

3 minutes

N. Shalene French

Chairman Mortimer

Members of the Committee

For the records, I am Dr. Shalene French, Superintendent Caldwell School District *Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.*

I am concerned that <sup>Senate Bill 1196</sup> ~~this~~ legislation doesn't include a weight for secondary alternative school students. Alternative secondary schools are essential to reach our shared goal for all Idaho students to graduate and to be empowered to make productive post-secondary choices after high school.

It is important that we clearly understand how we, as Idahoans, define an at-risk student. First, an at-risk youth is any secondary student grade six through twelve who has met identified at-risk criteria such as:

- a) The student may have repeated at least one grade
- b) They may have an absentee rate that is greater than 10% in the preceding semester
- c) They may have failed one or more academic subjects in the past year
- d) They may be two or more credits behind that rate required to graduate or to move on to the next grade level
- e) They may have a documented or a pattern of substance abuse
- f) They may be pregnant or a parent
- g) They may be an emancipated youth or an unaccompanied youth
- h) They may be a previous dropout
- i) They may have serious personal, emotional, or medical issues
- j) They may have a court or agency referral
- k) They may have demonstrated behavior that is detrimental to their academic progress

Please note that an at-risk student is not necessarily an economically disadvantaged student, nor is a student of poverty necessarily an at-risk student. An at-risk student is not necessarily a special education student or an English Language Learner, nor are students with special needs or students learning the English language necessarily at-risk students.

Alternative secondary programs were developed to provide an essential level of support for some of our most vulnerable youth. By definition, alternative secondary programs are those that provide tailored instructional courses and services to eligible at-risk youth to enable them to earn a high school diploma. These services include day-care centers for teen parents staffed by qualified day-care providers. They also include social services such as officers of the court, social workers, counselors and psychologists, all of which is based on student need.

Alternative secondary schools are not open enrollment schools, but schools of necessity created to serve a vulnerable group of adolescents who are worthy of our effort to help them begin to recognize their potential and help them to begin "becoming" contributing citizens of our community and of Idaho.

This legislation is intended to create a new way of funding education based on student needs -- however, the needs of alternative secondary students is absent. Without this component addressed, the work is incomplete, I urge you to hold the bill in committee and allow us an opportunity to work together to address funding to support our at-risk youth.

Thank you Chairman Mortimer and committee members. With that I will stand for questions.