

# NEWS RELEASE

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(BOISE)—Today, the Office of Performance Evaluations—Idaho’s independent, non-partisan agency of the Legislature—issued its report, *Reducing Barriers to Postsecondary Education*, detailing some of the challenges of increasing the postsecondary education of Idahoans. In his response to the report, Governor Otter said, “While I am optimistic that we are moving toward more college attendance and completion, the challenges before us remain significant.”

The State Board of Education has recently set a goal that 60 percent of Idahoans between ages 25 and 34 will have a college degree or a certificate by the year 2020. However, the board does not have a way to accurately know where the state stands with respect to this goal.

Data reported to the board does not include students who leave Idaho to pursue postsecondary education or who enroll in a private institution. Evaluators reviewed postsecondary enrollment data from nine school districts, including Boise, and found that 29 percent of those students would not be captured in the board’s existing data collection methods.

The report recommends that the board establish an accurate baseline of Idaho’s current levels of educational attainment and develop specific measures to monitor progress toward achieving its 60 percent goal. In a response to the report, the executive director of the J. A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation noted that “without the correct use of data, accountability, leadership, and alignment, we are concerned that Idaho will not be able to continue to provide the quality of life we are so very fortunate to have.”

The report discusses access, readiness, and affordability as the three most common barriers faced by students and their parents when planning for postsecondary education. Evaluators recommend a stronger focus on need-based scholarships and more data-driven decisions when determining the dollar amount and criteria for state-funded scholarships.

Evaluators surveyed students and found that 31 percent of respondents listed the likelihood of getting a job once they complete additional education as one of the greatest challenges when making decisions about postsecondary education. In fact, employment projections suggest that the majority of jobs in Idaho will continue to be those requiring less than an associate’s degree. According to Idaho’s Department of Labor data, from 2002 to 2008, the percentage of jobs in Idaho requiring postsecondary

education grew from 29.0 to 29.9, a change of less than one percentage point; by 2018, Labor projects it will grow only by a fraction to 30.6 percent. The Albertson Foundation, which has spent millions of dollars to support education in Idaho, expressed a “serious concern about the current trajectory of projected job growth in Idaho.”

The report recommends that the State Board of Education formally coordinate its efforts with the Department of Labor, as well as business and education stakeholders, to develop a statewide strategic plan that will produce the right types of graduates for the right types of jobs available in Idaho now and in the future.

In addition to the responses from the Governor, Budget and Policy Analysis, and the Albertson Foundation, the report contains responses from the Board of Education, the Department of Education, and the Department of Labor. The report is available on the evaluation office’s website at [www.idaho.gov/ope](http://www.idaho.gov/ope).

The eight-member Joint Legislative Oversight Committee, which is equally divided between the two political parties and the two chambers of the Legislature, directed the evaluation office to conduct this study. Senator Elliot Werk and Representative Clifford Bayer co-chair the committee.