions that passed. Fewer than fifteen of them record anybody voting against. That is fewer than one in eighty. [Y p153]

I am not going to tell you what that means about any individual. I will tell you what it looks like from a chair in the back of that room. A board that, across ten years and many changes of members, almost never records a no vote, about a school the state rates short of the state’s own targets in three areas.

> **Nobody agrees with four other people that consistently about anything.**

And look at the line of accountability an appointment creates. An elected trustee owes the seat to the people who voted. An appointed one owes it to the four people sitting on either side of them. That is not an accusation about anybody's character. It is where the obligation points, and it points that way whether anybody intends it to or not.

So here is what I would say to a trustee reading this.

You were not put there to agree. Idaho law gives you a vote of your own and nobody can take it from you. The superintendent is your employee, not your supervisor. [M p140] The chair runs the meeting and has exactly one vote, the same as yours.

You are allowed to ask a question that has not been cleared first. You are allowed to vote no on a motion the other four support. You are allowed to say you do not understand a number and will not vote for it until you do.

None of that is disloyalty. That is the job.

And if you have ever sat in that room thinking a question and not asking it, you already know the thing this article has been circling from the first page.

> **A board where nobody ever disagrees is not a board that agrees. It is a board that has stopped deliberating in public, and a county that cannot see it happen has no way to know the difference.**

And if that is not what somebody signed up for, that is an honest thing to conclude. It is no disgrace to decide the job is more than you want to take on, and not run again. What is not all right is to hold the seat, decline the work, and expect the county to trust the result anyway.

> **We do not owe them confidence. They owe us a worksheet.**

What the job actually takes

It is worth knowing what this job is, because the record here suggests something smaller than the job.

A national survey by the National School Boards Association found that sixty-three percent of school board members spend between eleven and fifty hours a month on board duties, with some spending more. [AI p169]

A 2026 survey out of Brookings found what you would expect about size. Thirty percent of board members in large districts report at least forty hours a month. In small districts it is three percent. [AI p169]

In small districts, then, few trustees report that kind of load. That is the fact. Here is the thing it does not settle.

> **The job does not shrink because the district does. A hundred children and more than $2.7 million a year in spending still need somebody to work out what they need and what it costs. [AD p164]**

And much of the work happens outside the meeting. The Oregon School Boards Association describes the work this way: study the packet before the meeting so you can make an informed decision, then committee meetings, work sessions, and appearances on behalf of the district on top of that. [AI p169]

A one-hour meeting where a person makes a motion or seconds one and votes is not the job. It is the last ten minutes of the job, performed in public.

Now the part that ought to matter most here.

A National School Boards Association report reviewed research comparing boards in high-achieving districts with boards in low-achieving ones. What it found separating them is what the board does. [AI p169]

> *Typically, they adopted the goals with specific achievement targets and benchmarks. "The board ensures that these goals remain the top priorities in the district and that no other initiatives detract attention or resources from accomplishing these goals." [AI p169]*
>
> *Boards in high-achieving districts are more likely to engage in goal setting and monitoring their progress. [AI p169]*
>
> *They are increasingly data savvy—identifying student needs and justifying decisions based on data. [AI p169]*
>
> *The districts also provided professional development to board members and examined the effectiveness of such training. [AI p169]*

Read three of those against this record.

Goals with specific targets: this board's mathematics target has been three children in ten for three years, and in March 2019 it was told some of its old goals were not available. [N p141, Y p153]

Monitoring data even when it is negative: the state has published three findings of "Does Not Meet" and no minute records a board member asking about any of them. The dual credit figure fell from thirteen students to four and no minute records anyone asking. [F p132, Y p153]

Training: the state money for board training described earlier, up to $6,600 a district, is available to this board now. [AC p162] The minutes do record board training sessions with the Idaho School Boards Association in 2021, 2023, 2024 and 2026. They record no check of whether the training changed anything. [Y p153]

And there is a finding about how the meetings themselves run. Research that observed 115 school board meetings found that meetings in low-performing districts "had less time spent on student achievement" and "did not focus on policy items as much as high- and medium-performing school districts." [AI p169]

> **In five years and about seventy meetings, the minutes record no request from this board for a worksheet, a plan to move a score, or an explanation of why $250,000.**

I am not saying these five people are lazy. I do not know what any of them does with their evenings and it is not my business. What I can say is what the record shows, and the record shows a board that meets, moves, seconds, and votes.

> **Eleven to fifty hours a month is what this job takes elsewhere. Whatever it takes here, it has not been enough to produce the arithmetic behind a half-million-dollar request.**

Who serves whom

Read enough of this record and a shape comes out of it. Not a scandal. A habit.

The board set the amount at its own meetings, without showing the work, and handed us the result. [D p131] Our part was to approve it.

A man asked twice whether he could ask a question and got a shake of the head. [V p149] His part was to sit quietly.

The minutes record six vacancies since 2019 filled by the board rather than by voters, and a seventh seat filled this year without an election. [Y p153, AQ p181] Our part was not to be asked.

A town meeting on a levy was dropped for want of time, and trustees were encouraged instead to tell people it would not raise their taxes. [Y p153] Our part was to be reassured.

And the amount itself is what four trustees judged this county would tolerate. [D p131] Our part was to be spared the question.

> **Every one of those is the same move. The work of running this district sits on us, and the convenience sits with them.**

That is backward, and it is backward according to Idaho’s own law, not just according to me.

The law says each board “shall hear public comment, if offered by a member of the public, prior to taking action on an agenda item.” [U p149] It says members of the public living in the district “shall be permitted to request the addition of an item directly related to school district business to the agenda of a regular meeting.” [U p149] It says every person has a right to examine any public record of this state. [AE p165]

And it opens the Open Meeting Law by saying that the people of Idaho, in creating the instruments of government that serve them, do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies so created. [AE p165]

Read that phrase again. The instruments of government that serve them.

The legislature wrote down which direction this runs. A board that settles what we will bear without asking us, and takes no comment on the levy on the night it votes, has turned that around.

> **We are not here to make this easy for them. They are here to do this work for us, and their own state’s open meeting law says so in its first sentence.**

Part VII — What I am asking for

They already have the vehicle

Everything I am asking for could be done with things this district already does.

There is a pamphlet. The district writes one before a levy election, and has for years. In January 2019 the superintendent handed each trustee a “sample pamphlet regarding the upcoming supplemental levy election.” The board reviewed it, made suggestions, and was asked to review it again. A trustee said the superintendent “should be commended for the excellent job done on the pamphlet.” [Y p153]

In January 2023 the board took up the levy brochure again, “strictly informational, no discussion of how someone should vote.” It voted to approve it for distribution. [Y p153]

And in 2019 it went out in two languages. The minutes record that “brochures for the levy have been sent out in both English and Spanish.” [Y p153]

So the vehicle exists. It is written, reviewed, approved by motion, printed in two languages, and sent out. Nobody has to invent anything.

Now look at the one change the board asked for in 2023. It wanted the brochure “to add wording that designated money can only be spent in certain areas.” [Y p153]

> **They know how to use that pamphlet. They have used it to tell this county what the money cannot be spent on. Nothing in ten years of minutes shows they have ever used it to tell us how they arrived at the amount.**

There is also a website. The district posts employee contracts by name, the pay scale, the audits, the check registers, the payroll. A document of any length could go on it tomorrow and cost nothing. Outside the ballot itself, Idaho Code 34-914 does not limit what a district may publish about its own request. [H p135] That law limits the ballot, not the truth.

And there are meetings. Twelve regular meetings a year, every one of them public, every one of them with an agenda somebody sets. A levy that went to a vote this August could have been discussed at every meeting from the September before it onward, in public, with the county watching the number take shape.

Instead, before the night of the vote, the whole recorded discussion of the amount is one sentence, from the June meeting two months earlier. [Y p153]

Now, none of this requires a rule telling them to do it. It is common sense. A board asking this county for half a million dollars ought to explain, in full, why that is the number. Not what the money is for. Why that amount, worked out where a person can follow it.

They already mail a newsletter to say welcome back to school. In 2022 the board asked for one and voted to approve it. [Y p153] So a mailing goes out to every household when there is something friendly to say.

> **A newsletter goes out to say welcome back. A brochure goes out to say the money is restricted. Nothing in the minutes shows either one ever going out to say why the number is the number.**
>
> **This is not a resource problem. It is a decision about what this county is told.**

And a citizen is entitled to demand it, for the same reason a banker demands it of a man who wants to build a hay barn. The banker does not take him on trust. The man brings the numbers, because he is the one asking for the money.

What I am asking for

When a board votes to ask its neighbors for half a million dollars, there should be a piece of paper showing how they got to that number. Not a sentence about keeping taxes steady. The work.

Not a page. A page is a length, and a length can be padded or trimmed until it says nothing. Six answers, however long they take.

What does this school need, item by item? Not three categories. The things themselves.

What does each one cost? With the figure somebody used to arrive at it.

What do the funds already held cover? There is $1,942,855 in the bank across two funds. Say what it is for and what it leaves uncovered. [AF p165]

Why $250,000 and not $180,000 or $420,000? Show the subtraction.

What happens at each amount? If the county gives you less, say what goes first.

Who worked this out, and when? A name and a date, so somebody stands behind it.

It could go out in the kind of levy brochure this board has approved before.

That is not a high standard. It is what a rancher does before he buys a tractor and what any of us do before we take out a loan. Every teacher in that building makes children show their work, because an answer without the work shown is not an answer. It is a guess that happened to be written down.

> **The board should hold itself to what it requires of a fourth grader.**

And not once, because I asked. Every time. Every levy, every budget, every year, published where anyone can read it before the vote rather than after.

What I am asking the board to do is not complicated, and it is more than a list.

Roll up your sleeves and work the problems. The homework before the meeting, the reading, the calling around, the costing. And then the deliberation itself in the meeting, in public, where this county can watch you think it through. That is where a board is supposed to do it, and it is eleven to fifty hours a month for most board members nationally. [AI p169]

Because here is what falls out of that work if anybody does it.

You cannot say what this school needs without knowing why families here send their children somewhere else, or homeschool them, and you cannot know that without asking them. You cannot know why children leave for West Jefferson without asking the ones who went, and you cannot win any of them back without saying what you intend to change.

> **West Jefferson is not the problem. Our inability to change is the problem.**

You cannot budget for mathematics while your own goal is three in ten and the number has not moved in three years. Say what you intend it to be, and by when.

Seven in ten of the children learning English did not make the year’s progress the state expects of them. Each of them has a timeline to become proficient, and the measure asks whether they gained enough this year to stay on it. This is the measure this district misses by the widest margin. Say what you intend to do about it, and by when. [F p132]

You cannot explain a dual credit program that went from thirteen students in 2020-21 to four the next year without asking why, and one Hispanic child of forty-five is a number somebody should look into. [F p132]

You cannot decide what a coach is worth until you decide what a coach is for. A stipend buys somebody to run practice. A salary buys somebody who teaches a child how to work with people she did not pick, which is the thing she will be paid for at twenty-five.

You cannot ask this county for money while $1,305,525 sits in the forest fund and $637,330 in a general fund the board may spend on any school purpose, without saying what each is for and what it leaves uncovered. [AF p165]

And you cannot be told twice, in public, that children left because of how they were treated here, and write down neither what you found nor how you intend to fix it.

Every one of those is part of the same work. That is what I am asking to see. Not a summary of it and not a form. The work itself: what you found, what it costs, what you decided, and who is answerable for each piece by when.

> **I am not asking for a list of answers. I am asking whether anybody has sat down and done this at all, and the only way a county finds out is if somebody writes it down.**

What I wanted to know

I grew up here and graduated from this school in 1982. For a good many of the years after that I was not living here, and I watched from a distance, because my mother worked in the district office and the school stayed a

supper-table subject in our house long after I was done with it. My family and I have owned property in this county over the years, and I have paid this levy myself in some of the years since 2016. I am a resident and a registered elector here, which is what puts this question on my ballot in November. I do not begrudge a dollar of what I have paid. Every one of those dollars was meant to go to our kids, and I would pay more tomorrow if somebody could tell me what the extra would do.

What I want is simple, and I do not think it is much to ask.

> **I would like to know the money is being spent well.**

I cannot say that today. Not because I found waste. I did not, and I looked.

The board will tell you where the money goes. Salaries. Supplies. Maintenance and transportation. That much is printed on the ballot, and it is true.

But that is a list of what it is spent on. It is not an answer to what it is for.

Ask the question the other way. What is a Clark County graduate supposed to be able to do that a Clark County graduate could not do ten years ago? What academic goal on that plan shows any ambition at all, three in ten, unchanged for three years? What athletic goal exists in the years there is no girls team to have a goal for?

Nothing filed since 2020 answers any of it.

> **The money goes somewhere. It is not aimed at anything.**

And I know what that costs, because I paid it myself. I got out of this school in 1982 and found out what I did not have. I made it up on my own time, and I was one of the lucky ones. I knew what I was missing and I had the years to fix it. Not every kid gets that. Some of them carry the gap a long time without ever knowing what to call it.

What I would like to see

Let me tell you what I would like to see, because I have spent a great many pages on what is wrong and that is only half of an honest document.

I would like a girl in the eighth grade here to have a basketball team to try out for, and a coach who was there last year and will be there next year, who knows her name and knows she can shoot.

I would like a boy who is going to end up welding or running cattle to leave here already knowing how, because somebody built the program, not because his uncle taught him.

I would like a family looking at a house in Dubois to look up this school and find something worth moving for.

I would like a kid from here to sit down in a class at BYU-Idaho or Boise State and find out he is not behind. I would like that more than anything else on this list, because I have been the one who was behind, and I know what the years cost to make it up.

None of that is radical. Rockland does it with 155 children and less money per child than we spend. Dietrich did it with one coach who stayed sixteen years. Bliss fields six teams with 110 students. [I p136, S p147, R p146] These are not big places with big budgets. They are towns like ours that decided their children were worth the trouble.

None of that is extravagant. It is the ordinary equipment of a childhood: a coach who is still there next season, a class that counts for something after graduation, a teacher who knows what the state says you should be able to do by June.

And here is the part I have not said plainly anywhere in these pages, so I will say it now.

The children in that building were owed better than this, and what they got instead is written down in the district’s own documents.

A goal of three eighth graders in ten proficient in mathematics, unchanged for three years. [N p141] A college readiness measure the district chose not to use, on a plan it wrote about itself. [N p141] Thirteen students taking a college-level course in 2020-21, then four. [F p132] Seven in ten children learning English not making the year’s progress the state expects. [F p132] A wrestling co-op approved three times in five years, the last time because “the school doesn’t have the wrestling equipment,” and no price for a mat anywhere in the minutes. [Y p153]

Nobody set out to shortchange a child. I have never once seen anything in this record suggesting otherwise, and I do not believe it. What the record

shows is smaller and harder to fix: nothing in it shows anybody sitting down to work out what these children needed, or what it would cost, or asking this county for it.

> **A goal is a statement about what you have decided a child will get. Three in ten, held steady for three years, is not a target anybody was reaching for. It is a number somebody wrote down and left alone.**

That is what I want changed. Not the amount on the ballot, the work behind it. Because the arithmetic no document shows is the same arithmetic that would have told this board what these children were missing, and how much it would cost to give it to them.

> **I am not writing this because I want the levy to fail. I am writing it because I want somebody to ask for enough.**

And if they will not, then this county has a harder question in front of it than a levy.

A school exists to get children ready for the life that comes after it. If this one cannot say what it is getting them ready for, then at some point the honest thing is to stop pretending.

There are alternatives and this county already knows what they are. Consolidation with West Jefferson, which spends $16,345 a child against our $32,238. [AD p164] Busing to Idaho Falls. Online courses, which this district already routes students through: its own handbook says dual and college credit classes are available through Idaho Digital Learning and online. [K p139]

I should say plainly that consolidation is no sure fix. Whether it would save money or help these children is a question that needs real study. Nothing in the record shows anybody here has studied it.

I do not want any of that. I want the school. I graduated from it, my mother worked in it, my niece and nephew went through it, and I would far rather see it fixed than closed.

But a district that will not set a goal worth reaching for is not really a school. It is a building with children in it, and there are cheaper buildings.

Something else is worth knowing here.

Nothing in the part of Idaho law that sets out how school districts change or end requires this district to continue. [Z p159]

The Idaho Constitution puts the duty on the legislature, not on us. It says it is the duty of the legislature “to establish and maintain a general, uniform and thorough system of public, free common schools.” [Z p159]

So the State of Idaho must see that the children of Clark County are educated. It does not have to do it through School District No. 161.

And the law already has the machinery. Chapter 3 of Title 33 sets out how land is taken out of one district and added to another, how a district lapses, how districts consolidate, how a study of whether consolidation would work is prepared, and how district boundaries are corrected or changed.

What the law does require is that no part of this state sit outside a school district. Every child must belong to one. The law does not say it has to be this one.

> **The test the state board applies when territory moves is written into the statute. It asks whether the change is in the best interests of the children residing in the area.**

I am not asking anybody to apply that test. I am saying it exists, and that a district which cannot say what it is trying to do for its children should know that the question can be asked by somebody else.

Part VIII — How to think about your vote

This is not about the teachers

This is not about the teachers. I want that said plainly, because in a town this size everybody knows who works in that building.

The teachers did not write the improvement plan that measures college readiness with the test-score target left blank and no count of who goes on to college. They did not set a mathematics target at three in ten and leave it there for three years. They are not the reason the district publishes no course list. They did not choose to run the English

instruction, the library, the front office and the homeless liaison work through one person. They did not decide which years the girls would have a team. And they certainly did not decide to ask for $250,000 without writing down why.

Every one of those is a decision made above them, by people who do not teach.

> **There was an aim here once. The documents show it, and they show the year it stopped.**

A district can fail at something it tried to do. That is forgivable and it happens everywhere.

And somebody in charge of this district did set out to make it good. I can show you when. In 2018 and 2019 the plans filed with the state describe full-day kindergarten adopted for early reading, two hours of literacy a day in every elementary grade, an intervention team meeting on a fixed calendar, and teachers paired to hold each other to the goals they set. [AN p175]

The last of those plans covers 2019-20. The state located no plan for 2020-21. From 2021-22 the plan’s written part is one page, and that page has not been rewritten since. [AN p175]

> **What I cannot find is evidence that anyone has set out to make this school good since 2020. Six years, and the only document that would show it has not been rewritten.**

Idaho law makes the superintendent the executive officer of the board of trustees. [M p140] The board sets policy. The superintendent runs the school and tells the board what it needs.

This district is not short of continuity in that office. The same superintendent has held it for five years.

