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## IBCEE Advocates for Sufficient Funding to Keep Schools Strong

In a tough economy and difficult legislative session, IBCEE has actively advocated on behalf of education, specifically supporting adequate funding to sustain wise long-term investment in Idaho education. Several IBCEE members communicated directly with legislators via e-mail, phone calls, and personal contact. In addition, the letter below from IBCEE Chair Skip Oppenheimer was sent to all legislators, as well as IBCEE members and resource partners, on March 9.

*Dear Legislator:*

*The Idaho Business Coalition for Education Excellence (IBCEE) is writing in support of adequate funding to sustain wise long-term investment in Idaho education.*

*IBCEE is a not-for-profit business coalition consisting of about 75 Idaho CEOs, presidents and managing partners. We have facilitated and advocated on behalf of improving Idaho education since 2004. We have long recognized the need for a long-range strategy, developed and supported by all education stakeholders, for improving Idaho education.*

*We recognize that these are among the most difficult of economic times. We understand you are facing very tough decisions and that some education funding cuts may be unavoidable. We support the efforts of all stakeholders - administrators, teachers, school boards, and the legislature - to ensure that Idaho's education dollars are being allocated effectively.*

*In our view, however, draconian budget cuts would ultimately cost far more than the budget dollars they might save today. Indeed, the education potential of Idaho's students may be significantly diminished if near term budget pressures result in inadequate investment.*

*Inadequate funding is likely to place Idaho at an even further competitive disadvantage than we are already subject to, compared to other states, when recruiting desirable companies and industries to locate here. Idaho will simply not be competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century without an adequately funded and continually improving education system.*

*Even in these difficult economic times, we must keep in clear view the long-term vision of an effective, efficient and continually improving Idaho education system. The goal must be to advance educational quality to provide students with a highly competitive education, while creatively seeking to gain greater value for each education investment dollar.*

### Organization Contacts

|                            |                   |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Chairman                   | Skip Oppenheimer  |
| Senior Policy Advisor      | Guy Hurlbutt      |
| President                  | Vince Hannity     |
| Executive Director         | Christine Donnell |
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For additional information on IBCEE news,  
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## IBCEE Steps Up Support for Broadband throughout Idaho

IBCEE recently increased its advocacy efforts on behalf of the establishment of broadband technology throughout the state's schools and libraries.

**Idaho Education Network.** With the IEN facing questioning by the state legislature, IBCEE members have e-mailed, phoned and personally met with legislators to voice our support for the project.

Our message was this:

*The establishment of broadband technology in all Idaho schools is critically important to the future education of our students. We hope the legislature can work its way through issues that have been raised about IEN and approve the spending necessary to keep the project alive and on track.*

**Broadband Technology Opportunities Program.**

IBCEE recently wrote in support of the Idaho State Library's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program, which seeks to enhance the public's access to computers in public libraries. We wrote in part:

*One of the key focus areas of IBCEE has been to support and advocate for broadband connectivity*

*throughout Idaho. With the establishment of the Idaho Education Network, our state government has succeeded in connecting over 50 high schools in its first phase and is continuing its efforts to connect all high schools and middle schools. It also plans to eventually connect county and city libraries, but reaching that goal is many years away.*

*In a world driven by technology-accessed information, it is critically important that all citizens have equal access to the technology. In order for the many companies represented by the IBCEE's membership to attract and retain a quality workforce, public access to this technology is vital. It provides resources in career guidance, job searches, resume writing, and computer skills. Having internet capabilities in our public libraries, as well as having the necessary number of computers to meet the demand, is critical.*

*We support the Idaho State Library in its endeavor to provide readily accessible computer centers in community libraries. Thank you for giving us this opportunity to voice our support for this broadband technology program.*

## Dr. Michael Rush: Higher Education at the Crossroads

At an IBCEE board of directors meeting on March 18, Dr. Michael Rush, executive director for the State Board of Education, made a presentation entitled "Higher Education at the Crossroads."

Dr. Rush noted the United States' loss of status as the world leader in the educational attainment of its citizenry. "Currently, the U.S. ranks 23rd in high school completion rates and 10th in postsecondary completion rates among the industrialized world," he said.

## Dr. Michael Rush: Higher Education at the Crossroads – Cont. ...

Dr. Rush quoted President Barack Obama, who, among other national leaders, has suggested that America work to regain its position in the world. “By 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world,” President Obama said.

In order to accomplish that, the U.S. will have to increase its postsecondary degree production by more than 150,000 degrees per year, or 52%. Idaho's share of that would be 7000 additional postsecondary degrees per year.

The challenge to significantly increasing postsecondary education completion rates includes:

- Overcoming the barriers created by poverty;
- Providing much better college preparation information and counseling in middle schools;
- Improving rigor in high school curricula; and
- Aligning exit requirements in high school with entrance requirements in college.

Dr. Rush believes that improving postsecondary

education makes good economic sense and that a strong higher education system is a key to digging ourselves out of our current economic crisis. Higher education affects the economy in at least four ways:

- Higher education contributes to the economic environment by bringing money into Idaho.
- Higher education generates income. Idaho's colleges and universities rank ninth in the top 25 industries in the state.
- Higher education is key to creating a positive business climate. It provides a strong workforce preparation system, a good education for families, an enhanced social and economic climate, and the availability of business expertise and research partnerships.
- Postsecondary education enhances personal income. Compared with those who have only a high school education, those with associate degrees will have median incomes 28% higher over their lifetimes and those with baccalaureate degrees will have income 61% higher.

## Education Alliance of Idaho Gears Up for the Long Term

The EAI Steering Committee, chaired by Bob Lokken, has met to review Standard Operating Procedures drafted by Chairman Guy Hurlbutt. Edits were requested and a final draft will be sent to the full Alliance membership in the next few weeks.

An EAI website ([www.eaidaho.org](http://www.eaidaho.org)) has been under development and, pending final approval of the membership, will soon be ready to launch.

## Education Alliance of Idaho Gears Up for the Long Term – Cont. ...

Work on a media kit continues. Participation in selected organization conferences and state government regional meetings during the coming year will give Alliance members an opportunity to showcase EAI's work. It will be important for the Alliance to substantially increase its visibility in order to continue advocacy efforts for the goals outlined in the Transformational Education Agenda for the State of Idaho that was presented to Governor Butch Otter last fall.

*The Education Alliance of Idaho is a coalition of key Idaho education stakeholders. Its core purpose is to advocate and advise on behalf of*

*Idaho education. Governor Otter has given it the task of developing a long-range strategic plan for improving Idaho education. In addition to IBCEE, which serves as Alliance member and facilitator, the Coalition consists of the Idaho Education Association, Idaho Association of School Administrators, Idaho School Boards Association, Idaho Parent Teacher Association, Idaho Digital Learning Academy, State Board of Education, State Department of Education, State Division of Professional-Technical Education, and the J. A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation.*