

March 21, 2011

To: Senate Education Members
From: Dr. Linda Clark, Superintendent
Joint School District No. 2

It is my understanding that public testimony will not be allowed on SB 1184. Since the outcome of proposed legislation is far reaching and will significantly impact funding for public schools in Idaho, I feel that it is important for me to share the perspective of Joint School District No. 2 on this measure.

There was a great deal of public testimony on the original bill, and most of that testimony is still pertinent to the revision. While this bill changes the manner in which issues are “dressed”, it does not substantively address the issues that were raised in previous testimony.

Please note that we (still) strongly support many of the concepts in this legislation.

Our district has made a concerted effort to expand technology use in our schools and we currently have a 21st Century initiative that is bringing many new tools and resources into the hands of teachers and students. We have been leaders and innovators in the use of technology. Our goal is to put the best technology and resources available into the hands of students and highly skilled teachers – to enhance teaching and learning.

We are also on record in support of a differentiated pay system for teachers – one that is based on growth, provides adequate incentives, is distributed to groups of teachers, and has a sound, appropriate funding base.

While we have been consistent in our support of these things, we stand strongly in opposition to the manner in which SB 1184 will fund them. Significantly reducing salary based apportionment for multiple years (and placing this in statute) is an inappropriate method of funding even the most worthwhile projects. Further, suggesting that school districts will have “choices” for how to pass along the reductions misses the reality that every school district in Idaho will be faced with “bargaining” with their staff for reductions in salary over the next six years. Is it truly “local control” to have to decide between fewer contract days, fewer teachers, and/or lower salaries? The situation that will be created is somewhat akin to the notion of telling someone that they are about to lose an appendage and then giving them the “choice” of whether it will be an arm or a leg

Parents, trustees, superintendents, school personnel and the public have consistently been led to believe that the most serious issues surrounding school funding are the sagging economy and the lack of funds to replace the one-time money that has helped to prop up the system over the past few years. We fully recognize these issues, and we stand ready to implement the budget cuts that are necessary to balance our budgets – as we have done for the past two years. It is our hope that the 2011 Legislature will provide all of the funding that is possible to public schools, and then let the local boards of trustees make the difficult

decisions required to balance the budget.

In addition, it is perplexing that proponents of this legislation are actually suggesting further, significant cuts in funding that is already insufficient to meet the real needs of public education – and then using these funds to fund new initiatives. This is not the time to fund these projects, no matter how worthwhile they may be. The legislature has given school districts the tools to manage the budget crisis. Please allow them to do so – without imposing further cuts, shifts, and/or mandates.

Legislators have spoken a great deal about “local control” and, in fact, that was the prevailing topic during passage of the contract bill. Yet, this legislation would institute technology funding with decision-making at the State level even down to the “devices” to be purchased.

Further, it removes the local decision making for course offerings, and instructional methodology and replaces it with requirements for online learning for all students, an approach that Joint School District No. 2 still strongly opposes.

Section 15 (6) states the state board of education shall promulgate rules to

implement the provisions of this section, including a requirement for online courses needed for graduation beginning with the graduating class of 2016. . . As stated,

this is a requirement for the state board to take the action that has been opposed by educators, parents, and students. There is, as we have stated previously, no research to support mandated online classes. Further, I am already hearing strong concerns from parents and patrons that this provision in the bill moves the decision to an appointed body and significantly reduces the legislative process required for adoption of the proposed rules. Couching the requirement for online classes for all students in new terms and moving it to the state board will not address the many concerns that have been expressed to legislators. Simply stated, families want the choice of instructional delivery models and they do not support requiring online courses for all students.

In conclusion, I respectfully request that the Senate Education Committee not pass SB 1184. Rather, establish a Task Force (with expanded responsibilities) to study the issues surrounding online education and technology, and require them to report their findings, including recommendations for funding technology and differentiated pay, to the 2012 Legislature. Engage the stakeholders, look at the research, vet many ideas, and seek creative solutions. We need 21st Century classrooms, but we need every classroom to have a highly skilled teacher who has the best technology and most up-to-date resources to enhance instruction that will result in increased achievement for all students. SB 1184 is not the vehicle to accomplish what needs to be done. Rather, it will handicap every district and charter school in their attempts to accomplish these ends.

Thank you.