In those five years the mathematics goal was raised once, from fifteen percent to thirty, and has sat at thirty ever since. In 2022 the state identified the school among the lowest performing five percent of Title I schools in Idaho, and in 2025 it kept the school under that designation because it had not yet met the exit criteria in mathematics. Three levy resolutions have been adopted, and asked for the worksheet behind any of them, the district produced none. And when the improvement plan needed

goals, the board was asked to supply them. [AN p175, N p141, D p131, Y p153]

> **Nobody can say this district has not had time, or has not had stability in the one job that exists to make the case for its children.**

This habit is older than the five people holding these seats. They inherited it. None of that matters.

These people took the job. Nobody made them. They sat down in those chairs knowing what the chairs were for, and on August 13 the four trustees then seated voted to put $250,000 on a ballot with no page of work behind it that the district could produce when asked.

That is how the world works. You take a job, you inherit whatever the last person left, and it becomes yours the day you sit down. The road crew does not get to say the potholes were there before them. Nobody who has ever worked for a living gets that excuse, and these five should not either.

> **This board, right now, is responsible for fixing this. Not the one from 2016. Not the one from 1982. This one.**

They are the only people in this county with the authority to do it, and they have every day they hold those seats to use it.

Do not let fear pick your vote

Many people who vote yes on a school levy are not so much persuaded as worried. That is a decent instinct and no one should be ashamed of it.

But it is worth checking whether the worries are true. Four of the common ones are not.

“The school will close.”

It will not. Idaho law spells out when a school district lapses for failing to work, and it takes any one of three things. When the district has not run a school for a full year. When average attendance falls below five pupils and stays there two years running. When for a year or more it has not had enough trustees to do business.

Clark County’s average daily attendance is 93. The threshold in the statute is five. And even then the law says the state board may act, not that it must — and what follows is joining the area to a neighboring district, not a padlock on the door. [AB p161, H p135]

“Teachers will lose their jobs.”

The state of Idaho pays about 97 cents of every dollar this district pays its people. Be straight about the rest. The ballot puts $85,000 of the $250,000 toward salaries and benefits, one line of three. [A p128] That is real money here. It is more than one teaching job once benefits are counted, and losing it would be felt. [P p144] But the state pays the salaries, and nothing in this record suggests the levy is what keeps a teacher in Dubois. If somebody is cut over this, that is a choice the board made from several open to it. [F p132]

“The money stops.”

It does not. The levy the school is running on now was approved in 2024 and pays for this school year. This November’s vote is about the school year that starts in the fall of 2027, not this one. [A p128]

“There will not be another chance.”

There will. Idaho lets school districts hold levy elections twice a year. If this one fails in November, the board can bring it back on May 18, 2027, with the work shown. The September deadline for sending the levy to the county commissioners is the same either way, so the money would still arrive on the ordinary schedule. [T p147]

Four fears. Not one of them survives the law or the calendar.

What a no vote actually does

It sends the board back to show its worksheet. A full year of funding is already approved, and a spring election is open.

That is all. It does not close a school, fire a teacher, or take a dollar out of a classroom this year.

And if the board comes back in May with a worksheet, a yes vote would mean something it cannot mean today. Here is what these children need to be

ready for what comes next. Here is how we got to that number. Here is what happens with less. That would be a number a voter could weigh.

It is all right to vote no

This part rarely gets said out loud, and it is the reason plenty of people vote yes anyway.

Clark County is small. You know the teachers. Your children know their children. Somebody will ask at church, or at the post office, how you voted. Voting no can feel like voting against people you like, in a place where you will see them again on Monday.

That feeling is real. It is also worth taking apart.

Your ballot is secret.

No one at the school, on the board, or in the county ever learns how you voted. That is as true in a town of five hundred as it is in Boise.

It is not about the people.

Nothing in this account says any teacher at that school is doing a bad job. The evidence runs the other way on most of it. The teachers did not write the ballot.

You are not alone.

In March 2023 this levy passed with 92.8 percent of the vote. Twenty months later it passed with 74 percent. Opposition went from 7.2 people in 100 to 26. About one in four of the neighbors who voted already voted no, quietly, for their own reasons. [E p132]

You owe no one an explanation.

You do not have to convince anyone, or say a word at the store, or defend yourself. You mark a box in private and you go home.

And it is all right to vote yes

A fair account has to say this too, because there is a real case on the other side and it deserves to be heard.

The amount has not gone up since 2016. Prices have. By the federal Consumer Price Index, published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, prices in September 2026 were about 40 percent higher than in September 2016, so the same $250,000 buys more than a quarter less. [Q p145] Whatever the reason, this county has not been asked for more.

Families here pay less for this levy than they used to — roughly half what they paid five years ago on a home of the same value, between rising property values and the state's payment. [G p134, Q p145]

Consider who this school serves. Nearly six in ten children here come from families with low incomes. Three in ten are learning a second language while doing everything else, which is extra work the child is doing and an asset the child will carry for life. One in twenty has no steady home. [F p132] Those are the children of this county. They are who the school is for, and nothing about them sets a ceiling on what it should aim for.

A word about school statistics, since both sides reach for them. With 100 students spread over thirteen grades, graduating classes have run from five to thirteen children. In a class of five, one student is twenty percentage points; in a class of thirteen, about eight. The same is true of test scores drawn from a handful of students in a handful of grades. Numbers from a school this small move a long way on one or two children. That is why this article leans on what has held year after year (short of the state's goal in reading, mathematics and English learning every year on record) and not on any one score. [F p132]

And when a citizen asked for records on August 17, the district produced them inside the time the law allows. That is what the law requires of it, and it is why this account could be written at all.

It also posts a great deal. Employee contracts are on the district website by name, the superintendent's among them, for every school year from 2020-21 through 2026-27. The teacher pay scale is there. So are the audits, and payroll and payables records back to 2018. (All at https://www.clarkcountyschools161.org/administration, read October 21, 2026.) Whoever decided to put all that up deserves the credit for it, and this article was built out of what they posted.

But be clear about what a yes vote buys, because it is not the same as what people usually mean by it.

A yes vote is not a vote for the school. The school opens in the fall either way, and the buses run. If anybody is fired or any class is cut, that is a choice the board makes, not the ballot. [A p128]

A yes vote is a vote for this request, at this amount, with no explanation attached. That is a narrower thing than most people think they are voting for, and it is worth knowing which one you are doing.

So here are reasons to vote yes that hold up.

You may think $250,000 is about right even without seeing how they got there. You know this school, you have watched it for years, and your judgment is worth something the paperwork is not. That is a real reason and I would not argue with it.

You may think the money matters more than the process, and that children in a classroom this year should not wait on a worksheet. That is a defensible position and a decent instinct.

Or you may weigh $6.87 a month against any risk at all and decide it is not close. For a lot of families that is the whole calculation, and it is not a foolish one.

And here are reasons that will not survive the morning after.

Because a no vote would hurt the kids. It would not. There is a full year of funding already approved and two chances a year to ask again. [T p147]

Because they must know what they are doing. They may. But when asked for the arithmetic behind any of the last three resolutions, the district produced no page showing it.

Because the school needs the money. It may. But there is $1,942,855 in the bank across two funds, and every line on this ballot is something those funds could lawfully pay for, if the trustees chose to. [AF p165, X p151] Nobody has shown the money is needed this November, when the current levy still pays for the rest of this school year and more may be known about the forest payments by spring.

Because $250,000 is modest. It may well be. But a number cannot be modest or excessive until somebody shows how it was arrived at, and the district produced nothing that does.

Because they will only come back and ask again if this fails. They will, with a worksheet this time. That is not a risk. That is the point.

> **Vote yes if you have a reason you would say out loud to somebody who asked. That is the only test that matters, and it is the same test I would want applied to a no.**

Why one man in Kilgore wrote this

Idaho’s Title 74 is called Transparent and Ethical Government. Its chapter on open meetings opens with a sentence the legislature chose to put first.

> *The people of the state of Idaho in creating the instruments of government that serve them, do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies so created. [AE p165]*

That is not my argument. That is the state’s, written into the law that governs how this board meets. And the chapter before it says every person has a right to examine and take a copy of any public record of this state, and the law starts from the rule that all of them are open. [AE p165]

So here is what I did with that, and the order matters.

I asked first. On August 14 I sent the district three questions in writing. I asked again on August 17. The district answered on August 19, and its answers are quoted here in its own words, unedited, and printed in full in the document folder that accompanies this article. [B p129, C p129, D p131]

I started with what the district itself has published. The minutes, the agendas, the audits, the levy spending reports, the improvement plan, the board policies: most of it came off the district’s own website, where the district put it for the public to read. The rest came from state files anyone can download, from the district’s own answer to my records request, and from the answers of the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education to mine.

Where I wanted a document that was not posted, I requested it under Idaho Code 74-102 rather than guess at it. Where the district produced nothing, I say it produced nothing.

I reviewed the whole record rather than search it for a phrase that would prove a point. One hundred and sixty-one board documents, ten years. Two of them had no text a computer could read, so I ran them through software

that reads scanned pages. Two of the plans the state sent are scans as well, and they went through the same process.

And I published my sources. Every figure here carries a letter pointing to a document. The public records come with this article, and the outside sources are named where they are used, most with the address where you can read them. If a number is wrong, you can prove it with the same papers I used.

Here is what I have not done.

I have not accused anyone of breaking a law, of misusing public money, or of acting dishonestly, because I found no evidence of any of those things and I say so plainly. I have not named a trustee outside their public acts. I have written nothing about anyone’s family, business, or private life.

> **This is a citizen reading public documents about a public question, in the month he is being asked to vote on it. That is not an attack on a school. It is the thing the state’s own law says the people never gave up the right to do.**

What it comes down to

A board asked for half a million dollars. A citizen asked three questions. Two came back answered, thoroughly and fast. One came back with nothing behind it — no worksheet, no calculation, no page showing how the total was reached, for any of the three levies the district was asked about.

That is not a scandal. I found no sign that anyone stole anything, and nothing here suggests it.

It is something quieter and harder to fix. A number that has not moved in ten years, that no document explains, and that nothing in the record shows anyone was ever asked to justify.

Behind that number is a question no document in this record writes down. Not what does this school need to survive, but what would it take for a child from this county to walk out that door as ready as any child in Idaho? Answer that, and the amount answers itself. Skip it, and all that is left to decide is the tax bill.

> **If you vote no on November 3, you are not voting against a school. You are asking the board to work out what these children need — in the classroom and on the court — and then come back and ask for it. Even if that turns out to be more than $250,000. A full year of funding is already approved, which gives time to do exactly that.**

If you vote yes, you are trusting a board whose district produced on time the other records I asked for on August 17, and has not produced the one that shows how the board reached $250,000.

> **I am not asking anybody to take my word for any of it. I am asking you to read it and decide for yourself, which is exactly what I think the board should have asked of us before it put a number on a ballot.**

Either way, you should know what you are deciding, and now you do.

Appendices: the sources, word for word

Each appendix reproduces the source as published or as written by the district, followed by where to find the original. Figures are transcribed without rounding.

Most sources here can be opened by anyone from the addresses given. Some cannot: the District’s written response to my records request and the documents it sent with it, the State Board of Education’s answer to my request and the plans it sent, the Department of Education’s letter of October 19, 2026 and the documents it linked, the State Board’s email of October 20, 2026 about the matrix, and my own letters. Those are published in full in the document folder that accompanies this article, at clarkpops.org, so that every quotation can be checked against the original. My recording of the August 13 meeting is available on request.

Appendix A — The ballot

The form of the ballot, from the resolution adopted by the Board of Trustees on August 13, 2026, reproduced here in full. The resolution provides that the official ballot “will be substantially as follows.” The author compared this text with the printed absentee ballot he received on October 8, 2026. On the printed ballot, the question, purposes, amounts and cost statement are identical, word for word. The printed ballot also carries a Spanish translation, added by the County Clerk; it is not part of the resolution the board adopted.

OFFICIAL BALLOT — SUPPLEMENTAL LEVY ELECTION. SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 161, CLARK COUNTY, STATE OF IDAHO. November 3, 2026.

The Board of Trustees of School District No. 161, Clark County, State of Idaho, is seeking authorization to levy a Supplemental Levy for the following purposes and approximate amount of levy funds to be allocated to each use:

Salaries and Benefits for Teachers, Staff, and Administrators — $85,000. Classroom Supplies, Curriculum Materials and Food Service — $55,000. Maintenance and Transportation — $110,000. Total: $250,000.

QUESTION: Shall the Board of Trustees of School District No. 161, Clark County, State of Idaho, be authorized and empowered to levy a Supplemental Levy in the amount of Two Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars ($250,000) per year for two (2) years, commencing with the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2027 and ending June 30, 2029, for the purposes stated above; all as provided in the Resolution adopted by the Board of Trustees on August 13, 2026?

The estimated average annual cost to the taxpayer on the proposed levy is a tax of $123.07 per $100,000 of taxable assessed value, per year, based on current conditions. The proposed levy replaces an existing levy that expires on June 30, 2027 and that currently costs $123.07 per $100,000 of taxable assessed value. Therefore, if the proposed levy is approved, the tax per $100,000 of taxable assessed value is not expected to change.

IN FAVOR OF AUTHORIZING A SUPPLEMENTAL LEVY IN THE AMOUNT OF $250,000 PER YEAR FOR TWO (2) YEARS

AGAINST AUTHORIZING A SUPPLEMENTAL LEVY IN THE AMOUNT OF $250,000 PER YEAR FOR TWO (2) YEARS

The two earlier ballots, in March 2023 and November 2024, were identical to each other: $55,000 for salaries and benefits, $55,000 for classroom supplies, and $140,000 for “Maintenance and Transportation, including Bus Purchase”. The words “including Bus Purchase” do not appear on the 2026 ballot. The same resolution’s form of election notice, in its Section 4, still lists “Maintenance and Transportation, including Bus Purchase” at $110,000; the ballot form in its Section 3 does not.

Sources: Resolution calling for supplemental levy election, adopted August 13, 2026; official absentee ballot, Clark County, election of November 3, 2026, received October 8, 2026.

Appendix B — The district’s answer about the bus

Written response from the District, August 2026. Reproduced as written.

> *The School District has not purchased a bus during the FY 24, FY25, FY 26. Money was sent aside into the Bus depreciation fund in the amounts of $20,000, $16,500, and $13,500 in each of those years to go towards the purchase of a bus. As stated in the August 13, 2026 board meeting the board moved to go forward using the “Sourcewell” method of getting a bid for a bus purchase, and that will be utilized and paid for during FY 27.*

The Bus Depreciation Fund appears as fund 424 in the district’s monthly financial report for July 2026.

The district also listed its vehicles. Buses 99, 07 and 15 have purchase dates it said were not readily available. Bus 20 was purchased in spring 2019 and Bus 21 in fall 2021.

Sources: The District’s written response to a public records request, dated August 2026, and its July 2026 financial report. Both were provided by the District and are reproduced in full in the document folder that accompanies this article. The Bus Depreciation Fund also appears in the District’s audited financial statements at https://www.clarkcountyschools161.org/administration/audit

---

Appendix C — The district’s answer about the bus barn

> *The cost of the Bus barn was paid out of “ESSER III funds” in the amount of $228,291.70 and out of the “Forest Funds” account in the*

amount of $123,393.32. The total cost came to $351,685.02. Neither of these funds are calculated in the annual levy reports.

The Board approved the Teton West bid in May of 2023 based off the bids received. These minutes can be found on the district website. Attached to the email is a copy of the bids quotes submitted, along with the detail of payments made to Teton West.

The attachment runs to 74 pages and contains competing proposals from more than one builder, dated early 2023. ESSER III is federal pandemic relief money. Forest Funds are federal payments to counties containing national forest land. Neither is levy money.

The district's total of $351,685.02 matches the payments to Teton West found in the district's own published check registers, to the penny.

Source: District written response and attached bid documents, August 2026. Payment records at https://www.clarkcountyschools161.org/administration/district-expenditures-and-payroll

The district's own annual levy spending reports for FY 2024, FY 2025 and FY 2026 show the maintenance and transportation category, which the reports label "Maintenance and Transportation, including Bus purchase - only part of transportation that is not reimbursed from SDE is calculated," in the reports' own columns: total expense, amount sent from the state, amount from the levy, and additional amount needed out of maintenance and operations.

FY 2024: total expense $268,058.42. From the state $8,673.95. From the levy $140,000.00. Additional out of maintenance and operations $119,384.47.

FY 2025: total expense $158,747.46. From the state $0.00. From the levy $140,000.00. Additional out of maintenance and operations $18,747.46.

FY 2026: total expense $185,011.19. From the state $0.00. From the levy $140,000.00. Additional out of maintenance and operations $45,011.19.

Together: $611,817.07 spent. The levy supplied $420,000.00, the state $8,673.95, and the district's maintenance and operations budget, which is its general fund, the other $183,143.12.

Source: Clark County School District No. 161, Supplemental Levy reports for FY 2024, FY 2025 and FY 2026, posted on the district's Supplement Levy page at https://www.clarkcountyschools161.org/administration/supplement-levy

Appendix D — The district’s answer about the $250,000

The request asked for any budget analysis, worksheet, calculation, staff memorandum, or recommendation used in determining the amount, for the resolutions of November 2022, August 2024 and August 2026. No such record was produced for any of the three. The district’s written answer follows, in part and as written.

> *You will find that the first Supplemental levy for Clark County was in 2012 for $150,000. It was increased to $250,000 FY 2016 and has remained that amount since then.*
>
> *During the discussions held at previous board meetings in June and July 2026, based on the supplemental levy information posted to the website, it showed a continued need for additional funds to cover the 3 main areas. With the board authorizing a purchase of a new bus in FY 27, the need for another bus with the age of the bus fleet was not as critical as being able to assist with the cost of an SRO that is currently funded by a grant, that ends in September of 2027 and with the increase in cost of salaries not covered by the State Dept. of Ed in all categories the need seemed greater in that category. The Board also discussed the need to keep the levy amount the same or lower in cost for their tax payers.*
>
> *Based on those discussions, the amount allocated within the maintenance and transportation budget was reduced while increasing the salary and benefits category while maintaining the same overall amount as the previous levy amount.*
>
> *In regards to the resolutions you requested for November 2022, and August 2024. Similar discussions were held during board meetings leading up to the final resolution languages in both instances.*

The school resource officer cost is real and documented. The district’s agreement for the 2026-2027 school year sets its share at $67,745, paid monthly from September 2026 through August 2027. The salary line on the ballot rose by $30,000 — less than half that figure.

Most of this explains how the $250,000 is divided and why the division changed. The rest says the total has been $250,000 since 2016 and that the board wanted to keep it there. None of it shows how $250,000 was worked out.

Sources: The District’s written response to a public records request, dated August 2026, and the 2026-27 School Resource Officer agreement provided with it. Both are reproduced in

full in the document folder that accompanies this article. The resolutions referred to are posted at https://www.clarkcountyschools161.org/administration/supplement-levy

---

Appendix E — The levy, year by year

Amounts and vote results as reported by Idaho Education News, The Jefferson Star, and the district.

