

## **OPEN LETTER TO IDAHO LEGISLATORS**

Dear Colleagues,

Since we adjourned last spring much has been said about the Idaho Core Standards. As chairs of the Senate and House Education Committees, we are strong advocates for staying the course and continuing to fully implement the Idaho Core Standards for the following reasons. The Idaho Core Standards are critical in making sure every child is prepared for success after high school.

First and foremost, the Idaho Core Standards raise the bar on what our students learn in math and English. These Standards are higher than Idaho's previous standards. If a student masters these standards, we know they will be prepared for college, community college, professional-technical education, the workforce – or whatever career path they choose to pursue.

Idaho's previous standards were not preparing our students for life after high school. We have proof: While more than 80% of students were performing at grade level in core subject areas in K-12 education, nearly half of those same students would be required to take remedial courses just three months later once they got to college or into the workforce.

As a result, it is not surprising that only one out of four of those students ultimately ends up graduating with a certificate or degree. They become frustrated with being forced to take remedial courses and often drop out.

This is unacceptable. As a state, we have to break this cycle and give every child the opportunity to pursue a meaningful job and career. It has to start in our K-12 public schools.

The Idaho Core Standards will help address this challenge. These Standards move our education system away from rote learning and memorization to a system where students learn concepts as well as how they can apply those concepts in the real world.

They will master skills like the ability to analyze information, draw conclusions, think critically, and express their thoughts in writing as well as orally. These are all skills that employers need from employees in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workplace – no matter the employer or the job.

Some people have voiced concerns with the implementation of the Standards. Let's address those.

A few have said this state-led effort will lead to a national curriculum. But Idaho law prevents this: Idaho Code 33-512 specifically outlines that curriculum adoption is up to the locally elected school board. This is how it was in the past under state academic standards, and this is how it remains today. While the state adopts standards – or goals for what each child should know and be able to do – the local school board determines how teachers will help students meet these standards, through a locally adopted curriculum or textbooks. If anyone wants to change it, they have to go through the Legislature first.

In fact, under these new Standards, teachers and school administrators say the new Idaho Core Standards give them more local control over how to teach and what students will learn, not less. Lori Bargman, a 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade teacher in Mountain Home, said, “Looking at the new Core Standards has helped me to focus my teaching on specific skills and to better assess my students’ progress.”

Some have claimed that the state should slow down because the Standards were “rushed through.” Yet, Idaho is three years into a six-year process of development and implementation. In 2009, Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna and other state school chiefs came together and created a state-led effort to develop these Standards. The state voluntarily chose to adopt them in 2011 after nearly a year of public comment and feedback. Idaho’s schools have been preparing to implement the standards for the past two years, and it will be another two years before the state administers the first test measuring students against these new, higher standards. Clearly, our adoption and implementation of the standards has been a phased-in, transparent approach.

Several parents have voiced concerns about the collection of data. While these concerns are not related to the Standards in any way, we share these concerns. Today, the state is not sharing any personally identifiable data with the federal government. However, we want to make sure this does not occur in the future. That’s why Senator Goedde is working on a bill that would prohibit the State Department of Education from sharing individual student data in the future. Superintendent Luna is fully supportive of this legislation.

In the end, the Idaho Core Standards will give parents the peace of mind they have been seeking for years: the comfort that when their child walks across that stage and earns that high school diploma, it means they are truly ready to go on.

For these reasons, the Idaho Core Standards have earned widespread support, not just from us, but from every education, child advocacy and business group in the state. Member organizations as diverse as the Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry and the Idaho Education Association have stepped forward to voice their support. The Governor’s Task Force for Improving Education also offered its strong endorsement for the full implementation of the Standards.

As the chairs of the House and Senate Education Committees, we urge you to stay the course. We have raised our academic standards in Idaho and increased expectations for every student to make sure they graduate from high school prepared to be successful. Now is not the time to go backwards.

*Senator John Goedde, R-Coeur d’Alene, is chair of the Senate Education Committee and Representative Reed DeMordaunt, R-Eagle, is chair of the House Education Committee.*