



 Idaho Business Coalition
for Education Excellence

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**IBCEE Testimony
Senate Education Committee
February 7, 2011**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Vince Hannity. I am president of the Idaho Business Coalition for Education Excellence. I am joined today by Christine Donnell, IBCEE's executive director. Christine will speak in a few minutes.

Our organization consists of more than 80 Idaho CEOs, presidents and managing partners. It was officially organized in 2003 and incorporated as a 501c3 nonprofit in 2005. Our purpose is twofold: To facilitate the work of key stakeholders to achieve education improvement, and to advocate on behalf of key education improvement efforts.

IBCEE embraces a philosophy of working closely with education professionals to support, in a constructive manner, selected education initiatives.

We believe the critically important task of education is to develop students into effective citizens, and into competent participants in the international economic environment.

How have we been doing? In our judgment, not nearly well enough. We believe the Idaho education system is falling behind other states in our nation in important metrics.

The nation itself is rapidly losing its historic edge in educational attainment. As recently as 1995, America still tied for first in college and university graduation rates, but by 2006 we had dropped to 14th. That same year the U.S. had the second-highest college dropout rate of 27 countries.

And in Idaho today, only one in four high school graduates is deemed college ready. Many require remediation after high school. Idaho is in the bottom 10 states for college-going rates and last in the nation for post-secondary retention rates.

In the future, most new jobs will require highly skilled workers. If Idaho's education system does not rise to meet this challenge, a growing number of those highly skilled workers will not come from Idaho.

That is why, for several years now, IBCEE has encouraged all stakeholders to look at meaningful reform of Idaho's education system. And today, in this climate of increased demands on Idaho's budget, the only way to improve and strengthen our education system is to innovate and eliminate inefficiencies.

We believe the package of education reform proposals outlined by Governor Otter and State Superintendent Luna in the Students Come First plan is a bold and innovative step toward

such reform...Although we know that specifics of the plan will change and that good ideas to improve the plan will certainly emerge.

Underscoring our support for this plan is this notion, which we wholeheartedly support: The most important entity in the education equation is the teacher. We recognize and salute the many dedicated, talented, and highly effective teachers who provide an enormously important service to our students.

And we recognize that, in the short run, elements of this plan will make more demands on teachers, as well as on students, parents, and administrators.

We also recognize that several elements of the plan are controversial. Specific proposals have attracted strong adherents and opponents, both with compelling arguments.

As we debate specific issues, we strongly encourage all stakeholders to weigh in with their perspectives and the most persuasive case they can make...to focus their debate on factual information and real details...to steer clear of historical bias and misinformation...and to always keep the desired end in sight. And the desired end, of course, is the most effective, efficient education system for Idaho, given the resources available.

We must come together to make these changes happen. By working together, Idaho will have a system that will be better for all, and make our common objectives more attainable. In summary, IBCEE supports systemic change in Idaho education now. We strongly support the Students Come First education reform plan. And we stand ready to join with all stakeholders, to facilitate and assist in any way possible, in the continued development and implementation of the plan.

As we look to the future of education in Idaho, consider this: The world is indifferent to tradition and past reputations, unforgiving of frailty, and ignorant of custom or practice. Success will go to those individuals and states and countries that are swift to adapt, slow to complain, and open to change.

Thank you. Now I'd like to turn over my remaining time to our executive director, Christine Donnell.