2012 — first supplemental levy, $150,000

FY2016 — increased to $250,000, and unchanged since

May 16, 2017 — renewal of the existing $250,000 levy; the result is not recorded in the minutes

March 2019 — 116 voted in favor, 26 against (81.7 percent)

March 2021 — 103 voted in favor, 10 against (91.2 percent)

March 2023 — 92.78 percent for, 7.22 percent against

November 2024 — passed with 74 percent support

Sources: The Jefferson Star, "Voters approve Ririe and Clark County supplemental levies," March 20, 2019, at https://www.postregister.com/star/news/voters-approve-ririe-and-clark-county-supplemental-levies/article_fdbccdf3-f308-59da-acd3-a3f971926fcd.html — Idaho Education News bond and levy results at https://www.idahoednews.org/elections24/bond-and-levy-live-results-244-million-at-stake/ — the District's written response for the 2012 and 2016 amounts; the board minutes of March 13 and May 8, 2017, for the 2017 election; and the board minutes of March 11, 2021 and April 13, 2023, for the 2021 and 2023 results.

Appendix F — The school, in numbers

From the Idaho Report Card, published by the Idaho Department of Education, and the district's own annual levy spending reports.

Enrollment, fall 2025-26: 100 in the district — 53 at Lindy Ross Elementary, 47 at the junior-senior high school. Average daily attendance by year is in Appendix AB.

Students from low income families 59.0 percent; English learners 30.0 percent; students with disabilities 17.0 percent; students who are homeless 5.0 percent. Hispanic or Latino 53.0 percent; white 44.0 percent.

Four-Year Graduation Rate, Class of 2025 — 100.0%, which the state marks as meeting its goal of 82.5%; Chronic Absenteeism — below 6%

ISAT English Language Arts, 2025-2026: 35.3 percent, 18 of 51 students tested. State target 54.6. Mathematics: 33.3 percent, 17 of 51. State target 43.6. Science: 31.8 percent, 7 of 22. English learner growth: 29.2 percent, 7 of 24. State target 65.8. Reading, mathematics and English learner growth are each marked "Does Not Meet State Goal or Target."

Dual credit (concurrent enrollment): 13 of 64 students in 2020-21; 4 of 77 in 2021-22, among them 1 of 45 Hispanic or Latino students. The report card shows no figure after 2021-22.

The scores move around, and in a school this size that is what they do. Reading proficiency has gone 41.7, 34.5, 36.0, 36.0, 28.9, 35.3 across six years. It dropped seven points twice and rose six once, and today it is six points lower than it was in 2021.

Mathematics has climbed two years running, 17.3 to 24.4 to 33.3, which is nine students to seventeen. That is a real direction and it should be said.

But hold the number still for a second. Thirty-three percent means seventeen children of fifty-one can do grade-level mathematics and thirty-four cannot. Reading means eighteen can and thirty-three cannot. The state's targets are 43.6 and 54.6, and this district is under both.

> **A child who leaves here not able to do the mathematics or read at the level the state expects is not ready for what comes next, and no amount of movement in a fifty-student sample changes that.**

Clark County Jr/Sr High School alone, 2025-2026: ISAT English Language Arts 40.0 percent, 10 of 25 students tested. Mathematics 36.0 percent, 9 of 25. The school's 2024-2025 mathematics figure is not published; the state shows it as "".*

Two measures went the other way this year. Growth in English language arts fell from 64.3 to 52.9. And English learner growth fell from 47.4 percent to 29.2 while the state target rose to 65.8. Seven children of twenty-four.

There is one more thing on that report card and it belongs here.

For 2025-2026 the state records that none of this district's teachers are teaching out of field, none are on emergency or temporary certificates,

none are inexperienced, and none are rated ineffective. Retention is 81.3 percent, thirteen of sixteen.

That is a good staffing picture and it is worth saying plainly. It also means that, for 2025-2026, the state counts no teacher here as on an emergency or temporary certificate. In October 2021 the board had continued an alternative authorization for the secondary mathematics position because “an emergency condition still exists.” [Y]

> **The people in front of these children are qualified, and most of them stay. Whatever is wrong here, that is not it.**

These rates are reproduced because they are the official record. Graduating classes here have run from five to thirteen students in the last six years, so one student moves the graduation rate by about eight to twenty points, and the tested grades hold a handful of students each. Read any one year with that in mind; the pattern across years is what this article relies on.

On pay: the district’s levy report for 2025-26 shows total pay and benefits of $1,942,004.96, of which the State of Idaho paid $1,879,770.65, the levy paid $55,000, and the maintenance and operations budget paid the other $7,234.31.

Sources: https://www.idahoreportcard.org/about-us/district?districtId=161 and the district’s Supplement Levy page.

Appendix G — What the levy actually costs

From the Idaho Department of Education’s annual report of school tax levies, district 161 Clark County Joint.

The report gives each district a row. The Clark County row for tax year 2025 shows:

> *161 Clark County Joint. Market Value: $203,131,987. Supplemental M&O levy rate: 0.000824429. Supplemental M&O amount: $167,468. Revenue from School District Facilities Payment Used to Reduce Amount Levied for Supplementals in Tax Year 2025: $82,532.*

Anyone can check the two figures from that one row.

What property owners actually paid: $167,468 divided by $203,131,987, times $100,000, equals $82.44 per $100,000 of taxable value.

What the ballot states: $250,000 divided by $203,131,987, times $100,000, equals $123.07 per $100,000 of taxable value.

The difference between the two, $40.63 per $100,000, is the $82,532 the State paid, spread across the same taxable value. That payment is 33 percent of the $250,000 levy. The ballot figure is the whole levy spread across the county as though that payment did not exist.

The prior year shows the same pattern:

Tax year 2024: supplemental levy rate 0.001007426; amount levied $196,236; School District Facilities Payment applied to reduce the amount levied: $53,764

A rate of 0.000824429 equals $82.44 per $100,000 of taxable value. The FY2021 rate of 0.001665777 equaled $166.58, so a family pays roughly half as much per $100,000 of taxable value today as it did five years ago.

Sources: Idaho Department of Education, Tax Levies for School Purposes, School Year 2025-2026, at https://www.sde.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/25-26-Tax-Levies-School-Purposes.pdf and School Year 2024-2025 at https://www.sde.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/FY2025-Tax-Levies-for-School-Purposes.pdf

---

Appendix H — The law behind the fear answers

Section 33-309 is summarized in plain words. Section 34-914 is reproduced in part, word for word. Full text of both at legislature.idaho.gov.

Idaho Code 33-309, lapsed districts. A school district lapses only when it has failed to maintain a school for one full school year, or when its average daily attendance falls below five pupils across two school years, or when for a year or more it has not had enough trustees to lawfully conduct its business. Any one of the three is enough; not all three are needed. The statute provides that the state board "may" enter such an order, not that it shall. Where a district does lapse, section 33-309 provides for joining the area to a neighboring district, with property and debts divided up by the state board.

34-914. Disclosures in elections to authorize a levy. (1) ... must include in the ballot question, or in a brief official statement on the ballot but separate from the ballot question, a disclosure setting

forth in simple, understandable language information on the proposal substantially as follows: ... (b) The estimated average annual cost to the taxpayer of the proposed levy, in the form of "A tax of $_____ per $100,000 of taxable assessed value, per year, based on current conditions." If the taxing district proposing the levy has an existing levy of the same type that is set to expire at the time that the proposed levy will begin, an additional statement may be provided along the following lines: "The proposed levy replaces an existing levy that will expire on _____ and that currently costs $_____ per $100,000 of taxable assessed value." The statement shall also disclose that, if the proposed levy is approved, the tax per $100,000 of taxable assessed value is either: (i) not expected to change or (ii) is expected to increase or decrease the tax by $_____ per $100,000 of taxable assessed value. The dollar amounts referenced in this paragraph shall be calculated by multiplying the expected levy rate by one hundred thousand dollars ($100,000);

(e) If the ballot question or official statement includes information regarding guaranteed state tax relief funds of a specific dollar amount, including school district facilities funds, and such state tax relief funds will expire at a future date, the ballot question or official statement shall disclose the year such state tax relief funds are scheduled to expire using the following language: "such state tax relief funds are currently only guaranteed through ". No ballot question or official statement shall include any information regarding state tax relief funds, unless a specific dollar amount of such funds is guaranteed to the taxing district.

Source: Idaho Legislature, https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title33/t33ch3/sect33-309/ and https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title34/t34ch9/sect34-914/

Appendix I — Rockland School District No. 382

Power County, Idaho. One school, kindergarten through grade twelve.

Enrollment 155 (2025-26, Idaho Department of Education fall enrollment). Student to teacher ratio 9.92 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024-25). Athletics conference 1A Rocky Mountain.

From the district's own superintendent recruiting flyer, published by the Idaho School Boards Association in February 2018: "The District currently has a bond and supplemental levy in place. The patrons of the

Rockland School District constantly show the District support as they continuously have passed bonds and levies over many years."

Same source: "The District offers Idaho Digital Learning (IDLA), Dual Credit, and AP Courses of which roughly 30% of students in grades 7-12 participate in one or more courses each year."

March 2021, as reported by Idaho Education News: "Rockland. Two-year, $420,000 supplemental levy: passed, with 95 percent support." That levy has since expired. The 2025-26 state levy report shows Rockland's current supplemental at $198,085 — $44,706 levied locally and $153,379 paid by the state — and no bond levy for either district. The recruiting flyer quoted above predates that report.

Per-pupil spending, 2024-2025, total expenditures divided by full-term average daily attendance, both from the state's own files: Rockland $21,126; Clark County $32,238; state average $14,950. [AD] Supplemental levy rate 2025-26: Rockland 0.000581061, or $58.11 per $100,000 of taxable value; Clark County 0.000824429, or $82.44. Total school levy rate 2025-26: Rockland 0.000663750, or $66.38 per $100,000 of taxable value; Clark County 0.000844071, or $84.41. Rockland's taxpayers pay a lower school tax rate than Clark County's.

Athletics. Rockland won the Idaho High School Activities Association 1A boys basketball state championship in March 2026, defeating Garden Valley 60-57 at the Ford Idaho Center in Nampa; East Idaho News reported that the head coach was in his ninth season. The girls basketball program won state championships in 2020, 2022 and 2025, the last a 56-39 win over Genesee. That program was led for 28 years by Vern Nelson, who won two of those titles and stepped down at the end of the 2022-23 season. The volleyball team finished as 1A runner-up in the 2025 season. No claim is made here about how Rockland staffs or pays its coaching positions, which has not been verified.

The account of Clark County's recent athletic history — a state tournament appearance in boys basketball in March 2016, one win in three games, no girls basketball team in some of the years since, and football played now and then through a cooperative arrangement with a school in Idaho Falls — is the author's own, drawn from living in the county. It is offered as first-hand account, not as a record obtained from the district or the association.

No comparison of test results between the two districts appears in this document, and none should be drawn from it. Where three in ten Clark

County students are still learning the language a test is written in, the score reflects language and subject together and cannot be read as a clean measure of either.

> *Clark County Jr/Sr High School student handbook, 2026-27: dual and college credit classes are offered on campus through IDLA and online, and off campus in Idaho Falls (quoted in Appendix K).*

No current participation figure for the district was found in the district's or the state's published records; the state report card's last figure is for 2021-22 (Appendix F). No comparison of participation between the two districts is made in this document.

Sources: Idaho Department of Education, Historical Fall Enrollment by District, updated July 2026 (enrollment); National Center for Education Statistics district directory for Rockland School District No. 382, 2024-2025 school year, at https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?ID2=1602820 (student to teacher ratio; a copy is in the document folder); Idaho School Boards Association, superintendent opening flyer for Rockland School District #382, February 2018, at http://www.idsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Rockland_Superintendent_flyer-1.pdf (the two quotations; a copy is in the document folder); Idaho Education News, Kevin Richert, March 10, 2021, at https://www.idahoednews.org/top-news/school-elections-mccall-bond-issue-passes-bonneville-levies-fail/ (the 2021 levy). Levy figures are from the Idaho Department of Education, Tax Levies for School Purposes, School Year 2025-2026 (Appendix G). Athletics: East Idaho News, "Revenge tour complete: Rockland rallies back in 1A championship game to keep eastern Idaho title streak alive," at https://www.aol.com/articles/revenge-tour-complete-rockland-rallies-215157255.html; Idaho State Journal, "Rockland girls basketball team wins third state championship in six seasons," February 22, 2025, at https://www.idahostatejournal.com/sports/highschool/rockland-girls-basketball-team-wins-third-state-championship-in-six-seasons/article_2ffaa5e4-f14a-11ef-a1c4-0f37c1ea700b.html; East Idaho News, "Butte County claims repeat championship; Rockland, Malad, Bear Lake grab trophies," at https://www.aol.com/news/butte-county-claims-repeat-championship-044649598.html. Per-pupil figures for this district and for Rockland are computed from Idaho Department of Education files and are set out in Appendix AD.

Appendix J — The Bus Depreciation Fund, from the audit

From the District's audited financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2026, in the combining statement for the District's smaller funds. The Bus Depreciation Fund is a capital projects fund, a fund kept for big purchases such as buses and buildings.

> *Other Local Revenue $931. State Revenue: none. Federal Revenue: none. Total Revenues $931.*

Total Expenditures $0.

Transfers In $13,500.

Fund Balances - Beginning $101,913. Fund Balances - Ending $116,344.

The prior year shows the same shape: transfers in of $16,500, other local revenue of $671, no state or federal revenue, and a balance rising from $84,742 to $101,913.

The money reaches this fund as a transfer from the District’s general fund, which is where levy money lands. The audit’s note on transfers between funds lists the general fund transferring out $178,182 during the year for purposes including depreciation.

Two things follow. The saving is real, and the balance is now larger than either bid the district opened for a bus in 2018. And no levy dollar can be traced into it, because general fund money is pooled and levy dollars are not tagged.

Sources: Clark County School District No. 161 audited financial statements, years ended June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2025 (the prior year: combining statement for nonmajor governmental funds, page 39 as printed on the page, which is page 41 of the PDF file), posted at https://www.clarkcountyschools161.org/administration/audit. The 2025 statements are in the document folder.

Appendix K — The district’s own handbook

From the Clark County Jr/Sr High School student handbook for 2026-27, provided by the District with its records response.

> *Staff listing: “Erica Perez, ESL/Jr. and Sr. High Librarian/Front Office/Homeless Liaison” and, in the same listing, “Erica Perez, Secretary/Athletic/Activity Director”*
>
> *Course access: “Dual and/or college credit classes are available on campus (at CCHS) through IDLA (Idaho Digital Learning Academy) and on-line. They are also offered off-campus in Idaho Falls.”*
>
> *Athletics: “Being competitive and winning competitions is the ultimate goal for the varsity level programs yet the philosophy is not a “win at all cost” philosophy. The safety and welfare of athletes is most important.”*

No foreign language teacher appears in the handbook’s staff listing, and the handbook names no foreign language class anywhere.

Source: District response to records request, August 2026, reproduced in full in the document folder that accompanies this article.

Appendix L — The homeowner’s exemption

Idaho Code 63-602G, current text from the Idaho Legislature. Reproduced in part. The statute calls it the homestead exemption; the assessor’s office and most people call it the homeowner’s exemption. They are the same thing.

> *63-602G. Property exempt from taxation — Homestead. (1) For each tax year, the first one hundred twenty-five thousand dollars ($125,000) of the market value for assessment purposes of the homestead as that term is defined in section 63-701, Idaho Code, or fifty percent (50%) of the market value for assessment purposes of the homestead as that term is defined in section 63-701, Idaho Code, whichever is the lesser, shall be exempt from property taxation.*

The exemption applies to an owner-occupied primary residence. “Homestead” is defined in section 63-701 and covers the dwelling and a limited amount of land, so acreage beyond that is taxed at full value. Rental property, second homes, and bare ground get no exemption at all.

The household dollar figures in this article, what the levy costs a family each month or year, are illustrations on a home assessed at $200,000, not a claim about any particular property. Anyone can substitute their own assessed value. Assessed values come from the county assessor.

Source: https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title63/t63ch6/sect63-602g/

Appendix M — Who employs whom

Idaho Code 33-513, current text from the Idaho Legislature. The section opens by stating that these are powers and duties of the board of trustees. Reproduced in part.

> *33-513. Professional personnel. The board of trustees of each school district, including any specially chartered district, shall have the following powers and duties:*

> *(2) ... to employ a superintendent of schools for a term not to exceed three (3) years, who shall be the executive officer of the board of trustees with such powers and duties as the board may prescribe. ... The board of trustees shall conduct an annual, written formal evaluation of the work of the superintendent of the district to be completed no later than June 1. The evaluation shall indicate the strengths and weaknesses of the superintendent's job performance in the year immediately preceding the evaluation and areas where improvement in the superintendent's job performance, in the view of the board of trustees, is called for.*

The board is also given its own powers and duties separately, at Idaho Code 33-506, which requires every trustee to attend all meetings and gives the board authority to make the rules governing itself and the district.

Sources: https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title33/t33ch5/sect33-513/ and https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title33/t33ch5/sect33-506/

Two more passages from the same chapter bear on what a trustee receives for serving.

> *33-507. Limitation upon authority of trustees. (1) It shall be unlawful for any trustee to have pecuniary interest, directly or indirectly, in any contract or other transaction pertaining to the maintenance or conduct of the school district or to accept any reward or compensation for services rendered as a trustee except as may be otherwise provided in this section.*
>
> *33-506. Organization and government of board of trustees. (2) Each member of the board not otherwise compensated by public moneys shall be compensated for actual expenses incurred for travel to, from, and attending meetings of the board. Such compensation shall be paid from the district school funds.*

Sources: https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title33/t33ch5/sect33-507/ and https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title33/t33ch5/sect33-506/

Appendix N — The district's own targets

From the Continuous Improvement Plan, Metrics and Demographics, posted on the district website under School Board. Two versions are posted, covering targets for 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26. Figures transcribed as printed.

Goal: All students will be prepared to transition from middle school / junior high to high school. Percent proficient grade 8 Math ISAT: 30.0% (2023-24), 30.0% (2024-25), 30.0% (2025-26). Adequate growth grade 8 Math: 20.0%, 20.0%, 20.0%. Percent proficient grade 8 ELA: 40.0%, 40.0%, 40.0%.

Goal: All students will be prepared to transition from grade 6 to grade 7. Percent proficient grade 6 Math: 25.0%, 25.0%, 25.0%. Percent proficient grade 6 ELA: 40.0%, 40.0%, 40.0%.

Goal: All students will be college and career ready. Four-year cohort graduation rate target: 100.0% for each of the 2023, 2024 and 2025 cohorts. Percent of students who meet the college ready benchmark on the college entrance exam (optional metric): no target entered in any year.

