

FOR RELEASE AFTER 12:30 p.m., Dec. 13, 2012

Statement from Mike Lanza and Maria Greeley, co-founders of Idaho Parents and Teachers Together; Chair and Treasurer, respectively, of Vote No on Props 1, 2, 3.

Since the Nov. 6 election, when Idaho voters repealed the three Luna laws with majorities of 57, 58, and 67 percent, we have been contacted by and talking with many educators, business leaders, and other Idahoans. Many people see this voter mandate as a unique opportunity to begin a real and honest effort to improve Idaho's public schools. Voters did not say no to having great schools; they said they want this process done right, by engaging all education stakeholders and the public in a conversation about what challenges our schools face and how to address them.

We are impressed and encouraged by the commitment of many people and the caliber of ideas that have already surfaced. Idaho has a wealth of excellent teachers and administrators, examples of successful schools and programs, and smart business and other leaders who can help. Our state has the intellectual firepower to create a public-school system that's a national model for success—if we do it right.

But as encouraging as many recent developments are, we have concerns about what we are hearing from some political leaders. As parents who voluntarily led the effort to vanquish the Luna laws, we want to share some consensus ideas we have seen develop already among the many people we have met with over the past several weeks.

- Some political leaders are talking about “bringing back” elements of the Luna laws. Idaho conducted the ultimate poll on Nov. 6, and it was not “a bump in the road,” as Tom Luna called it. Any attempt to resurrect these policies would demonstrate an extreme disregard for the will of voters, and we will not stand by quietly and accept it.
- School policy cannot be a top-down mandate dictated by politicians; we tried that and voters decided it was a resounding failure. Many education, business, and community leaders agree that the best way to improve our schools is to launch a statewide effort involving all education stakeholder groups and citizens. We cannot find solutions without first identifying problems. This takes time and hard work, but improving schools doesn't happen easily or overnight.
- While parents and business and community leaders must have a voice in school policy, solutions should come from professional educators, who best understand what happens in the classroom.
- We are told that Gov. Otter is considering appointing a task force on public schools that would include the major stakeholder groups, as well as an adequate number of professional educators and the two of us as the leaders of the campaign to repeal the Luna laws and a voice for parents. This would necessarily involve holding public meetings across Idaho, where all citizens would have the opportunity to share concerns and ideas. We and the education, business, and community leaders we've spoken with wholeheartedly endorse that idea and believe it's entirely feasible that this group could issue recommendations by the end of 2013, in time for the 2014 Legislature.

- Gov. Otter could demonstrate his support for making this a ground-up effort by asking teachers and administrators to help him select the most highly accomplished teachers and administrators for this panel. We hope he realizes that the public would be distrustful of appointees who were merely political sycophants closely tied to the Luna laws, which the governor had strongly supported.
- Educators and others recognize the urgent need for the Legislature to make Idaho's school districts financially whole for the current school year by sending them the money already promised to them—without strings attached. We hear murmurs that some legislators cynically want to “teach a lesson” to voters who rejected the Luna laws by not giving schools the money promised to them. The rejection of the Luna laws did not create a budget crisis for our schools, but the Legislature would if it withholds the money they need to pay employees and bills. Voters will hold accountable those legislators who willfully damage our schools out of a desire to execute some political vendetta.
- But legislators must also refrain from taking any radical steps regarding public schools in the upcoming session. They must respect the need to involve the public in public-school policy. They should go home and listen to their constituents' concerns and ideas for their schools.
- Voters and educators believe in local control of schools. Idaho's districts face very different realities. Whatever recommendations emerge from a task force must respect the desire for local control. Not all solutions for our schools must come from the Legislature.

The other clear mandate of this election was a wholesale rejection of Tom Luna's policies and methods. If Superintendent Luna chooses to participate in this process of bringing education stakeholders and citizens together to chart the future of public schools, he will be under close scrutiny by many people, including us. We will not tolerate him trying to politicize or manipulate this process to rehabilitate his reputation. This must be about what's best for our schools, not Tom Luna's agenda.

We are optimistic about the opportunity before us. We also see how politics and animosities could upend this effort. The two of us are committed to helping make this successful. We want to ensure that policy for public schools is driven not by political agendas or ideology, but by what's going to improve student achievement and success.