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Opinion: Students Will Continue to Persevere
by Superintendent Sherri Ybarra

Over the past number of years, there has been a misconception about what accountability looks like, in our school system. Real accountability is mutual. It is taking mutual responsibility for our students. Mutual responsibility is not one-sided, it is not finger-pointing and blaming others, nor a “top-down” compliance focus. Mutual accountability includes multiple measures over multiple times, and does not look like one test score, as most parents will tell you, “There is more to my child than one-test score.” It is not telling our students they are “not allowed” to fail. We have been so centered on “not failing” that we haven’t been aiming for success! According to a recent magazine article, “Studying others’ misfortunes is one of the most valuable tools we have; one must navigate through failures and misfortunes, on their path to success.”

I used to have a poster in my classroom, “This is a mistake-making place.” That was meant to reinforce to my students that success, is sometimes, not immediate. And, mistakes don’t mean “this is the end of your path.” You just need a strategy to pull through, when misfortunes happen (because they happen to us all). Some of those strategies include: have back-up plan, know your point of no return, and identify possible roadblocks that could stop you, while on your path. Finally, and most importantly, have grit, or determination.

Educators have good strategies in place every day, for success. For example, from the time that a student steps into their classroom, they not only have a lesson plan written, and teaching strategies in place, but they also support students in many different ways that we don’t see; for example, they show up for class, even when students are hungry, when students are going through personal struggles, and they show up for class when our students are victims of unspeakable things, or victims of terminal illnesses. They are not afraid to have or witness a misfortune. They are not afraid to face roadblocks; they just have strategies for success, and navigate through the path. They also display determination, because they show our kids how to “stick it out,” every day.

Mastery-based education, as one of the Governor’s task force recommendations, is coming to education, in Idaho. It is the flexibility we have all been waiting for--this is personalization in education for our kids. But, this is probably going to be messy and chaotic, and there will be failures and misfortunes that we will need to learn from, in order for our educational system to get better. We need to allow our schools to have this flexibility and mutually responsible accountability culture, in order to change the land-scape of education in Idaho.

We have faced many challenges in education over the last decade, including financial obstacles, higher expectations in our standards, and stricter accountability measures. But we showed grit and determination. This is our moment in time, the one we have all been waiting for. This is personalization in education; but, this will be tangled and muddled, and there will be failures that we will need to learn from. Finally, our state is bringing back the local-control and bottom-up



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approach that we Idahoans enjoy, in our educational system. And, as your state Superintendent I want to renew our partnership and build excitement for our educational system and our students, and I will continue to drive our agenda forward, with a message that failure is just a stepping stone on our path to success!

You are going to experience misfortunes and you are going to fall, but that's not the point: It's how quickly you get back up, that really matters!

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