Literacy: Kindergarten Spring IRI 60.0%, Grade 1 75.0%, Grade 2 75.0%, Grade 3 70.0% (65.0% for 2023-24), Grade 4 ELA ISAT proficient 50.0% — otherwise unchanged between the two plans.

From the plan's own explanation: "In reviewing previous years data, and our small enrollment, we felt that small gains in percent would be reasonable and show growth being made. These percentages are also attainable which is important when setting goals."

Also from the plan: "Clark Jr. Sr. High was identified as CSI-UP November of 2022, and as part of theat process, our leadership team is meeting monthly and PD has been focused on ensuring writing and math are being incorporated in all classes in the effort to improve our ISAT scores."

Targets the district met at 100 percent: all students tour at least one college before graduating; guest speakers from at least five different industries present to grades 9-12; students in grades 1-5 receive at least an additional 30 minutes a day of reading or math support.

CSI-UP stands for Comprehensive Support and Improvement, Underperforming. Under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act as Idaho applies it, that designation identifies the lowest performing five percent of Title I schools in the state, and a school can be identified again if it does not meet Idaho's exit criteria. The school was identified in November 2022. In 2025 it was re-identified because it had not met Idaho's exit criteria in mathematics; the Department's school improvement coordinator wrote that it met them in English language arts and was not, that year, among the lowest five percent. [AR] An Idaho Department of Education school improvement

presentation lists a “SMART Goal” among its “Requirements” for a school re-identified in that category, and defines the goals as “Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Rigorous, & Time bound.”

Sources: Continuous Improvement Plan documents at https://www.clarkcountyschools161.org/school-board/continuous-improvement-plan and Idaho Department of Education, “School Improvement: How? When? Why? What if . . . ?”, Patty Dalrymple, School Improvement Coordinator, September 2024, slides 9 and 10, at https://www.sde.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/School-Improvement-Patty-Dalrymple.pdf (in the document folder)

Appendix O — Deary School

Deary School, Whitepine Joint School District No. 288, Latah County, Idaho. Figures from the state’s report card and the Census Bureau, read October 21, 2026.

> *Grades 4-12. Enrollment 151 in spring 2025-26; the report card’s history shows 142, 145, 149 and 155 for the four years before. Proficiency rate in mathematics 65.0 percent and in English language arts 56.9 percent, both marked “Meets State Goal or Target”; statewide, 43.1 and 54.0 percent. Students from low-income families 34.0 percent.*
>
> *Town of Deary: 505 people at the 2020 Census base, 531 in the Census Bureau’s 2025 estimate.*
>
> *The district posts its 2026-27 middle and high school class schedule on its website. Among the classes: Pre-Calculus, Algebra 2, Data Science, Chemistry, Biology, Psychology, Animal & Vet Science, Welding & Fabrication, Forestry & Greenhouse, and Consumer Economics & Personal Finance.*

No comparison of test results between Deary and Clark County is offered in this document, and none should be drawn from it. Three in ten Clark County students are still learning the language these tests are written in, so a score there reports language and subject at the same time. That is a limitation of the measurement, not a characteristic of the students.

The account of a Deary student attending Harvard is the author’s recollection of a newspaper article read years ago. It has not been located or verified and is offered as recollection only. The 1975 state basketball tournament in Lewiston — wins over Carey and Elk River, a loss to Deary in the championship — is the author’s own recollection. He did

not attend; he waited for word in Dubois. The 1985 state volleyball championship — wins over Camas County and Greenleaf-Friends Academy, two straight over Shoshone in the final, a 23 and 0 season, and the county's first team title in any sport — is the author's own account of a tournament he attended in Nampa.

The girls basketball placings of fourth in the state in 1980 and third in 1981, and the account of the author's mother recording the 1985 tournament and distributing copies, are likewise his own recollection. So is the account of Clark County having played eight-man football, and of the present arrangement under which football is played only occasionally and through a cooperative with a school in another county.

Sources: Idaho Report Card, Deary School, at https://www.idahoreportcard.org/about-us/school?schoolId=0794 and https://www.idahoreportcard.org/performance-summary/school?stateId=ID&districtId=288&schoolId=0794, and statewide at https://www.idahoreportcard.org/performance-summary/state?stateId=ID; United States Census Bureau, Vintage 2025 city and town population estimates, at https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/datasets/2020-2025/cities/totals/sub-est2025_16.csv; Whitepine Joint School District No. 288, Course Information, at https://www.sd288.org/courseinformation (the schedule is in the document folder). All read October 21, 2026. The Harvard account is unverified.

Appendix P — What the district pays a teacher

From the Master Teacher Agreement for 2026-2027, Schedule A, posted on the district website. Reproduced in part.

> *2026-2027 Salary Schedule. R1 $50,252. R2 $50,902. R3 $51,952. P1 $53,402. P2 $54,839. P3 $56,677. P4 $58,514. P5 $60,352. AP1 $64,427. AP2 $65,927. AP3 $68,027. AP4 $70,127. AP5 $72,227.*
>
> *Additional Stipends: BA + 24 credits + $2,000. Master's Degree + $3,500.*

Benefits are additional and are not shown on this schedule. The cost figures in this article add 33 percent, about one third, to the schedule salary for benefits. That is an estimate, not a figure from any district document.

Worked out: a position at R1, $50,252, costs about $66,835 with benefits; that is the figure used for each teacher. Two coaches paid at P3, $56,677 each, cost about $150,761 together. Two coaches and the teacher for the

children learning English come to about $217,600 a year, or about $8.93 a month on a home taxed at $100,000. The four positions in this article, two coaches and two teachers, come to about $284,431 a year. Spread across the county taxable value of $203,131,987, that is about $11.67 a month on a home taxed at $100,000, on top of the $6.87 paid now.

Source: https://www.clarkcountyschools161.org/administration/master-teacher-agreement

---

Appendix Q — What the levy has cost, year by year

From the Idaho Department of Education's annual Tax Levies for School Purposes reports, district 161. Taxable value, the amount levied on local property, and the School District Facilities distribution paid by the state under Idaho Code 33-911.

> *FY2021: taxable value $150,080,127. Levied locally $250,000. State facilities distribution: none, the program did not yet exist. Rate 0.001665777, or $166.58 per $100,000.*
>
> *FY2023: taxable value $181,306,456. Levied locally $250,000. State distribution: none. Rate 0.001378881, or $137.89 per $100,000.*
>
> *FY2025: taxable value $194,789,476. Levied locally $196,236. State distribution $53,764. Rate 0.001007426, or $100.74 per $100,000.*
>
> *FY2026: taxable value $203,131,987. Levied locally $167,468. State distribution $82,532. Rate 0.000824429, or $82.44 per $100,000.*
>
> *Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers, U.S. city average, all items (1982-84=100): September 2016, 241.428. September 2026, 336.940. That is about 40 percent higher, so a fixed $250,000 buys about 28 percent less.*

The figure of $420,905 used in this article is the FY2021 rate of 0.001665777 applied to the FY2026 taxable value of $203,131,987, giving $338,373 from local taxpayers, plus the state's current $82,532. It is an illustration of what the FY2021 rate would raise today, not a proposal.

Idaho Code 33-911 created the School District Facilities Fund in 2023. The fund is supplied from sales tax and other transfers under sections 57-811, 63-3638 and 67-7434, and is paid out every year without the legislature having to vote on it again. Section 33-911(2) provides that the money is distributed to each district "on a per-pupil basis using the average daily attendance calculation provided in section 33-1003A," and section 33-

911(3) provides that the amount received “must be deducted from a school levy that would otherwise have been paid by property taxpayers.” The distribution does not increase if a district asks for a larger levy.

Two cautions on the state distribution. It is calculated on average daily attendance, which is usually lower than enrollment, so no simple per-head number is stated in this article. And this fund is not the state’s principal support for public schools, which flows through the educational support program under Idaho Code 33-1002 and is calculated by a state formula based on groups of students, called support units, rather than directly per pupil.

The statute has been amended six times since it was created: twice in 2024, twice in 2025 and twice in 2026. The Department of Education’s FY2025 levy report records that 55 districts reduced supplemental levies under this section that year, totaling $54,241,060 statewide.

Sources: Idaho Department of Education, Tax Levies for School Purposes, FY2021, FY2023, FY2025 and FY2026, at https://www.sde.idaho.gov; Idaho Code 33-911 at https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title33/t33ch9/sect33-911/; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index news releases of October 18, 2016 and October 14, 2026, at https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/cpi_10182016.htm and https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/cpi_10142026.htm

---

Appendix R — Bliss School

Bliss School, Bliss Joint School District No. 234, Gooding County, Idaho. Kindergarten through grade twelve in one building. Enrollment 110 (2025-26, Idaho Department of Education fall enrollment). Competes in IHSAA Class 1A, Sawtooth Conference.

The Idaho High School Activities Association school directory lists the following coaching positions at Bliss: Basketball (Boys), Basketball (Girls), Soccer (Boys), Soccer (Girls), Track (Boys), Track (Girls). The activities director is listed as the coach of boys basketball, boys soccer and boys track.

The account of Clark County having played Bliss in football, and of Bliss subsequently ending its football program and adding soccer, is the author’s own recollection from his time as manager of the Clark County team in junior high. The reason for Bliss’s change has not been established and no reason is asserted in this article.

Sources: IHSAA school directory, https://idhsaa.org; Idaho Department of Education, Historical Fall Enrollment by District, updated July 2026.

Appendix S — Dietrich School

Dietrich School, Dietrich School District No. 314, Lincoln County, Idaho. One school, kindergarten through grade twelve. Total enrollment 154 (2025-26, Idaho Department of Education fall enrollment). Competes in IHSAA Class 1A.

KMVT of Twin Falls reported in September 2025 that Acey Shaw coached Dietrich girls basketball for 16 years, winning four consecutive state championships from 2011 to 2014 and finishing state runner-up in 2009, 2015 and 2016. The Times-News of Twin Falls reported in March 2020 that he was retiring from coaching. The IHSAA directory currently lists a different head coach, so that tenure is described here as historical.

The IHSAA directory lists coaching positions at Dietrich for boys basketball, girls basketball, boys cross country, girls cross country, football, boys track, girls track and volleyball.

Sources: Idaho Department of Education, Historical Fall Enrollment by District, updated July 2026; KMVT, Debanny Cerda, "Coach Acey Shaw leaves a legacy in Dietrich," September 15, 2025, at https://www.kmvt.com/2025/09/16/coach-acey-shaw-leaves-legacy-dietrich; Times-News, Ben Jones, "All-star sendoff: Dietrich's Acey Shaw calling it a career after Tuesday's game," March 11, 2020, at https://magicvalley.com/sports/high-school/basketball/article_0f603ecd-707a-5d43-8f59-dc35d3ebf949.html; IHSAA school directory, https://idhsaa.org

---

Appendix T — Election dates, election costs and the certification deadline

Idaho Code 34-106, Limitation on elections, current text from the Idaho Legislature. Reproduced in part.

> *(1) The dates on which elections may be conducted are: (a) The third Tuesday in May of each year; and (b) The Tuesday following the first Monday in November of each year.*

(7) Community colleges governed by chapter 21, title 33, Idaho Code, and school districts are subject to the limitations specified in subsection (1) of this section.

Earlier versions of this section allowed school districts two additional dates, the second Tuesday in March and the last Tuesday in August. That exception has been repealed. A number of legal reference websites still show the old text. Since 2022 the section has been amended six times: in 2022, three times in 2023, in 2024 and in 2025.

Idaho Code 34-1411, Payment of election expenses by county, subsection (1). Reproduced in part.

(1) On and after January 1, 2011, no county shall charge any taxing district, as defined in section 63-201, Idaho Code, for expenses associated with conducting any election on behalf of any taxing district, with the exception of expenses associated with conducting municipal runoff elections, which shall be paid by the city adopting runoff elections pursuant to the provisions of section 50-612 or 50-707B, Idaho Code.

Section 63-201 defines a taxing district as “any entity or unit with the statutory authority to levy a property tax,” which a school district has. The county runs the election and may not bill the district for the costs of conducting it. Subsection (2) adds that the county is not responsible for election expenses incurred before a district orders an election.

Idaho Code 63-803, Certification of budgets in dollars, subsection (3). Reproduced in part.

...the certification to the county commissioners required in this section shall be made not later than the Thursday prior to the second Monday in September, unless, upon application therefor, the county commissioners grant an extension of not more than seven (7) working days.

The third Tuesday in May 2027 falls on May 18. The certification deadline in September 2027 is the same whether a levy is approved in November 2026 or in May 2027, so a levy approved at the May election would be certified in September 2027 on the ordinary schedule, the same month as one approved this November.

Sources: https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title34/t34ch1/sect34-106/, https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title34/t34ch14/sect34-1411/,

https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title63/t63ch2/sect63-201/ and https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title63/t63ch8/sect63-803/

Appendix U — School board meetings and public comment

Idaho Code 33-510, from the Idaho Legislature. Reproduced in part.

> *(2) Regular meetings of each board of school district trustees shall be held monthly, on a uniform day of a uniform week as determined at the annual meeting. Special meetings may be called by the chairman or by any two (2) members of the board and held at any time.*
>
> *(5) Each board of trustees shall provide the opportunity for members of the public residing in the school district to comment on school and education matters at regular meetings of the board of trustees. Each board of trustees shall hear public comment, if offered by a member of the public, prior to taking action on an agenda item. Nothing in this subsection restricts a board of trustees from establishing reasonable standards for the public comment period of the meeting, including time limits and conduct standards.*
>
> *(7) Members of the public residing in the school district shall be permitted to request the addition of an item directly related to school district business to the agenda of a regular meeting of the board of trustees.*

No claim is made that this board failed to hold its monthly meetings or refused public comment generally. The point is that the meetings existed, the power to call more existed, and the obligation to listen existed, and the record shows no assessment of what the school needs, and what it would cost, put before this county at any of them.

Source: https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title33/t33ch5/sect33-510/

Appendix V — The recording of the August 13, 2026 board meeting

Audio recording of the regular meeting of the Board of Trustees, Clark County School District No. 161, held August 13, 2026, recorded by the author, who was present. The agenda for that meeting is published on the district website. The statements below are drawn from that recording.

On the audit, the auditor told the board that the general fund ending balance "as of June 30 was $637,330," that this "comes out to be about a 2.9 month operating reserve," and that "we do recommend 1.5 to 3 months." Of the forest reserve fund he said: "we have a little bit of money saved up in there."

On the Zone 1 opening, a letter of interest for the seat was read aloud and a motion to accept it was spoken.

On the school resource officer, the board was told that the position is funded by a grant now in its third year, and that there is "no cost to us other than the time it takes Lisa to submit."

Introducing the levy resolution, the board was told the levy is "not projected to raise anyone's taxes," that it would be "less than when we ran" the levy two years ago because the rate "went down in 25," and, compared with what taxpayers had just paid, "It's not projected to change. At all."

On a proposed three and four year old program, the board was told a survey had returned fifteen responses, twelve from families with children of that age, and that seven said a $300 monthly charge would prevent them using it.

The levy resolution was read aloud as the motion to adopt it. After the reading, and before the vote, a member of the public asked, on that item, whether questions were allowed. The board proceeded to the vote.

Three documents bear on those statements. The written agreement for the school resource officer sets the district's payment to the county for 2026-2027 at $67,745, in monthly installments from September 2026 through August 2027; the district's written answer of August 2026 says the position is "currently funded by a grant, that ends in September of 2027." The resolution adopted that night, and printed on the ballot, states that the existing levy "currently costs $123.07 per $100,000." (Sources: the 2026-27 School Resource Officer agreement and the district's written answer, both in the document folder; the resolution, Appendix A.)

The recording captures the question, asked twice, and the vote that followed it. The member of the public was the author. That the chair shook her head, did not answer him, and went on to the vote is the author's own account of what he saw in the room, offered as first-hand testimony and not as something the recording establishes.

The recording is available on request.

Appendix W — County population

United States Census Bureau, annual population estimates for Clark County, Idaho (Vintage 2025, the most recent series): 791 in 2020, 794 in 2021, 811 in 2022, 798 in 2023, 782 in 2024, 783 in 2025.

From 2021 to 2025 the county went from 794 to 783, a drop of eleven people, about one in seventy. Over the same years, the district’s fall enrollment, from Appendix AB, went from 121 in 2021-22 to 100 in 2025-26, a drop of about one in six. Average daily attendance is not compared across those years, because the state computed the 2021-22 figure from enrollment under a temporary rule.

Sources: United States Census Bureau, Vintage 2025 county population estimates, at https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/datasets/2020-2025/counties/totals/co-est2025-alldata.csv; Idaho State Department of Education fall enrollment file, Appendix AB.

Appendix X — The forest reserve fund

16 USC 500 provides that the twenty-five percent payment goes to the state “to be expended as the State or Territorial legislature may prescribe for the benefit of the public schools and public roads of the county or counties in which such national forest is situated.” The purpose is the benefit of public schools and public roads. It is not limited to construction.

The United States Forest Service describes Title I of the Secure Rural Schools law (not the Title I school program mentioned elsewhere in this article) as “Title I for roads and schools,” with funds “distributed to eligible counties to help maintain local roads and schools.”

Education Week reported in December 2025 that restored Secure Rural Schools money would let a 650-student district in northern California “replenish reserves, pay back debts, and cancel any layoffs that might have been necessary early next year,” citing the district’s superintendent. That money can pay staff.

The Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Act of 2025, Public Law 119-58, was signed on December 18, 2025 and reauthorizes the program only through the end of federal fiscal year 2026, with final payments in calendar 2027.

The program had lapsed for more than two years before that, since the end of federal fiscal year 2023, so the money received in the year ended June 30, 2026 is not a normal year's income. This levy would run from July 1, 2027, to June 30, 2029. No authorization currently covers either year.

