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CWI may expand programs under 'K-through-Career' proposal

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BOISE -- In his annual budget address, Governor Butch Otter outlined his proposals to invest in what's being called "K-through-Career" education and workforce development. One area of focus is proposed funding specifically for community colleges.

Some of the ideas include increased funding to professional technical programs, including for advanced manufacturing and other programs at schools like College of Western Idaho (CWI). Those programs include areas like machining, welding, design and electronics.

CWI's Dean of Professional Technical Education Will Fanning says a financial investment from the state would mean putting money into programs that are in high demand by students and companies.

"That advanced manufacturing concept of producing components in a highly technical way, using highly technical machinery, is critical for us to be able to provide enough trained employees for business and industry to have people to hire," Fanning said.

Specifically, Fanning says he'd like to add staff to teach the classes that are more highly demanded than they can keep up with.

"Our vital need is employees. We need teachers to teach the classes. So my hope is that the funding will be able to be used for personnel. So I can hire instructors to teach more classes," Fanning said.

The governor's recommendation is also to add funding for the college's nursing program, which CWI says is another area where more people want into the program and more people will be needed to fill jobs.

"Nursing, as with everywhere in Idaho is an in demand profession, so we do need a skilled workforce within the nursing programs. And CWI has a great program both within the RN and surgical technician and then some of our assistant programs that will benefit from that increased funding there," said Jennifer Couch, CWI's Director of Communications and Marketing.

In addition to expanding existing programs, CWI hopes it could add an entirely new program in advanced manufacturing. Those programs directly train for highly-technical and computerized manufacturing jobs. An example is working for a computer company, like Micron.

Other schools specifically listed for investment in an Advanced Manufacturing Initiative are College of Southern Idaho (CSI), North Idaho College (NIC), Idaho State University, Eastern Idaho Technical College and Lewis-Clark State College. Funding for outreach programs is proposed in Idaho Falls for CSI and in Sandpoint for NIC.