



Idaho law puts education funding in the hands of investors

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BOISE, Idaho (KIVI)—For almost ten years, Lee Peksy Learning Center has been running a program called, “Every Child Ready To Learn,” to help prep children for kindergarten.

For Executive Director Dr. Evelyn Johnson, prepping pre-schoolers is vital in a state where an estimated 54% of Idaho children enter kindergarten without basic skills.

“Yeah, it's frustrating because our staff knows we have a lot to do. We know the kinds of things that should be taking place in those early learning environments whether that is a home or pre-school. Regardless of setting the activities themselves are what are important,” Johnson explained.

Dr. Johnson says that if she could replicate her program throughout the state of Idaho, then the statistics could drastically change and improve skill sets for children.

Trying to fund an early learning teacher-training program has been impossible until now.

House Bill 170 or the “Pay For Success” program sailed through the Idaho Legislature and was signed by Governor “Otter” this session.

"This is a really innovative way to prevent the problem before it happens and taking some of the risk out of the equation for the government, because you have private investment that's used to scale that social program," Angeli Weller from Boise State's College of Business and Economics explained.

A big question from educators after the bill was signed was; how will House Bill 170 work?

Think about it with building blocks:

The first block is the State Department of Education. The second block is with Superintendent Sherri Ybarra that will identify a weakness in the system such as kindergarten reading readiness. The government will partner with a service provider such as Lee Pesky Learning Center that has proven results. The third block is what's called "impact investors."

"The folks that say 'I don't' want to take my philanthropic values and separate them'," Weller said. "I actually want to bring them together. My aspiration for social change and my aspiration for return on investment can be married together and these opportunities do exist."

The investors will be the ones to front the cash, which ultimately results in the state government being free of risks in case of failure.