Idaho Code 57-1304, from the Idaho Legislature, reproduced in full:

> *57-1304. Use of such moneys. The school portion of this money may be retained, accumulated and expended for the purchase of school sites and for the construction and remodeling of school buildings within the discretion of the trustees of the respective school districts; provided, that when, within the discretion of the trustees of the respective school districts, such moneys are not so needed they may be expended for current expenses.*

The statute names school sites and buildings first, and leaves the trustees free to spend the money on current expenses whenever they decide it is not needed for those. Nor does the district behave as though the money were limited to buildings. In June 2021 the board was told the district "might have to transfer $100,000 from forest funds this year to balance the budget," and in August that it was "looking at a carry over this year instead of balancing with forest fund money." The minutes do not record the transfer being made. They do show the district treating the fund as available to the operating budget, not only to buildings. [Y]

On the district's reserves: the FY2026 audit shows a general fund ending balance of $637,330 against general fund expenditures of $2,452,387, which is about 3.1 months of operating spending. [AF] On August 13, 2026 the district's auditor told the board the general fund was "about a 2.9 month operating reserve" and that "we do recommend 1.5 to 3 months." [V] His 2.9 matches the balance divided by a month of general fund expenditures plus transfers out ($2,452,387 plus $178,182, or $2,630,569 a year); the 3.1 here uses expenditures alone. Either way the general fund is near the top of his range or above it. In October 2023 he had told the board that the district was then at one and a half months and that the audit recommends three. [Y] The forest reserve fund is a separate matter: no audit, minute or other document in the record sets a level or a target for it. The only purpose any district document states for it is the audit's "used primarily for major capital outlay." [AF]

Sources: 16 USC 500, at https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2023-title16/html/USCODE-2023-title16-chap2-subchapI-sec500.htm; Idaho Code 57-1304 at

https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title57/T57CH13/SECT57-1304/; US Forest Service, Secure Rural Schools, at https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-with-us/secure-rural-schools; Education Week, Mark Lieberman, "Congress Revived a Fund for Rural Schools. Their Struggles Aren't Over," December 12, 2025, at https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/congress-revived-a-fund-for-rural-schools-their-struggles-arent-over/2025/12; Public Law 119-58, at https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-119publ58/pdf/PLAW-119publ58.pdf; Clark County School District board minutes of June 2021, August 2021 and October 2023; Clark County School District FY2026 audit.

Appendix Y — The board minutes, 2016 to 2026

The Clark County School District publishes board minutes at clarkcountyschools161.org/school-board/board-meetings. For January 2016 through July 2026, one hundred and sixty-one documents are posted; the minutes of August 13 and September 10, 2026 were posted later and are quoted in Appendix AQ. Of the one hundred and sixty-one, two are second copies of a meeting already posted, and two are agendas for meetings whose minutes are also posted, so the documents cover one hundred and fifty-seven meetings. Two are scanned images with no text layer; their contents were recovered by optical character recognition and may contain transcription errors, and the original PDFs are the authoritative documents. All one hundred and sixty-one were reviewed, about one hundred and seventeen thousand words. Counting the phrases the minutes use for a vote that passed, such as "motion passed" and "passed unanimously," across the one hundred and fifty-seven meetings gives more than twelve hundred motions passed and none recorded as failing; a search for "nay," "opposed" and "voted no" finds fewer than fifteen entries. The archive accompanying this article contains both the original PDF files as the district published them and the extracted text.

Levy items: more than twenty across ten years. Resolutions, ballot language, a brochure, a pamphlet, an instruction to work with a law firm on state guidelines, the auditor's 2020 observation that the school would want another levy, and the June 2026 entry quoted in this article. No figure in any of them is shown to have been derived from an assessment of what the school needs.

Program proposals: the minutes contain many. Among them a breakfast program in 2018, a technology purchase in 2018, a curriculum director reassignment in 2019, a junior high track program raised in 2018 and

established in 2021, a dual language immersion program raised in 2019 which then disappears from the record, Gear Up college visits repeatedly, a greenhouse paid for with donations and grants in 2016, a positive behavior intervention system in 2016, and a three and four year old preschool program in 2026 tabled pending survey results. Teachers presented on their classes regularly and achievement data was reported to the board.

Coaching: the minutes record little about coaching money in ten years. In March and April 2016 a track assistant coach question was resolved by paying one assistant and making the other two volunteers. In October 2020 the superintendent reported that assistant coaches had not been paid in the past; in November 2020 the board approved a coaching stipend schedule; in March 2021 it approved hiring a junior high track coach “with a stipend depending on participation of students.” In February 2019, after a transfer of $1,830.68 cleared dormant accounts on the auditor’s advice, the athletic department stood at a positive balance of $185.20.

In October 2018 the athletic director’s report listed two options for high school girls’ basketball: a co-op with Watersprings, or letting the girls play with the boys. When the board took it up in November 2018 it discussed letting the girls play with the boys and moving eighth graders up, then voted to return the question “back to the administration.” Hiring somebody to coach them does not appear among the options.

An earlier draft of this research asserted that no academic or program proposals appeared in ten years of minutes. That was wrong, and it is corrected above. The finding that survives is not the absence of ideas but how seldom the record shows one carried through.

Many of the passages this article quotes from the minutes are collected below, so they can be read here as well as in the files. Each is transcribed as written, including the district’s own spelling.

> *June 11, 2026, on the levy amount, the superintendent “does not feel there is a need to increase the supplemental levy, but would like the see the wording change to more salary and benefits on the verbiage.”*
>
> *Earlier entries on the amount, quoted in part; none records how the figure was reached: February 27, 2017, a motion “to approve a supplemental levy in the amount of $250,000”; October 8, 2018, “Mrs. Woods recommended seeking a $250,000 levy”; December 10, 2018, “It was agreed by the board that a request for a $250,000 replacement levy will*

be put on the ballot in March"; December 14, 2020, "The school board directed Dr. Wilding to pursue renewing the $250,000 levy."

March 2019, on the strategic plan: the board "were informed that some of the information was not available at the time of printing. Some areas do not have the goals from the past available."

October 2021, on staffing: "an emergency condition still exists in filling the position of Secondary math teacher."

January 11, 2016, on a gift: two citizens donated $1,250 "to the district for the library and supplies." The board signed a thank-you card.

March 2021, on the food program: the meat company that processed the school's beef "donated $100 and also chicken, ham and bacon to our food program."

March 12, 2026, the principal on accreditation: "the accreditation has been submitted and in April they will have meetings with parents, students, teachers, and board members." April 9, 2026: "the accreditation has been completed. She said that the interviews went well." July 9, 2026, the superintendent: "we passed the accreditation and should get the report back to us in the next 4-6 weeks."

December 2025, on the forest money: a rural schools bill had passed "which would give back forest funds, but amount could be reduced."

November 2018, on what would improve the school, a trustee "encouraged all involved to be more positive and help Clark County to become a magnet school which can draw in students and retain students."

February 2019, on activities: "A survey was completed asking students what activities they were most interested in. Soccer was the number one response, so efforts will be made to implement this program in the future."

October 2018, on girls basketball: it might be "necessary to form a co-op for high school girls' basketball with Watersprings or to allow the girls to play with the boys."

Girls' basketball coaches: August 2016, a high school girls' basketball coach named in the coaching hires; November 2017, an "assistant varsity high school girls' basketball coach" hired; October 2019, a "Head Girls Basketball coach" hired; October 2020, a motion "to hire [a coach] as the High School Girls Basketball" coach. November 2024: "There will not be a High School Girls' Basketball team this year."

May 2017, on the levy campaign, trustees were "encouraged to speak to the public and let them know the levy is simply a renewal of the existing levy and will not increase taxes."

From the September 2018 patron input session on out-of-district transportation, and from other meetings on bullying and students leaving:

"currently costing the district approximately $20,000 per year" and "a huge loss for a small district"

The families "had made the choice to transfer their students to another district and should be expected to transport their own children because of that choice."

"Two parents voiced their concern about their children who had been bullied in the district and were happier in a different school."

April 2016: a patron had "transferred her son to West Jefferson because of bullying issues here."

April 2016, on behavior at Lindy Ross Elementary, from the superintendent's report: "Guidelines and consequences have been set." June 2016: a motion "to approve payment to Boise State University for Positive Behavior Intervention System Team registration on June 20 through June 24, 2016." Motion passed unanimously.

November 2017: West Jefferson invited Clark County's "elementary students in grades one through five to an anti-bullying assembly in Terreton."

A trustee "was voted to the school district to protect it and its students" and could not support other districts' buses coming in "to take our students to another district." Another trustee "voiced concerns for both sides."

A member of the public: if families keep leaving, "the school district will close which will in turn cause the community to disappear. The community must be protected."

September 2018, from the minutes: those who wanted the West Jefferson bus "voiced their concern that this had been done for years." Among the options presented was to "stop allowing the buses to pick up the families grandfathered in last year."

April 2025, from the school resource officer's report: "3 instances of bullying."

On the levy pamphlet the district already produces:

January 2019: the superintendent gave each trustee a "sample pamphlet regarding the upcoming supplemental levy election." A trustee said the superintendent "should be commended for the excellent job done on the pamphlet."

January 2023: the levy brochure was "strictly informational, no discussion of how someone should vote." The only change the board asked for was "to add wording that designated money can only be spent in certain areas."

"Motion was made to approve the brochure for distribution with the changes requested by Ms. Small ..."

March 2019: "brochures for the levy have been sent out in both English and Spanish."

August 2022: "The board would like to see just a brief communication newsletter be mailed out." "Motion was made to approve a back to school newsletter mass mailing."

On coaching money:

April 2016, on the track assistant: "Only one assistant will be paid and the other two will be considered volunteers." October 2020, under the heading "Assistant Coach Stipends": the superintendent "stated that it looks like the assistant coaches have not been paid in the past and he would like to correct that."

On wrestling:

A co-op with West Jefferson for wrestling was approved in September 2016, October 2019 and October 2021. October 2021: "There are 4 boys and 1 girl interested in wrestling. The district would like to Coop with West Jefferson, whereas the school doesn't have the wrestling equipment."

On programs, training and the board itself:

January 2018: "Clark County has more students taking dual credit classes this year than they ever have. Several of the students will be graduating with more than 10 dual credits." March 2023: the principal "presented a graph with the growth of students in each grade and went over it with the board."

Board training sessions with the Idaho School Boards Association are recorded on March 18 and 22, 2021, March 21, 2023, March 19, 2024, and March 2, 2026 (that file's header reads "March 2, 2025").

June 11, 2026: a trustee's resignation was accepted, and a motion was made "to declare zone 1 vacancy and post the vacancy to our normal posting sites and social media to be filled by the August meeting."

On trustees appointed to vacant seats since December 2019:

November 13, 2019: the board declared "vacancy in Trustee Zones 1, 2 and 4 effective immediately." December 18, 2019: "Ms. Stanford was appointed to Zone 2 as of January 1, 2020." Ms. Stanford was already a trustee. January 13, 2020: "Ms. Frederiksen was appointed as trustee for Zone 4." February 10, 2020: "Mr. Jorgensen was appointed as trustee for Zone 1." Mr. Jorgensen had chaired the board until December 31, 2019. January 14, 2021: "Motion was made to approve Tom L. Strong as Board Trustee for the Clark County School District 161 Zone 2." December 9, 2021, after the board declared a Zone 3 vacancy effective January 1, 2022: "Motion was made to accept Laurie Small as Zone 3 Trustee effective January 1st," Ms. Small being already a trustee. October 12, 2023: "Motion was made to appoint Rigo Raya as board trustee to Zone 1."

Three more trustees took seats between elections with no appointment vote in the posted minutes. Ms. Tavenner was on the board by June 23, 2020, after the Zone 5 seat was opened on April 1. Ms. Barg was on the board by August 10, 2020. Ms. Baker "took the oath of office as a new board member, Zone 1" on February 11, 2021, after the Zone 1 resignation was accepted on December 14, 2020.

On the superintendent's evaluation:

February 10, 2022: "Motion was made to accept the Superintendent evaluation by Mr. Strong, seconded by Ms. Frederiksen." The minutes record no result for that motion. February 2023: "Motion was made to accept and approve the Superintendent evaluation." January 11, 2024: "Motion was made to accept the Superintendent evaluation." December 12, 2024: "Ms. Tavenner gave the board members the evaluation sheets to the board member. She asked board members to give them back to her before the next school board meeting." No acceptance is recorded in 2025. December 11, 2025, under the heading "Superintendent Evaluation Process and Timeline": "Motion was made to approve the Superintendent evaluation to be completed and go over at the February board meeting by Ms. Small, seconded by Mr. Strong. Motion passed." February 12, 2026: "Motion was made to approve the superintendent evaluation as presented."

The minutes are public. Anyone may check every word of this.

Appendix Z — Whether this district must exist

Idaho Constitution, Article IX, Section 1: “The stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it shall be the duty of the legislature of Idaho, to establish and maintain a general, uniform and thorough system of public, free common schools.”

The duty runs to the legislature.

Title 33, Chapter 3 of the Idaho Code provides the procedures by which school districts change or end. Section 33-307, correcting or altering school district boundaries. Section 33-308, excision and annexation of territory. Section 33-309, lapsed districts and annexation. Section 33-310, consolidation of school districts. Section 33-310A, consolidation of contiguous school districts. Section 33-310B, feasibility study and plan for consolidation. Section 33-311, plan of consolidation submitted to electors. Section 33-312, division of a school district.

Section 33-307(1)(a) exists so that no part of the state is left outside a school district. Every child in Idaho must belong to one. Nothing in these provisions requires that any particular district continue.

Section 33-308(4) provides that the state board of education shall approve a proposal to excise and annex territory provided “the excision and annexation is in the best interests of the children residing in the area described in the petition” and “the excision of the territory, as proposed, would not leave a school district with a bonded debt in excess of the limit then prescribed by law.”

No opinion is offered here on whether any of this should happen in Clark County. It is set out because a reader is entitled to know what the law provides.

Sources: Idaho Constitution Article IX Section 1 and Idaho Code Title 33 Chapter 3, at https://legislature.idaho.gov

---

Appendix AA — What the state says about critical thinking

Idaho Content Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy, in the section explaining the reasoning behind the standards:

> *We cannot think deeply, productively, or critically about a matter if we have little foundational knowledge of it. Thus, the key to developing critical thinking skills in our students is to increase their knowledge about a breadth of subjects by reading rich and related texts on various topics.*

The Idaho State Department of Education describes English Language Arts as cultivating "critical thinking and collaboration skills preparing students to be active participants in society." The World Languages standards carry critical thinking as an explicit goal of their advanced seminar: "The student applies critical-thinking skills to build a portfolio that organizes and uses information acquired from a variety of sources, including technology." Social studies materials distributed by the department are described as designed to promote "critical thinking, debate, and civic understanding."

On who decides how any of it is taught, the department is direct. Its social studies standards say: "No specific curriculum or strategies are required by the State of Idaho to be used to teach the Idaho Content Standards in Social Studies. Local schools and districts make decisions about what resources will be used to teach the standards." Its world languages standards say the same of world languages, in the same words.

The standards are quoted here as the state's own account of what thinking requires. No claim is made about any individual's ability to think, and none should be read into it. The point is narrower: the state says reasoning depends on being given the knowledge to reason from, and the record shows no analysis of the levy amount put before this board.

Sources: Idaho State Department of Education: Idaho K-12 State Standards for English Language Arts/Literacy, at https://www.sde.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Idaho-K-12-State-Standards-for-ELA-Literacy.pdf; English Language Arts page, at https://www.sde.idaho.gov/about-us/departments/content-and-curriculum/english-language-arts/; Social Studies page, at https://www.sde.idaho.gov/about-us/departments/content-and-curriculum/social-studies/; K-12 Social Studies Standards, at https://www.sde.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/K-12-Social-Studies-Standards.pdf; World Language Standards, at https://www.sde.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/World-Language-Standards.pdf. All read October 21, 2026; the three standards documents are in the document folder.

Appendix AB — Average daily attendance

From the Idaho State Department of Education, Historical Full-Term Average Daily Attendance, updated July 2026. District 161, Clark County Joint.

> *2025-2026: 92.83. 2024-2025: 85.06. 2023-2024: 93.24. 2022-2023: 111.66. 2021-2022: 121.32. 2020-2021: 114.36. 2019-2020: 111.64. 2018-2019: 111.06. 2017-2018: 123.03. 2016-2017: 128.00. 2015-2016: 142.28.*
>
> *Going further back: 185.03 in 2010-2011. 204.98 in 2005-2006. 202.37 in 2000-2001.*

The state's file notes that 2010-2011 was a system conversion year, and that 2020-2021 through 2022-2023 were computed from enrollment under a temporary rule.

Average daily attendance is used here rather than a headcount because it is the figure the state itself counts and pays on. Idaho Code 33-911 distributes the school district facilities fund to each district on a per-pupil basis using the average daily attendance calculation in section 33-1003A, and requires that money to go first to school bonds and certain other required payments, and next to supplemental levies. It is the state contribution shown in Appendix Q. When attendance falls, all else equal, this district's share of the fund falls with it and more of the levy falls on local property.

The department's separate fall enrollment file records, for the district: 2025-2026: 100. 2024-2025: 91. 2023-2024: 108. 2022-2023: 117. 2021-2022: 121. 2020-2021: 117. 2019-2020: 121. 2018-2019: 122. 2017-2018: 137. 2016-2017: 134. 2015-2016: 150. Of the 100 in 2025-2026, 55 are in kindergarten through fifth grade and 45 in grades six through twelve. (The Idaho Report Card in Appendix F counts 53 at Lindy Ross Elementary and 47 at the junior-senior high school. The two state files do not count the same way.) Enrollment does not fall every year; it rose in 2017-18, in 2021-22 and again in 2025-26. Over ten years it fell by a third. Enrollment and average daily attendance are different measures and are not interchangeable.

Sources: Idaho State Department of Education, Historical Full-Term Average Daily Attendance and Historical Fall Enrollment by District, both updated July 2026; Idaho Code 33-911 at legislature.idaho.gov.

Appendix AC — What the law now requires

Section 33-320, Idaho Code, was repealed and replaced in 2026. It is now titled Strategic Performance Plans and Training. Reproduced in part.

> *(1) Each school district and public charter school in Idaho shall develop and submit to the state department of education a strategic performance plan that has a continuous focus on innovating and improving: (a) Student academic proficiency; (b) Student academic growth; (c) College and career readiness at the high school level; (d) Outcomes of at-risk and economically disadvantaged students as defined in section 33-1001, Idaho Code; and (e) Local school board performance and stewardship of monitoring student performance...*
>
> *(3) The strategic performance plan shall: (a) Set clear and measurable goals for student outcomes and postsecondary achievements... (c) Be data-driven and include student outcomes and growth data in literacy, math, graduation rates, achievement of individual postsecondary goals, and any other metric required by the state board of education...*
>
> *(4) A school district or public charter school may apply to use alternative student success measures if it demonstrates that a combined twenty-five percent (25%) or greater of its students include special education students, homeless students, economically disadvantaged students, students enrolled in an alternative high school, or English language learners.*
>
> *(5) Beginning with the 2027-2028 school year, the local governing board shall adopt and submit its strategic performance plan to the state department of education no later than October 1 of each year... The plan shall cover a period of no less than four (4) years...*
>
> *(6) The state board of education shall adopt a matrix to be used by the state department of education to evaluate a school district's or public charter school's progress toward the student-outcome goals in its strategic performance plan. The matrix shall give determinative weight to locally approved goals and alternative success measures. The matrix shall be adopted no later than September 1, 2026.*
>
> *(8)(a) The local governing board shall, at least quarterly, review, discuss, and approve progress reports on two (2) or more key areas of the strategic performance plan at a regular or special board meeting.*
>
> *(11) If during its annual evaluation of progress reports the state department of education finds that a school district or public charter school has not demonstrated progress in achieving a majority of the*

goals identified in its strategic performance plan, the superintendent of public instruction shall: (a) Support the local governing board... (b) Support... in reviewing school district or public charter school performance, including in the areas of local budget, curricula, and professional development, to identify areas hindering student performance; (c) Offer recommendations...; and (d) Provide a list of high-performing school districts and public charter schools of similar size and student demographics to offer opportunities for mentorship...

