



Idaho State Senate
Idaho House of Representatives
Democratic Leadership

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**House and Senate Dems Reject Luna Plan:
Job Killing Plan More About Politics Than Promoting Student Performance**

BOISE— Superintendent Luna is to be applauded for attempting to present a new vision for our school system, including a diverse range of ideas for the Legislature’s consideration. And though there may be some worthy ideas rolled into the two hefty bills, Mr. Luna’s omnibus approach leaves us no choice but to assess the legislation as an all-or-nothing proposition. As such, we can only conclude that this job-killing plan is about trying to weather a fiscal crisis and avoid politically difficult decisions rather than truly boosting student achievement and enhancing student readiness for college and the global economy.

Our objections are many, from the numerous logistical questions prompted by the proposal to give all 9th graders laptops to concerns about institutions of higher ed refusing to accept online course credits. Nevertheless, we shall focus our critique of the plan on four key concerns:

- 1) **Class size matters:** Regarding the Superintendent’s suggestion that there is no credible evidence pointing to the impact of class size on educational outcomes, we sharply disagree. Class size matters a great deal, as is obvious to anyone who spends time in our schools and according to a substantial body of research. No one believes the deceptive average class size figures the Superintendent likes to cite because the reality on the ground is usually quite different. Classes are crowded now in districts all over the state. In what alternative universe is reducing the amount of one-on-one time a teacher can spend with a student perceived as putting students first?
- 2) **Teachers matter:** The Luna plan rests on a puzzling contradiction. The assertion that effective classroom teachers are the most important factor in student achievement cannot be reconciled with a proposal to reduce more than 1000 classroom teachers. If teachers matter more than any other factor, and we know they do, then reducing our teaching force flies in the face of such reasoning. There isn’t a parent, student, or administrator in the state who would argue that one of our biggest problems is too many teachers. Furthermore, today’s knowledge economy requires far more than rote memory and the transmission of information (where technology is most useful). Only teachers can help to instill some of the most prized qualities in today’s workforce: collaboration, effective written and oral communication, empathy, problem-solving, analysis, defending (or selling) an idea/thesis, and the synthesis and application of knowledge.

- 3) **Evidence matters:** There is no conclusive evidence that the most radical changes proposed in the plan actually work or have produced favorable results anywhere else. The results from other states who have adopted additional classroom technology aren't really relevant as their approach to technology was to introduce it as a way to supplement, not replace, classroom teaching. "Pay for performance," while a trendy concept, has not been proven to drive better educational outcomes. Idaho's Legislature takes a very cautious approach to making law, often insisting on evidence from elsewhere or a limited pilot project as proof of concept. Jumping off the cliff chasing unproven ideas is not only inadvisable—it contradicts our very nature as Idahoans.

- 4) **Education is a team sport:** Despite what the Superintendent may have said in earlier hearings, key stakeholders in the education community, including the State Board of Education, local school boards, superintendents and administrators, teachers, and parents were all left out of the process of crafting this plan. This isn't a matter of opinion—the stakeholders mentioned all say that they were not consulted during the plan's drafting. In the private sector, such a heavy-handed, top-down imposition of a radical restructuring without some degree of buy-in from those required to implement such a plan would be unfathomable and a recipe for failure.

All told, the Luna plan warrants a high degree of skepticism. To withstand scrutiny, the plan should answer a basic question: Do the proposals stand on their own and would we even consider them if the state weren't facing the prospect of a second year of unprecedented cuts to schools?

We believe the answer is "no" and we cannot get behind such radical changes when we see no compelling evidence that the changes would truly benefit our students. Parents throughout Idaho are counting on us to provide the best possible education and opportunities to their children. We cannot and should not surrender to economic adversity and compromise what we know to be important elements of educational success in the name of untested notions of "reform."

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