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Idaho Statesman

How Idaho schools repeatedly break federal disability laws



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Kali Larsen, who has dyslexia and struggles with reading and writing, uses clay with her private tutor to practice spelling.

BY BECCA SAVRANSKY
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This article was produced for ProPublica's Local Reporting Network in partnership with the Idaho Statesman. Sign up for Dispatches to get stories like this one as soon as they are published.

Kali Larsen sat at her desk at Fruitland Elementary School in Idaho earlier this year, trying to read the test questions as her classmates silently worked around her. Her anxiety climbed as she stared at the paper. She asked to use the bathroom and left the room.

Her mother, Jessica Larsen, had been substitute teaching that day when she received a call from the front office, notifying her that her 9-year-old daughter was having a panic attack. Kali, now 10, has dyslexia and struggles with reading and writing, Larsen said.

"Wouldn't you be anxious?" Larsen told the Idaho Statesman and ProPublica.

For years, Larsen had been pleading with the Fruitland School District to get Kali qualified for special education for reading. Larsen, who herself was diagnosed later in life with dyslexia, had her daughter tested in first grade in 2021 by a private specialist who said Kali had the



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Fruitland Elementary School in Idaho

same disability. But a diagnosis doesn't automatically qualify a student for special education. The school still wouldn't evaluate Kali for help, saying she likely wouldn't qualify, in part because her scores weren't low enough, Larsen said.

Larsen grew more frustrated with each passing school year as her child — a shy girl who feels most confident when com-

peting in rodeos on her horse, Pie — would cry after school and tell her she felt "dumb." A year before her daughter's panic attack in fourth grade, Larsen had filed a state complaint against the district, saying it refused to evaluate Kali for special education. A few months

SEE SCHOOLS, 3A

'We did our job': Prosecutor discusses Kohberger murder case

BY KEVIN FIXLER
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Just days after sentencing in the most closely watched and scrutinized case of Bill Thompson's decades-long legal career, he acknowledged that prosecuting Bryan Kohberger, who pleaded guilty to murdering four University of Idaho students, might not have been possible if the killer had not left his DNA at the crime scene.

Without that "critical" piece of evidence, Thompson told the Idaho Statesman in a phone interview, the state could have struggled to bring charges, let alone make an arrest of its only suspect.

"From our perspective as prosecutors, the DNA was critical to the strength of the case for trial purposes," Thompson said.

After sentencing, lead investigator Moscow Police Cpl. Brett Payne expressed confidence that law enforcement would have ultimately arrived at Kohberger, who drove his white Hyundai Elantra to commit the stabbings with a large, fixed-blade knife.

James Fry, former Moscow police chief, told the Statesman the same, though admitted that the timeline likely would have extended by as much as several months before an arrest.

"There are a lot of white Hyundai Elantras out there," Thompson said. "But if they stuck with it, eventually they would have found Mr. Kohberger's car and made that preliminary connection."

It wasn't until investigators confirmed the paternal DNA match from trash retrieved at Kohberger's parents' home that the longtime Latah County prosecutor said he and his team felt they had the evidence needed to seek an arrest warrant. And trying to prove Kohberger's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt without the link through his DNA found on a leather knife sheath — in addition to no known motive and no murder weapon — could have been insurmountable at trial.

"Yeah, I think that that's fair to say," said Thompson, in his 33rd year as the North Idaho county's elected prosecutor. "We didn't have to make that decision."

Kohberger, 30, was sentenced

SEE KOHBERGER CASE, 2A

New Warm Springs Grill and Golf is about 'community'

BY SHANNON TYLER
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After over two decades of talks and a year of construction, the brand-new Warm Springs Grill + Golf facility is now open in East Boise, beckoning more than just people craving birdies

and crisp drives.

The city invested in the new clubhouse with the design of it becoming a sort of community center in an area of town that lacks a lot of options, Parks and Recreation Director Doug Holloway said. The building holds a restaurant, bar, grab-and-go snack bar and golf shop, and

features indoor and outdoor seating.

"It's a place for the golfers, but it's a place for the community. It's a place for the neighborhood, it's a place for people who use the Greenbelt and use the Mesa Reserve across the street. It's for the community as a whole," Holloway said at an

event Wednesday afternoon.

City leaders, including Mayor Lauren McLean and City Council President Pro Tem Meredith Stead, along with Holloway and others who worked to see the building come to life, gathered in front of the facility to mark its opening to the public.

And that word, "public" is the key to what the city had in mind with this major project. The restaurant will be open from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day, and officials hope East End residents find it welcoming as a place to eat, drink and relax — even if they don't plan on taking aim

with 8-irons that day.

The menu will include breakfast dishes such as omelettes, a bacon and egg sandwich, and eggs Benedict. For lunch and dinner, there are staples such as burgers, chicken strips and salads, as well as a Boise favorite: finger steaks.

With plenty of nice summer and fall days ahead, visitors can hang out on the expansive patio — over 5,000 square feet — in lounge chairs or at tables, or just relax in the bar area at indoor seating, Holloway said.

SEE COMMUNITY, 4A



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64°/93° See 14B
(Saturday night low and Sunday high)