(12) ...after two (2) consecutive annual evaluations of progress reports, the superintendent of public instruction shall: ...(b) Direct the state department of education to approve ISAT remediation funds, professional development and literacy budgets, professional development plans, and curricular materials that are in alignment with the school district's or public charter school's student performance goals...

(13) ...after three (3) consecutive annual reviews of progress reports, the superintendent of public instruction shall: ...(b) Direct the state department of education to conduct a comprehensive review of school district and public charter school operations, including a review of instructional calendars. The state department of education shall have final approval of instructional calendars for the next school year.

(17) Of the moneys appropriated in the public school educational support program, up to six thousand six hundred dollars ($6,600) shall be distributed to each school district and public charter school to be expended for school board and leadership development training... To qualify for reimbursement, training shall cover strategic performance planning, finance, ethics, governance, superintendent evaluations, and public charter administrator evaluations.

(19) The state department of education is authorized to withhold a portion of funds for any school district or public charter school that does not submit its strategic performance plan by the date required in this section. ... The withheld funds shall be returned to the school district or public charter school upon the submission of the outstanding strategic performance plan.

Two other provisions bear on this. Section 33-116, Idaho Code, provides that all school districts in Idaho shall be under the supervision and control of the state board. Section 33-119 authorizes the state board to set accreditation standards for secondary schools and to withdraw accreditation from a school that "has failed or neglected to conform to accreditation standards."

Source: Idaho Code sections 33-116, 33-119 and 33-320, at legislature.idaho.gov. Section 33-320 as added 2026, chapter 177, section 2.

Appendix AD — Per-pupil spending, and how it was calculated

Per-pupil figures in this article are computed from two files published by the Idaho State Department of Education, both included in the archive with this article. The method is the same for every district named, so the comparison is fair.

The numerator is total expenditures for the 2024-2025 school year, from the department’s Financial Summaries of Idaho Schools. The denominator is full-term average daily attendance for the same year, from the department’s Historical Full-Term Average Daily Attendance file.

> *Clark County Joint School District No. 161: total expenditures $2,742,204, average daily attendance 85.06, per pupil $32,238.*
>
> *Rockland School District No. 382: total expenditures $3,373,355, average daily attendance 159.68, per pupil $21,126.*
>
> *West Jefferson School District No. 253: total expenditures $9,263,564, average daily attendance 566.74, per pupil $16,345.*
>
> *Statewide: total expenditures $4,353,376,875 across 191 school districts and charter schools, average daily attendance 291,196, per pupil $14,950.*

Clark County spends about fifty-three percent more per child than Rockland and more than double the state average. Much of that is arithmetic: a building, a bus route, a superintendent and a heating bill divided by 85 children rather than by 160 or by 567.

A note on why these figures differ from earlier drafts of this article. Earlier versions gave per-pupil figures taken from a summary someone else had put together. The figures above are computed directly from the department’s own files, using the same measure for every district, and can be reproduced by anyone with the two spreadsheets in the archive.

Sources: Idaho State Department of Education, 2024-2025 Financial Summaries of Idaho Schools, and Historical Full-Term Average Daily Attendance, both at sde.idaho.gov.

Appendix AE — The law this article rests on

Idaho Code, Title 74, Transparent and Ethical Government. Current text from the Idaho Legislature.

> *74-201. Formation of public policy at open meetings. The people of the state of Idaho in creating the instruments of government that serve them, do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies so created. Therefore, the legislature finds and declares that it is the policy of this state that the formation of public policy is public business and shall not be conducted in secret.*
>
> *74-102. Public records - Right to examine. (1) Every person has a right to examine and take a copy of any public record of this state and there is a presumption that all public records in Idaho are open at all reasonable times for inspection except as otherwise expressly provided by statute.*

Source: Idaho Code sections 74-102 and 74-201 at legislature.idaho.gov.

Appendix AF — The fund balances, from the audit

From the District’s audited financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2026. Two statements carry the two balances quoted throughout this article, and both are reproduced here in the audit’s own columns, followed by the budget comparison, the district’s July 2026 report, the audit’s table of transfers between funds, and its note on fund types.

From the Balance Sheet, Governmental Funds, June 30, 2026, page 1 of 3:

> *Cash and Investments. General Fund $852,935. Forest Reserve Fund $1,305,525. Child Nutrition Fund $6,846. School District Modernization Facilities Fund $362,513.*
>
> *The General Fund also shows $19,087 owed to it from local sources and $55,211 from state sources, and $9,266 due from other funds. The Forest Reserve Fund shows nothing owed to it and nothing it owes. Its total assets and its fund balance are the same figure: $1,305,525.*

From the Statement of Revenues, Expenditures, and Changes in Fund Balances, Governmental Funds, year ended June 30, 2026, page 1 of 3:

> *Forest Reserve Fund. Revenues: Other Local Revenue $26,445, Federal Revenue $213,240, Total Revenues $239,685. Total Expenditures $10,266.*

Transfers In $75,267. Net Change in Fund Balances $304,686. Fund Balances, Beginning $1,000,839. Fund Balances, Ending $1,305,525.

General Fund. Total Revenues $2,716,249. Total Expenditures $2,452,387. Transfers In $1,620. Transfers Out $178,182. Net Change in Fund Balances $87,300. Fund Balances, Beginning $550,030. Fund Balances, Ending $637,330.

The two figures quoted throughout this article come from those statements. The forest reserve fund held $1,305,525 in cash and investments at the close of the year with nothing owed against it, and the audit classifies all of it as restricted, for special programs. It took in $239,685 during that year and spent $10,266. Of the change in the balance, $75,267 was a reimbursement transferred from the general fund rather than money newly received. The general fund closed at $637,330. Together, $1,942,855.

A note on what these two funds are. The forest reserve fund is a special revenue fund: the money arrives under a federal statute and is held separately. The general fund is the district’s unrestricted fund. It is called general because it is not tied to a purpose. Money in it can be spent on a teacher, a coach, a class, a roof, or any other lawful school purpose the board directs. Nothing in the written audit states that any part of the $637,330 is held deliberately as a reserve, or names a target for one. The auditor’s spoken recommendation of 1.5 to 3 months is in Appendix V.

From the Balance Sheet, Governmental Funds, page 1 of 3, the fund balance section:

Fund Balances. Restricted: Special Programs $1,305,525 (Forest Reserve Fund). Unassigned $637,330 (General Fund).

From the Budgetary Comparison Schedule, General and Major Special Revenue Funds, page 2 of 3, Forest Reserve Fund:

Budgeted expenditures, original and final: Maintenance - Buildings & Equipment $150,000; Capital Assets $707,544; Total Expenditures $857,544. Actual: Maintenance - Buildings & Equipment $4,249; Capital Assets $6,017; Total Expenditures $10,266. Budgeted Fund Balances - Ending $0. Actual Fund Balances - Ending $1,305,525.

No other forest reserve fund expenditure line in that schedule has a budgeted amount.

From the district’s financial report for July 2026, fund 220, Forest Funds, the budget for the year beginning July 1, 2026:

> *Original Budget. Revenue $1,257,737. Expense $1,257,737.*

From the notes to the financial statements, interfund transfers during the year:

> *General: transfers in $1,620, transfers out $178,182, purpose Depreciation, Indirect Costs, Reimbursement, Support. Forest Reserve: transfers in $75,267, purpose Reimbursement.*

From the notes to the financial statements:

> *The audit’s note on fund types: “Special revenue funds are used to account for the proceeds of specific revenue sources that are legally restricted to expenditures for specified purposes. Major special revenue funds include the forest reserve fund, used primarily for major capital outlay, and the child nutrition fund...”*

Source: Clark County School District No. 161 audited financial statements, year ended June 30, 2026, Balance Sheet page 1 of 3, Statement of Revenues, Expenditures, and Changes in Fund Balances page 1 of 3, and Budgetary Comparison Schedule page 2 of 3, posted at https://www.clarkcountyschools161.org/administration/audit; and the district’s financial report for July 2026, released with its answer of August 19, 2026.

Appendix AG — When a board may close a meeting

Idaho Code 74-206, Executive sessions - When authorized. Current text from the Idaho Legislature. Reproduced in part.

> *(1) An executive session at which members of the public are excluded may be held, but only for the purposes and only in the manner set forth in this section. The motion to go into executive session shall identify the specific subsections of this section that authorize the executive session. There shall be a roll call vote on the motion and the vote shall be recorded in the minutes. An executive session shall be authorized by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the governing body. An executive session may be held:*
>
> *(a) To consider hiring a public officer, employee, staff member or individual agent, wherein the respective qualities of individuals are to be evaluated in order to fill a particular vacancy or need. This paragraph does not apply to filling a vacancy in an elective office or deliberations about staffing needs in general;*

(b) To consider the evaluation, dismissal or disciplining of, or to hear complaints or charges brought against, a public officer, employee, staff member or individual agent, or public school student;

(c) To acquire an interest in real property not owned by a public agency;

(d) To consider records that are exempt from disclosure as provided in chapter 1, title 74, Idaho Code;

(e) To consider preliminary negotiations involving matters of trade or commerce in which the governing body is in competition with governing bodies in other states or nations;

(f) To communicate with legal counsel for the public agency to discuss the legal ramifications of and legal options for pending litigation, or controversies not yet being litigated but imminently likely to be litigated. The mere presence of legal counsel at an executive session does not satisfy this requirement;

The list continues with four more subjects: pardons and parole, a juvenile custody review board, talks with the agency's insurer about a claim, and, last, labor contract matters. Setting the amount of a supplemental levy is not among them.

Source: Idaho Code section 74-206 at legislature.idaho.gov.

Appendix AH — How a vacant trustee seat is filled

Idaho Code 33-504, Vacancies on boards of trustees. Current text from the Idaho Legislature. Reproduced in part.

(1)(a) A vacancy shall be declared by the board of trustees when any nominee has been elected but has failed to qualify for office, or within thirty (30) days of when any trustee: (i) Dies; (ii) Resigns as trustee; (iii) Removes himself from his trustee zone of residence; (iv) Is no longer a resident or school district elector of the district; (v) Refuses to serve as trustee; or (vi) Without excuse acceptable to the board of trustees, fails to attend four (4) consecutive regular meetings of the board.

(2) With the exception of recall, any declaration of vacancy shall be made at any regular or special meeting of the board of trustees, at

which any of the conditions provided in subsection (1)(a) of this section are determined to exist.

(3) The board of trustees shall appoint to such vacancy a person qualified to serve as trustee of the school district provided there remains in membership on the board of trustees a majority of the membership thereof, and the board shall notify the state superintendent of public instruction of the appointment. Such appointment shall be made within ninety (90) days of the declaration of vacancy.

Source: Idaho Code section 33-504 at legislature.idaho.gov.

Appendix AI — What school board service takes elsewhere

National sources on the time and work of school board service. They are other organizations' published work and are not reproduced; each can be read at the address in the sources line, and the document folder gives the address of each and the key passages quoted.

National School Boards Association survey, reported by the New Jersey School Boards Association: "A survey by the National School Boards Association found 63 percent of board members spend 11 to 50 hours a month on board duties – with some dedicating even more time to the position."

Brookings Institution, survey of America's school board members, 2026: "A large share of board members serving in large districts (30%) report spending at least 40 hours per month on board-related work. This far exceeds the share in small districts reporting the same workload (3%)."

Oregon School Boards Association, on what the hours are for: "Before the monthly meetings, you'll need to study the materials provided (board packets) so you can make informed decisions. A substantial time commitment is required of board members beyond meeting and meeting-preparation time. There are committee meetings, work sessions and appearances on behalf of the district."

National School Boards Association, Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards, on boards in high-achieving districts: "Typically, they adopted the goals with specific achievement targets and benchmarks. 'The board ensures that these goals remain the top priorities in the district and that no other initiatives detract attention or resources from accomplishing these goals.' The districts also provided

professional development to board members and examined the effectiveness of such training."

The same brief, on what those boards do: "Boards in high-achieving districts are more likely to engage in goal setting and monitoring their progress. They are increasingly data savvy—identifying student needs and justifying decisions based on data."

Lee and Eadens, a 2014 study that observed 115 school board meetings, on the meetings in low-performing districts: they "had less time spent on student achievement" and "did not focus on policy items as much as high- and medium-performing school districts."

Sources: New Jersey School Boards Association, How to become a school board member, at https://www.njsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/FAQ_howtobecomeaschoolboardmember-3.pdf; Brookings Institution, Main findings from a survey of America's school board members, June 2026, at https://www.brookings.edu/articles/main-findings-from-a-survey-of-americas-school-board-members/; Oregon School Boards Association, How much time does being a good board member require, at https://www.osba.org/how-much-time-does-being-a-good-board-member-require/; National School Boards Association Center for Public Education, Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards, 2019, at https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NSBA/dfc2722c-752e-43ee-b165-99ed3a3c9d30/UploadedImages/Documents/Eight_Characteristics_of_Effective_School_Boards_Report.pdf; D. E. Lee and D. W. Eadens, The Problem: Low Achieving Districts and Low Performing Boards, International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership, 2014, at https://ijepl.journals.publicknowledgeproject.org/index.php/ijepl/article/view/563

Appendix AJ — Who votes on a supplemental levy

Idaho Code 33-802, School levies. Current text from the Idaho Legislature. Reproduced in part.

(3) Supplemental Maintenance and Operation Levies. No levy in excess of the levy permitted by this section shall be made by a noncharter district unless such a supplemental levy in a specified amount and for a specified time not to exceed two (2) years be first authorized through an election held subject to the provisions of section 34-106, Idaho Code, and pursuant to title 34, Idaho Code, and approved by a majority of the district electors voting in such election. A levy approved pursuant to this subsection may be reduced by a majority vote of the board of trustees in the second year.

The question is decided by the district's electors. Nothing in the section conditions a vote on owning property or on holding a tax bill.

Source: Idaho Code section 33-802 at legislature.idaho.gov.

Appendix AK — When only one person files

Idaho Code 33-502B, Board of trustees - One nomination - No election. Current text from the Idaho Legislature. Reproduced in full.

> *33-502B. Board of trustees - One nomination - No election. In any election for trustees, if, after the expiration of the date for filing written nominations for the office of trustee, it appears that only one (1) qualified candidate has been nominated for a position to be filled or if only one (1) candidate has filed a write-in declaration of intent as provided by section 34-1407, Idaho Code, and has provided to the district's board clerk the signatures of five (5) electors of the candidate's specific zone, then no election shall be held for that position. The board of trustees or the school district clerk, with the written permission of the board, shall declare such candidate elected as a trustee. The school district clerk shall immediately prepare and deliver to the person a certificate of election signed by him and bearing the seal of the district. The procedure set forth in this section shall not apply to any other school district election.*

Read together with section 33-504 on vacancies, this is the second of two ways a person can come to one of these seats without a vote being cast. On a vacancy, the board appoints. On a single filing, no election is held and the board declares the candidate elected.

Source: Idaho Code section 33-502B at legislature.idaho.gov.

Appendix AL — What school transportation is for

Idaho Code 33-1501, Transportation authorized. Current text from the Idaho Legislature. Reproduced in part.

> *33-1501. Transportation authorized. To afford more equal opportunity for public school attendance, the board of trustees of each district, including specially chartered school districts, shall, where practicable, provide transportation for the public school pupils within the district, and pupils resident within adjoining districts annually agreed to in writing by the districts involved, under conditions and*

limitations herein set forth. Nonpublic school students may be transported, where practicable, when the full costs for providing such transportation are recovered. In approving the routing of any school bus, or in the maintenance and operation of all such transportation equipment, or in the appointment or employment of chauffeurs, the primary requirements to be observed by the board of trustees are the safety and adequate protection of the health of the pupils.

Two things in that section bear on the September 2018 decision. Busing children who live in an adjoining district is lawful where the districts agree to it in writing, and the agreement is annual, so it continues only while both districts keep agreeing. And the purpose the legislature gave the whole section is to afford more equal opportunity for public school attendance.

Source: Idaho Code section 33-1501 at legislature.idaho.gov.

Appendix AM — What the state sent back

In a letter dated September 5, 2026, I asked the Idaho State Department of Education for every continuous improvement plan Clark County School District No. 161 had filed since 2016, and for any record showing that anybody at the state had reviewed one. The Office of the State Board of Education answered on September 18, 2026. It produced the plans it holds, eight completed review checklists, forty-seven blank templates, the submission and confirmation emails for the most recent plan, and a written statement. Everything it sent is reproduced in the document folder that accompanies this article, except its signature logo and an attachment titled “A. Laird Initial Requests.pdf.”

The written statement, in full and as written:

Records responsive to this request have been provided to the extent available for the years 2016-2026. Please note that the templates released by our office (both the standalone Continuous Improvement Plan templates and Combined Plan templates) were available for district use but were not required. All templates available for the years requested are provided even if Clark County School District did not opt to use one of them. Additionally, email correspondence related to the receipt and compliance confirmation of the 2025-2026 plan has been included. Correspondence older than twelve (12) months may not be available, as

emails are retained in accordance with the agency's system retention configuration.

All available records responsive to this request have been provided.

No Continuous Improvement Plan submissions were located for 2017 or 2021. Additionally, no review records were located for 2016, 2017, 2018, or 2021.

The district's submission of the current plan, September 16, 2025, from Superintendent Eileen Holden to the state's plans address:

Attached are the Clark County Continuous Improvement Plan for 25-26 documents. It will also be uploaded to our District Website at https://www.clarkcountyschools161.org/school-board/continuous-improvement-plan by tomorrow. Let me know if you need anything further. Thank you.

The state's reply, September 18, 2025:

Superintendent Holden; Thank you for submitting a Continuous Improvement Plan for Clark County School District. We have completed a full review of your updated plan. This e-mail is to notify you that your Continuous Improvement Plan has been accepted by the Office of the State Board of Education and the version received on September 18, 2025, is in alignment with Idaho law. Congratulations! A detailed checklist reflecting your full review is attached. If you have any questions or need additional support, please feel welcome to contact me.

The eight review checklists are dated 1/10/19; 11-12-19 and 12-23-19 (two dates on one checklist); 12-17-21; 3-31-22 (a second review of the same plan); 12/5/2022; 10/24/2023; 9-23-2024; and 9/18/2025. Each asks whether the required parts of the plan are present and whether performance targets are set. Each item is marked with an X for fully addressed, a slash for partially addressed, or left blank for not addressed. The 2025-26 checklist, the one behind the letter above, is marked fully addressed throughout.

Searching all eight for any comment on whether the goals are adequate returns nothing. The figure 30.0 does not appear in any of them. Neither do the words ambitious, rigorous, insufficient, deficient, underperforming, or Comprehensive Support.

The reviewers' comments of substance in the whole set come from three reviews: in January 2019, an outdated template and a missing benchmark for

the four-year graduation rate; in November 2019, a missing benchmark for the college-ready measure; in December 2021, missing Go On targets and missing staff performance results. None addresses whether any goal is adequate.

> *From the 2025-26 plan's Report of Progress Narrative, as written: "A monetary encentive has also been incorporated using outside funding sources for students who show growth and who score proficient in the spring ISATs. This was done both in 22-23 and then in 23-24, with lower performing students improving their scores. The monetary incentive to the students was the largest needed based off their Spring 2025 scores to date. The increase attention to the data along with individual goal setting each student sets with an assigned teacher has led to more engagement by the students and a focus on increased growth. Our growth has increased overall, but we still have a ways to go."*

On the grade 8 mathematics proficiency target, the plans the state holds show fifteen percent for the 2022-23 school year, thirty percent for 2023-24, thirty percent for 2024-25, and thirty percent for 2025-26.

I also asked the State Board separately, under sections 33-116 and 33-119, to determine whether this district and this school conform to the standards the Board sets. The Board replied that the Department of Education is best equipped to answer most of the request, that the Board delegates authority for K-12 to the Department, and that the state's accountability and improvement system, which runs on a three-year cycle, "essentially acts as the review you are requesting." It referred the request onward and offered a phone call.

A further part of my request, covering the Comprehensive Support designation, the matrix adopted under section 33-320(6), and whether the state ever notified this district that it was not progressing, was directed to the Department of Education. The Department answered those parts, together with my request for review, on October 19, 2026, without a separate request. Its response is Appendix AR.

Source: response of the Office of the Idaho State Board of Education to a public records request, September 18, 2026, with attachments. Reproduced in the document folder that accompanies this article, except its signature logo and the attachment titled "A. Laird Initial Requests.pdf."

Appendix AN — The plans, year by year

These are the improvement plans Clark County School District No. 161 filed with the state, as the state holds them. All are reproduced in full in the document folder that accompanies this article.

The strategic plan for 2015-2016. Six pages. Page one sets out the statute: a plan shall be data driven, shall set clear and measurable targets based on student outcomes, shall include a vision and mission, and shall include key indicators for monitoring performance. What follows is a template, with tables of students, staff and money filled in and much else left empty. “Vision Statement: under development.” A heading reading “Message from the Superintendent” with no message. A heading reading “Paragraph about Idaho Testing—ISAT and SBAC,” which is the template’s instruction to the writer, left in. Headings for Graduation Rate, College and Career Readiness, ACT Scores, SAT Scores, AP Courses and Dual Enrollment Coursework, with nothing under any of them. A heading for SWOT Analysis with nothing under it. The document ends with the line “As such the School District #161 sets the following goals:” and no goals follow.

> *The 2015-16 plan opens with the statute then in force, Idaho Code 33-320: “The board of trustees and the superintendent shall collaborate on the plan and engage students, parents, educators and the community as appropriate.”*

The plan for 2017-2018. Its cover reads “CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND ANNUAL REPORTING 2017-2018” and, beneath that, “School Board Approved (Pending Approval).” Its last column is headed “Benchmark / Performance Target.” In that column: grade 8 mathematics proficiency, 5/7. Grade 8 English, 6/7. Grade 6 mathematics, 3/9. Most other measures, a ten percent annual increase. Six of this plan’s ten pages, the cover among them, carry no readable text and were run through software that reads scanned pages to read them.

The combined plan narrative for 2018-2019. Nineteen pages, of which about 5,900 words are the district’s own writing. It describes the literacy intervention program in detail, lists sixteen college and career activities for grades nine through twelve with further lists for grades ten to eleven and grade twelve, and states that all communication goes out in Spanish and English with a translator available. On how the plan was developed:

It was with every good intention that a CIP committee would be set up this summer to get together to work on this plan. In fact, two separate trainings were scheduled with ISBA to provide guidance on the CIP. However, unfortunately, other more pressing items changed the course of the second training which was to go in depth on CIP, to a training to cover Roles and Responsibilities instead. Now, with that said, I did gather feedback and input from several faculty/staff members; parents; the College and Career Counselor; the Title 1 Para; my school board chair; and my ISBA Leadership Development Director all individually. Additionally, I considered student and parent surveys. These individuals provided me with the necessary student data, the program specifics, and the brain-storming sessions to move forward with very specific program plans. Next year, I will begin this process in March or April, so that we will have plenty of time to meet, as I see value of getting together as a group rather than collecting data and feedback separately.

And: "we recognize that using and analyzing data has been a weakness in the past, and therefore we have chosen to be strategic in our planning."

The combined plan narrative for 2019-2020. Eighteen pages. This one also carries no readable text and was run through software that reads scanned pages. It describes full-day kindergarten adopted for early literacy, at least two hours of literacy daily in every elementary grade, an additional aide in the preschool room, hearing, vision and speech screening being arranged for pre-kindergarten through second grade, and an intervention team of every elementary teacher, the Title 1 aide, the special education teacher, the ESL teacher and the superintendent meeting on a set calendar. It describes twenty minutes of nightly reading homework, books matched to reading level, a partnership with the local library, family reading nights, and an English class for parents three nights a week. It contains:

Due to our lower IRI scores, K-3 Teachers are being asked to commit to the on-line professional development offered by the State: The Reading Teacher's Top Ten Tools: Instruction That Makes A Difference (TTT).

And:

Clark County teachers are required to pair up with an Accountability Buddy that helps to hold them accountable for amongst other things, reaching their goals they have set, having high expectations, and maintaining a culture for learning.

The narratives for 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26. One page each. The district’s own account of community involvement, the only part besides its mission and vision statements that is not the form’s stock wording, reads as follows in the plan the state accepted in September 2025:

> *Clark County School District believes in the importance of giving our parents the opportunity to provide input in the development of their child’s Education. On a monthly basis public input is sought by the Board at their regularly scheduled board meetings. Additionally, the Superintendent and Building level administration is always available for patrons to provide their input to directly throughout the year. Then by September of every year at the latest, during a regular publicized Board meeting the Board and Administration seek input from the district patrons in the direction or needs of the School District. All this input is then reviewed and if need be, the Continuous Improvement Plan is revised.*

The same paragraph appears in the plans for 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25. Compared word by word across those five years, apart from year and template labels, the changes are three: 2021-22 reads “public input is saught,” corrected to sought from 2022-23. 2021-22 reads “through out the year,” corrected to throughout from 2023-24. 2021-22 reads “Please see thee Continuous Improvement Plan Metrics document,” corrected to the from 2023-24.

Grade 8 mathematics proficiency targets, from the plans that set them: 5/7 for 2017-18. A 10 percent increase for 2018-19. 28 percent for 2019-20. 15.0 percent for 2021-22 and again for 2022-23. 30.0 percent for 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26.

Grade 8 mathematics growth targets: 15.0 percent for 2022-23, then 20.0 percent for 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26.

Staff performance. Each plan sets a target for every group of staff and reports the previous year’s result. The 2025-26 plan sets 75.0 percent for grades kindergarten through five and 80.0 percent for music, science, English, social studies, career and technical courses and mathematics. In the results column of every plan for five years, every entry reads “n size,” the state’s marker for a staff group of fewer than five. The district’s own note in the plan’s metrics document reads: “The number of staff per instructional grade/subject is less than 5 in all areas.”

The staff performance file filed with the 2025-26 plan is headed CONTINOUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN (2024-2025). Its columns are for 2024-25 and 2025-26.

Source: plans produced by the Office of the Idaho State Board of Education in response to a public records request, September 18, 2026. All reproduced in the document folder that accompanies this article.

Appendix AO — What the plan is measured by

The measures the state asked of every Idaho district, year by year, taken from the blank templates it issued. All are reproduced in the document folder.

The Go On rate, the share of a graduating class that goes on to college or training. Present in the template for 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22. Absent from 2022-23 onward.

The college ready benchmark on the college entrance exam. Present in every year's template from 2016-17 onward, and marked "(optional metric)" from 2021-22 onward.

The detailed Advising Program Summary. Required in 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21. Not asked for since.

Participation in advanced opportunities. Present through 2020-21, absent after. Industry-recognized certification for career-track students: present through 2020-21, absent after. Dual credit: present in 2016-17, absent after.

What the 2025-26 template requires under the goal "All students will be college and career ready": the four-year cohort graduation rate. The five-year rate and the college ready benchmark are both marked "(optional metric)."

The state's review of December 17, 2021, marking one item partly addressed:

> *You did not create 2021-22 Performance Targets for the Go On Rates (1 year or 2 year). While you are not required to set Performance Targets (goals) for the number of students who will go on, you do need to set targets for the % that will Go On.*

The state's review of November 2019, marking one item partly addressed:

In Section II of the Metrics, you need a Benchmark (performance target / goal for 2019-20) for the % of students meeting the college ready benchmark on the SAT/ACT. It is fine if you want to split the metric up (as you have done), but in that case, you do need to set Benchmarks for all applicable metrics.

The district's own chosen college and career measures, from the field headed "LEA Chosen Performance Metrics (at least 1)." In the 2019-20 plan, results for 2018-19 beside the targets set for 2019-20: percentage of high school seniors completing the FAFSA, 64 percent, target 67; percentage applying to at least one postsecondary institution, 82 percent, target 83; percentage who have visited a college campus, 100 percent, target 100. For 2021-22 through 2025-26: all students will tour at least one college prior to graduation, 100 percent; guest speakers from at least five different industries will present to grades 9-12, 100 percent in every year reported but 2021-22, when it was 85 percent.

Among the college readiness results reported in the 2019-20 plan: ACT English: a change of minus 40.66 percentage points from 2017-18 to 2018-19. ACT Mathematics: five of fourteen students in 2017-18, 35.71 percent. SAT English: a change of plus 30 percentage points. SAT Mathematics: a change of 0 percentage points. Career and technical students graduating with an industry certification: 0.00 percent both years. In the benchmark column for each count, and for the certification line, the state's own template printed "Not Required." The benchmark for each percentage was required and was left blank.

The Go On rate results reported in the same plan. Within one year of graduation: four of ten from the 2017 cohort, ten of sixteen from the 2018 cohort. Within two years: eight of sixteen from the 2016 cohort, five of ten from the 2017 cohort. Targets set for 2019-20: 60 percent within one year, 80 percent within two.

The 2021-22 plan's Go On results, as printed: within one year of graduation, 4 enrolled of the 2020 cohort of 6 (66.7%); within two years, 6 enrolled of the 2019 cohort of 9 (66.7%). Targets the district set for 2021-22: 80.0% within one year, 70.0% within two.

Source: blank templates and completed plans produced by the Office of the Idaho State Board of Education, September 18, 2026.

Appendix AP — What the district was asked, and when

Every letter below is reproduced in the document folder that accompanies this article, as it was sent.

August 14, 2026 — three questions in writing: whether a bus was bought, what paid for the bus barn, and how the $250,000 was arrived at.

August 17 — a follow-up narrowing the first question, and a public records request on the district's own form, 4260F, for six items, among them the basis for the $250,000 levy amount.

August 19 — the district answered, by email from the superintendent. Its answers are Appendices B, C and D. (My letter of August 20 thanks the district for "the response of August 20." The answer was sent August 19.)

August 20 — a draft of this article, sent so that "the Board sees it before the public does and has time to respond if it wishes to."

August 22 — a revised draft, with new material on what the levy costs a household, and two open questions: whether the board intended to review, before ballots were printed, the ballot's statement that the existing levy "currently costs $123.07 per $100,000," and whether any analysis, worksheet or calculation exists behind the $250,000.

September 4 — a records request to the Department of Education and a request for review to the State Board of Education, sent that evening and dated September 5. The State Board's answer of September 18 is Appendix AM.

October 8 — the printed absentee ballot arrived. Its question, purposes, amounts and cost statement are identical, word for word, to Appendix A, including the statement that the existing levy "currently costs $123.07 per $100,000."

October 19 — the Department of Education answered both September letters, for itself and for the State Board. Its response is Appendix AR.

October 19 — my reply to the Department, asking it to name the statutes it called inaccurate and pressing it on four other open points, and a records request to the State Board for the matrix required by section 33-320(6), sent the same night to the Board's records office. Both are in the document folder.

October 20 — the State Board's records office answered the matrix request. Its answer, and the matrix, are Appendix AS.

October 21 — my email to the Department correcting four errors in my September 5 letters, and two things in my October 19 reply: my statement that every section I cited matched current law, and a loose paraphrase of the Department's response. It is in the document folder.

Both drafts went to the clerk of the board, with copies to the four trustees then seated and to the superintendent. Each carried an offer. From the letter of August 20: "If any fact in the attached article is wrong, I will correct it and say so. Send the record that shows the error and I will issue a corrected version." And: "Any response in writing, by email or by mail, will be received and considered, and will be published in full if the Board wishes it to be." From the letter of August 22: "Anything the Board sends before then will be included, in full, alongside my own account."

No reply was received to either. The drafts themselves are not reproduced, because each was replaced by the next and both by this article. The covering letters are.

Sources: the author's letters of August 14, 17, 20 and 22, 2026 and of September 5, October 19 and October 21, 2026, the district's answer of August 19, 2026, the Department of Education's response of October 19, 2026, and the State Board's answer of October 20, 2026, all in the document folder.

Appendix AQ — The August 13, 2026 meeting, in the district's own papers

The agenda and minutes of the regular meetings of August 13 and September 10, 2026, and the agenda of the regular meeting of October 8, 2026, as published on the district website. All five are reproduced in full in the document folder that accompanies this article. The parts the article relies on are set out here.

From the agenda of August 13, 2026:

2. Public Input. 3. Reports: a. Annual Audit ... 4. New Business/Action Items: c. Zone 1 Opening. f. Supplemental Levy Resolution 2027-2029.

From the minutes of August 13, 2026:

Public Input. No report.

> *[The auditor] stated the school has an operating reserve of 2.9 months, which is the recommendation since we are reimbursed by the federal funds.*
>
> *Supplemental Levy Resolution 2027-2029. The supplemental levy cost per 100,000 will cost the tax payers less this time than the previous levy.*

The minutes contain no entry for agenda item 4(c), the Zone 1 opening. The recording captures a motion to accept the letter of interest. Whether that motion was seconded or voted on cannot be told from the recording. The minutes record no public comment on item 4(f), the levy resolution. They do not state the general fund balance or the forest reserve fund balance.

The resolution adopted at that meeting, and printed on the ballot, says of the cost per $100,000: “Therefore, if the proposed levy is approved, the tax per $100,000 of taxable assessed value is not expected to change.” (Appendix A)

From the agenda of September 10, 2026:

> *4. New Business/Action Items: a. Zone 1 trustee, Oath of Office. b. Consent Agenda: i. Board Minutes of August 13, 2026. d. Cross Country as a Team sport and the Coaching Stipend.*

From the minutes of September 10, 2026:

> *Oath of Office. [The new trustee] was sworn into office for Zone 1.*
>
> *Consent Agenda. Motion was made to accept the August minutes ... Motion passed.*
>
> *Cross Country Team and Stipend. Motion was made to approve the new team sport, Cross Country and stipend ... Motion passed.*

The September minutes record no change to the August minutes. The agenda for October 8 lists the September minutes for approval. The minutes of October 8 had not been posted on the district website when it was last checked, on October 21, 2026.

Idaho Code 74-205(1), from the Idaho Legislature. Reproduced in part.

> *The governing body of a public agency shall provide for the taking of written minutes of all its meetings. Neither a full transcript nor a recording of the meeting is required, except as otherwise provided by law. All minutes shall be available to the public within a reasonable time after the meeting, and shall include at least the following information: (a) All members of the governing body present; (b) All*

motions, resolutions, orders, or ordinances proposed and their disposition; (c) The results of all votes, and upon the request of a member, the vote of each member, by name.

Sources: Clark County School District No. 161, agendas and minutes of the regular meetings of August 13 and September 10, 2026 and agenda of the regular meeting of October 8, 2026, from the district website; https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title74/t74ch2/sect74-205/

Appendix AR — What the Department of Education answered

On October 19, 2026 the Idaho Department of Education answered both of my September 5 letters, for itself and for the State Board of Education. The text of its letter is reproduced here in full, as written; the letterhead and page footers are left out. Some words in it are links in the original. Key passages from the four documents behind its "link to documentation" and "Strat Plan" links follow the letter; the documents themselves are in the document folder.

October 19, 2026

Mr. Laird,

Thank you for your inquiry regarding the performance and oversight of Clark County School District. The Idaho Department of Education appreciates the opportunity to address the questions raised that fall within its statutory responsibilities. While portions of your correspondence were difficult to evaluate because some of the cited statutes, requirements, and references were either inaccurate or did not align with current law, we have nevertheless reviewed each issue on its merits.

In summary, while the Department recognizes that, like many school districts, Clark County School District has areas where continued improvement may be appropriate, our review did not identify any egregious violations of law, significant compliance failures, or other findings that would warrant corrective action beyond the supports and oversight already provided through established state processes. For ease of reference, responses to each of your questions are provided below and are labeled consistent with the format used in your request:

Question #4 from Mr. Laird "All records concerning the designation of Clark Jr./Sr. High School as Comprehensive Support and Improvement - Underperforming, including the designation notice, the supports offered

or provided to the district under that designation, and any monitoring, site visit, progress review or exit determination."

IDE Response – link to documentation

According to Patty Dalrymple, School Improvement & Support Coordinator, Clark County Jr./Sr. High School was identified as a Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI-UP) school in 2022 and participated in the state-supported improvement process, including technical assistance, monitoring, and school improvement planning.

Ms. Dalrymple noted that school leadership actively engaged in the process and demonstrated measurable academic progress, including meeting the exit criteria in ELA and improving mathematics proficiency by 7%.

The school's continued identification in 2025 was based on accountability criteria rather than any finding of misconduct, and the record reflects the district's commitment to improvement and compliance with all required school improvement activities.

Question #6 from Mr. Laird Any record showing whether the department has ever notified Clark County School District No. 161 that it was not demonstrating progress toward the goals in its plan, and any support, recommendation, mentorship referral or corrective step taken as a result.

IDE Response

The Idaho Department of Education has no records indicating that Clark County School District No. 161 has been notified that it was not demonstrating progress toward the goals contained in its strategic or continuous improvement plans. Likewise, the Department has no records showing that the district was identified as deficient in any of the areas referenced in this request.

As a result, the Department has no records of supports, recommendations, mentorship referrals, corrective actions, or other interventions undertaken in response to a determination that Clark County School District No. 161 was failing to make progress toward its established goals. The records available to the Department do not reflect any findings that would warrant such actions.

Question #7 from Mr. Laird The matrix adopted by the State Board of Education under section 33-320(6), Idaho Code, to be used in evaluating a district's progress toward the student-outcome goals in its strategic performance plan, together with the date of its adoption.

IDE Response

Pursuant to Idaho Code § 33-320(5), local education agencies are not required to submit their initial strategic performance plans until October 1, 2027. Accordingly, no formal evaluation of a district's progress toward its student outcome goals will occur until the subsequent annual submission cycle in October 2028, when districts will report on implementation and progress related to their adopted plans.

At this time, the Idaho Department of Education has focused its implementation efforts on supporting districts in the development of meaningful goals, evidence-based strategies, and locally relevant measures of success. As districts begin implementing their plans, the Department's review will primarily focus on whether identified strategies are being implemented with fidelity and whether districts are engaging in continuous improvement efforts to improve student outcomes. Given that the strategic planning process is still in its initial implementation phase, the matrix referenced in Idaho Code § 33-320(6) has not yet been utilized to formally evaluate district progress toward established student outcome goals.

Question #8 from Mr. Laird Any guidance, template or instruction issued by the department to school districts concerning the strategic performance plan required by section 33-320, Idaho Code, as amended in 2026, including the submission deadline of 1 October and the quarterly review obligation placed on local governing boards by section 33-320(8)(a).

IDE Response – link to documentationStrat Plan

Question #9 from Mr. Laird Any application submitted by Clark County School District No. 161 to use alternative student success measures under section 33-320(4), Idaho Code, and the department's response to it. If no such application has been submitted, a written statement to that effect.

IDE Response While Clark County School District may be eligible to pursue that option, the Idaho Department of Education has implemented the state's strategic planning and accountability framework in a manner that already provides substantial flexibility for districts to establish goals, measures, and indicators that reflect their unique student populations and local circumstances.

As a result, it has not been necessary for the district to seek alternative student success measures to account for the characteristics of its student population. The Department's current implementation

model allows districts to incorporate locally relevant outcomes and performance measures while remaining aligned with state requirements. Accordingly, the Department is not aware of any concerns that would require Clark County School District to pursue alternative measures beyond the flexibility already available within the existing framework.

Question #10 from Mr. Laird Records showing the amount distributed to Clark County School District No.161 under section 33-320(17), Idaho Code, for school board and leadership development training in each year such a distribution was available, the amount claimed for reimbursement by the district, and the training for which reimbursement was claimed.

IDE Response

Records maintained by the Idaho Department of Education indicate that Clark County School District No. 161 received reimbursement under the Continuous Improvement Reimbursement program as follows: FY2022: $0.00, FY2023: $2,000.00, FY2024: $2,000.00, FY2025: $590.00, and FY2026: $3,499.90, for a total reimbursement of $8,089.90.

It is important to note that Idaho Code § 33-320(17) does not require a local education agency to request reimbursement for all, or any, available funds. Participation in the reimbursement program is voluntary, and districts may determine whether and to what extent they seek reimbursement based on their local training priorities, participation levels, and eligible expenditures.

Reimbursement requests submitted by Clark County School District No. 161 reflect the district's voluntary use of the program to support school board and leadership development activities. The reimbursement amounts neither indicate a deficiency in training nor establish any obligation to expend available funds but rather demonstrate the district's use of state-supported professional development opportunities as determined appropriate by local leadership.

Question #11 from Mr. Laird The department's records of the average daily attendance and enrollment reported by Clark County School District No. 161 for each year from 2015-2016 through 2025-2026, and the state distribution made to the district under section 33-911, Idaho Code, in each of those years

IDE Response Information on average daily attendance, enrollment, and state distributions is readily available on the IDE's website.

a. Whether Clark County Jr./Sr. High School conforms to the accreditation standards established by the Board under section 33-119, Idaho Code, and if it does not, in which respects.

IDE Response – link to documentation

Clark County Jr./Sr. High School is in full compliance with applicable accreditation standards and maintains continuous accredited status. According to Dr. Michael Garrett, Director, Accreditation and Certification Services for Cognia, the school's accreditation history dates to July 1, 1973, and reflects decades of uninterrupted accreditation, successful external reviews, positive accreditation commission actions, and sustained compliance with Cognia standards. The school successfully advanced from candidate status to full accreditation following its 2013-14 External Review, earned an IEQ score of 292.00 in 2019, and most recently received an extension of its accreditation term through June 30, 2032. Based on the records provided by Cognia, there is no indication that Clark County Jr./Sr. High School is out of compliance with accreditation requirements; rather, the record demonstrates a strong and well-established history of meeting accreditation expectations and maintaining accredited status.

b. Whether the district's improvement plans for the years 2016 through 2026 met the requirements of section 33-320, Idaho Code, as that section read in each of those years, and whether any of them were reviewed by the Board or by the State Department of Education.

IDE Response The Idaho State Board of Education received and reviewed the Clark County School District Continuous Improvement Plans for the years 2019 through 2026. The review process resulted in suggested revisions to the 2019, 2020, and 2022 plans. The 2023, 2024, 2025, and 2026 plans were received and found to be compliant with applicable statutory and state requirements. Based on available records, these plans were reviewed through the state's established Continuous Improvement Plan review process.

c. Whether the goals set in those plans, in particular a mathematics proficiency goal of 30.0 percent held constant for three years, satisfy the requirement that a plan set clear and measurable goals for student outcomes.

IDE Response The Idaho State Department of Education does not require school districts to change their Continuous Improvement Plan goals annually. Districts may retain goals across multiple years when those goals remain relevant to identified needs and ongoing improvement

efforts. The focus is on demonstrating progress toward the goals and using data to inform continuous improvement, rather than on changing goals from year to year.

d. Whether the district has complied with the requirement that the board of trustees monitor progress toward the goals in its plan, and whether that progress has been considered in the superintendent's evaluation as the statute requires.

IDE Response Information regarding whether the Clark County School District Board of Trustees has monitored progress toward the goals contained in its strategic plan is not maintained by the Idaho Department of Education. Monitoring of local board governance activities is not a function performed by the Department, nor is the Department aware of any state agency that routinely collects or reviews such information.

With respect to superintendent evaluations, annual audits conducted for Clark County School District indicate that the district is compliant with applicable superintendent evaluation requirements. The Department has no records suggesting noncompliance in this area. Accordingly, while the Department cannot verify the specific manner in which strategic plan progress may have been considered by the Board of Trustees during superintendent evaluations, the records available to the Department do not indicate any deficiency with respect to the district's superintendent evaluation obligations.

e. Whether the supervision contemplated by section 33-116, Idaho Code, has been exercised with respect to this district at any time in the last ten years, and in what form.

IDE Response During the last ten years, the Idaho Department of Education has not exercised any extraordinary supervisory authority over Clark County School District pursuant to Idaho Code § 33-116. The district has operated under the governance of its locally elected board of trustees and administration, consistent with Idaho law. Any interactions between the Department and the district have been conducted through routine statewide processes, including technical assistance, program support, accountability reporting, and monitoring activities applicable to districts throughout Idaho. The Department is not aware of any instance during this period in which Clark County School District was placed under special supervision, control, or intervention pursuant to Idaho Code § 33-116.

f. Whether this district qualifies to apply for alternative student success measures under section 33-320(4), Idaho Code, given that it reports fifty-nine percent of students from low-income families, thirty percent English learners, seventeen percent with disabilities and five percent homeless, and whether it has ever been advised of that option.

IDE Response This question was answered previously in question #9.

In closing, thank you for your interest in the operations and performance of Clark County School District. The Idaho Department of Education has reviewed the matters raised in your inquiry and, while opportunities for continuous improvement exist in every school system, the information available to the Department does not indicate violations of law, systemic noncompliance, or other circumstances warranting corrective action. Rather, the records reflect a district that has participated in applicable state and federal processes, engaged in improvement efforts when appropriate, and continued to serve students within the framework established by Idaho law. We trust this information is helpful in addressing your questions

Professionally,

Alica Holthaus, Deputy Superintendent, Idaho Department of Education
Dr. Spencer Barzee Deputy Superintendent Idaho Department of Education

The documents behind its links:

School improvement. An email of October 8, 2026 from Patty Dalrymple, School Improvement & Support Coordinator, to Dr. Barzee: "In 2025 a new Cohort of School Improvement was identified. Clark County Jr/Sr High School was re-identified as CSI UP due to not meeting the Idaho's exit criteria. They were not identified in the lowest 5% of schools (the federal definition for CSI schools). They did meet Idaho's exit criteria in the area of ELA, but missed it in Math. From last year to this year their Math Proficiency score has increased 7%, which is strong growth. If 2026 had been a re-identification year, the Jr/Sr High School would have met all exit criteria."

The same email: "They fully engaged in the process bringing their whole team to all convenings that I held." And the school "worked with a Capacity Builder from the IBC project through Idaho State University that is in contract with the Idaho Department of Education as one of our School Improvement services."

Accreditation. A letter from Dr. Michael Garrett, Director, Accreditation and Certification Services, Cognia: "Most recently, a

commission action in June 2026 further extended the accreditation expiration date to June 30, 2032."

Strategic planning. An email of September 18, 2026 from Deputy Superintendent Alica Holthaus to district superintendents, attaching a "Workbook Matrix for Strategic Plan - 1339" and stating that "a secure folder will be assigned to each district with an active Strategic Plan Matrix." And an email of October 8, 2026 from Dr. Barzee announcing strategic planning training: "These trainings are intended for superintendents, charter administrators, and school board members." The training is free, and one session is December 3-4, 2026 at Idaho State University in Pocatello.

The letter says the matrix "has not yet been utilized." It does not say whether the State Board adopted it by September 1, 2026, as section 33-320(6) requires. On October 19 I asked both agencies. The State Board answered on October 20. Its answer is Appendix AS.

Source: letter of the Idaho Department of Education to the author, October 19, 2026, signed by Deputy Superintendents Alica Holthaus and Spencer Barzee, and the documents at its links, all reproduced in the document folder that accompanies this article.

Appendix AS — What the State Board answered about the matrix

On October 20, 2026 the State Board of Education's records office answered my request for the matrix that section 33-320(6) required it to adopt by September 1, 2026. Its email is reproduced here as written; the address, telephone number and records notice under the signature are left out. The words "Here is the link," "Here is the link to the meeting materials" and "clicking here" are links in the original, to the meeting recording, the meeting page and the Department's agenda materials.

Hello Allen!

Pursuant to the Idaho Public Records Act (Idaho Code § 74-103), we are providing this written acknowledgment within three (3) business days of receipt. We have already gathered information responsive to your request as outlined below.

The information you are looking for is in the Idaho Department of Education (IDE) portion of the October board meeting agenda and is item #3 Strategic Performance Plan Matrix. Here is the link to the recording of the meeting, and you can skip to 1 hour and 47 minutes to hear the

discussion around that agenda item. Here is the link to the meeting materials from the October board meeting. You can access IDE's agenda items by clicking here.

The matrix was created by the Department prior to the legislative deadline, but the timing of Board meetings resulted in it not coming to the Board until the October meeting. The Board voted to approve the matrix. We do not yet have meeting minutes to provide a record of that vote. But the meeting recording can be accessed above.

Please reach out if you have any questions, or if you feel a phone call would be easier.

Thank you!

Iseyda

S. Iseyda Lacombe | Communications Manager

Idaho State Board of Education

The State Board's agenda for its October 14–15, 2026 meeting lists, under "Idaho Department of Education" on Thursday, October 15, "3. Strategic Performance Plan Matrix – Action Item." The Department's cover memo for that item says its committee "met six times between May and July 2026," and that "The first round of district Strategic Performance Plans will be due to the Department by October 1, 2027." The motion it proposed: "I move to adopt the Strategic Performance Plan Matrix, as provided in Attachment 1, in alignment with Section 33-320, Idaho Code."

The State Board held a regular meeting on August 12 and 13, 2026, in Pocatello, before the September 1 deadline. Neither the agenda nor the minutes of that meeting mention the matrix.

From the matrix itself, Attachment 1 to that agenda item:

Literacy and math, the measurement tool: "Specify the assessment tool used (e.g., ISAT, local assessment, or other assessment utilized)."

Targets: the district enters its own baseline, and its own targets for 2028-29, 2029-30, 2030-31 and 2031-32.

"An LEA will be considered to have made Strategic Performance Progress when it demonstrates implementation of stated strategies, accomplishment in a majority of goal areas, which includes growth, and progress monitoring."

"This annual self-assessment will serve as the primary evidence used to determine whether the LEA has demonstrated Strategic Performance

Progress (SPP) through a combination of target attainment, growth, implementation, and ongoing progress."

Governance and board stewardship: "At least quarterly, review, discuss, and approve progress reports on two (2) or more key areas of the strategic performance plan at a regular or special board meeting." The form has columns for "Date of Board Meeting," "Which indicator was discussed?" and "Summary of Conversation."

College and career readiness: "Metrics related to the number of students completing the FAFSA, developing postsecondary plans, or submitting applications to postsecondary institutions will not be considered."

LEA means local education agency. Here, that is the school district.

Sources: email of the Idaho State Board of Education records office (S. Iseyda Lacombe) to the author, October 20, 2026; Idaho State Board of Education, agenda and Idaho Department of Education agenda materials (Tab 3 and Attachment 1) for the meeting of October 14–15, 2026, at https://boardofed.idaho.gov/event/board-meeting-lewiston-7/; agenda and minutes of the meeting of August 12–13, 2026, at https://boardofed.idaho.gov/event/board-meeting-pocatello-7/; all in the document folder.

Appendix AT — What accreditation checks

What Cognia, the organization that accredits Clark County Jr/Sr High School, says about its own accreditation, from its own published pages and documents, and from a superintendent's column Cognia republished, read October 21, 2026. Copies are in the document folder that accompanies this article.

From Cognia's accreditation page:

Cognia Accreditation is designed for progress, not pressure.

The same page says that to keep accreditation, a school is to conduct a self-assessment against Cognia's standards and host a review, "to achieve a six-year continuing accreditation term."

From Cognia's Performance Standards for K–12 and Postsecondary Institutions, effective July 1, 2022. The 31 standards are grouped under four "key characteristics": culture of learning, leadership for learning, engagement of learning, and growth in learning. The fourth reads:

> *GROWTH IN LEARNING: the growth of learners in the programs and curricula provided by the institution and their readiness to successfully transition to next levels of learning*

Among the signs of growth the document lists:

> *Learners demonstrate growth in meeting expectations of learning as defined by the institution*

The last standard:

> *STANDARD 31: Learners demonstrate growth in their academic performance based on valid and reliable assessments.*

Nothing in these pages and documents sets a share of students who must be proficient, or ready for college, a trade or a job, for a school to be accredited.

On the review score. Cognia's letter about this school, sent with the Department of Education's answer (Appendix AR), reports: "In June 2019, the school earned an IEQ score of 292.00 and received accreditation through June 30, 2026." IEQ stands for Index of Education Quality. A column by the superintendent of West Fargo Public Schools in North Dakota, first published in the West Fargo Pioneer on February 12, 2020 and republished by Cognia on its own website, describes the scale:

> *The IEQ is comprised of the ratings from the three domains and are reported on a scale of 100 to 400. An IEQ score below 250 indicates that the institution has several areas within the "Initiate" level and should focus their improvement efforts there. An IEQ in the range of 250-300 indicates that the institution has several standards within the "Improve" level and is using results to inform continuous improvement and demonstrate sustainability.*
>
> *This range is good. An IEQ of 300 and above indicates the institution is reaching an "Impact" level and is engaged in practices that are sustained over time and are becoming engrained in the culture of the institution.*

The 2019 review was done under the standards then in force; the current standards took effect July 1, 2022. Cognia's letter says a commission action in June 2026 extended the school's accreditation to June 30, 2032. It gives no score from the 2026 review. The board's minutes record that the review was submitted in March 2026, with interviews in April, and that on July 9, 2026 the superintendent reported "we passed the accreditation and should get the report back to us in the next 4-6 weeks" (Appendix Y).

The letter closes:

> *Overall, the record demonstrates a long history of continuous accreditation, successful external reviews, positive commission decisions, and sustained compliance with Cognia accreditation standards.*

Sources: Cognia, Accreditation, at https://www.cognia.org/accreditation/; Cognia, Performance Standards for K–12 and Postsecondary Institutions, at https://www.cognia.org/k12-postsecondary-standards/ and https://www.cognia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Performance-Standards.pdf; "West Fargo proves to be one of the best districts in nation," originally published in the West Fargo Pioneer, February 12, 2020, at https://www.cognia.org/news/west-fargo-proves-to-be-one-of-the-best-districts-in-nation/; Cognia letter of October 2026 to the Idaho Department of Education, in Appendix AR and the document folder. All read October 21, 2026.

What this document is, and is not

This is an account of what a citizen asked, what the district answered, and what one question left unresolved. It reaches an opinion, and the facts it rests on are all shown so that a reader can weigh them and reach a different one.

It does not allege that anyone broke a law, misused money, or acted dishonestly. Nothing found suggests any of that. Where the district gave a good answer, this article says so — twice, at length, before raising the question it could not answer.

What it argues starts with the levy: that a public body asking for half a million dollars should be able to show how it reached the figure, and that for the three levies the district was asked about, no such showing was produced when one was asked for. It goes on to the money already in the bank, and to how the board holds itself to its own goals.

> **If any fact here is wrong, it will be corrected. Send the record that shows the error and a corrected version will be issued.**

How this was made

I wrote this with the ordinary tools anyone uses for a document this size: word processors, spelling and grammar checkers, a thesaurus, spreadsheet

software for the arithmetic, and AI assistance for research, drafting and checking my work against the source documents.

None of that changes what is in here. Every figure comes from a district, state or county record, from my own recording of the August 13, 2026 board meeting (Appendix V), or from a published source named where it is used. Each of those records is reproduced or supplied so you can check it yourself, the recording is available on request, and the outside sources are named where they are used, most with the address where you can read them. The tools helped me find things and put them in order. They did not decide what this says.

I read it. I approved it. The judgments in it are mine, and so are any errors. If you find one, write to me with the record that shows it and I will correct it.

Who prepared this

Prepared by Allen Laird, a resident and registered elector of Clark County, Idaho. Corrections and responses may be sent to allen_laird@outlook.com.

The questions described here were sent to the District on August 14 and August 17, 2026, with a formal records request. The District responded on August 19, 2026. Its written answer is quoted at length above and reproduced in the document folder.

Drafts of this article were sent to the District on August 20 and August 22, to the clerk of the board with copies to the four trustees then seated and to the superintendent. Each came with an offer to correct any fact shown to be wrong and to publish any written response in full. No reply was received. The offer does not expire. The drafts were earlier versions, and parts of this article, the forest fund analysis among them, were written after them. Appendix AP sets out what was asked, and when.