



# Office of Performance Evaluations Idaho Legislature

Report 06-06F

August 2006

## Public Education Technology Initiatives Follow-up Report

*In our January 2005 report, Public Education Technology Initiatives, we made 12 recommendations to improve the ability of the Board of Education and the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning (ICTL) to comply with statute and fulfill their responsibilities for technology assessment and guidance. The board and the council have each implemented one recommendation; the council is in the process of implementing five recommendations; three recommendations have not been implemented; and two recommendations have been addressed by changes to legislation and state plans.*

### Background

The main findings of our January 2005 report were as follows:

- While Idaho compared well to other states on simple education technology measures, such as the statewide number of students per computer, a large degree of variation existed between Idaho's 114 school districts. As illustrated in exhibit A, our report called for the council to shift its primary focus from "counts" of dollars spent and computers owned to more meaningful measures of the cost-effectiveness and readiness of Idaho school districts to provide and integrate technology.
- The State Board of Education and the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning had not implemented key statutory requirements governing the use of state technology funds. The board and the council did not promote proper planning, develop or promote best

### Exhibit A: Necessary Change in Management Focus

#### Focus Has Been on:

- How much money was spent
- How many computers and other equipment were acquired

Shift Primary  
Focus to



#### Focus on Results:

- How far districts have come in achieving their goals
- Where districts need to go next
- Cost-effectiveness of technology acquisition
- Districts' technology capacity to meet new challenges

Source: Office of Performance Evaluations.

*This report was completed at the request of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee under the authority of Idaho Code § 67-457 through § 67-464. Questions about the report may be directed to the Office of Performance Evaluations through e-mail ([opeinfo@ope.idaho.gov](mailto:opeinfo@ope.idaho.gov)) or phone (208 334-3880).*

practices, or provide adequate justification for dollars spent by school districts.

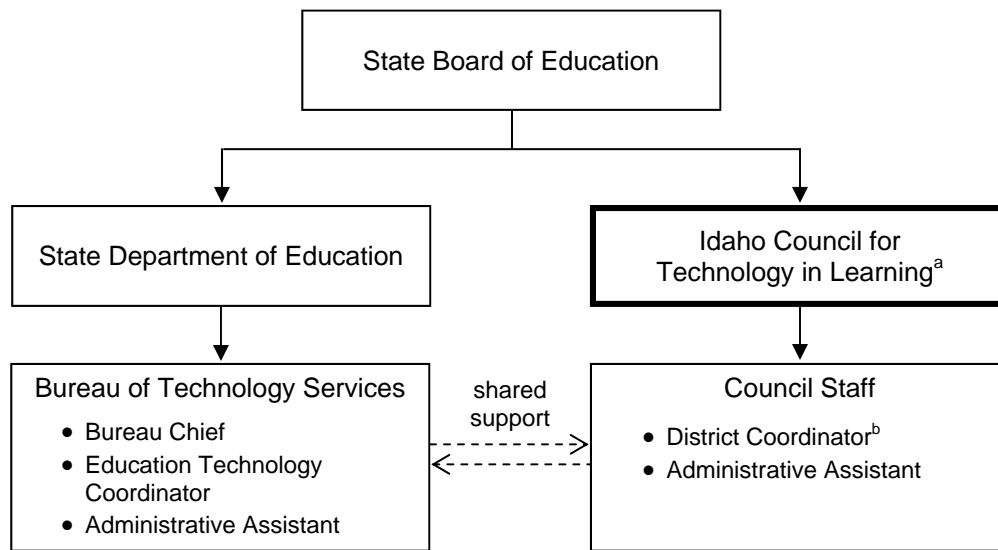
- The council had placed little priority on ensuring school districts had adequate support to maintain their technology investments. Recommendations in the areas of planning and guidance were designed to assist the council in addressing technology support as a priority.

The Idaho Education Technology Initiative of 1994 established the Idaho Council for

Technology in Learning under the Board of Education.<sup>1</sup> Two permanent subcommittees of the council address educational technology matters for primary-secondary and higher education, respectively. Exhibit B illustrates the relationship of the 14-member council to other educational entities. As part of its technology biannual grant application process, the council continues to collect self-reported tallies of school and district technology equipment, along with financial reports and narratives.

<sup>1</sup> IDAHO CODE §§ 33-4801-10.

### Exhibit B: Relationship of the Council to Other Education Entities



<sup>a</sup> According to Idaho Code, council membership includes the following positions:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| • Superintendent of Public Instruction               | • 1 practicing public school administrator                   |
| • 2 members of the Senate                            | • 2 business/private sector representatives                  |
| • 2 members of the House                             | • 1 member of a local school board                           |
| • Executive Director of the State Board of Education | • 1 representative of the higher education subcommittee      |
| • 1 member of the State Board of Education           | • 1 public school teacher representing the K-12 subcommittee |
| • 1 president of a public college or university      |  |

<sup>b</sup> The council changed this job title from Network/Telecommunications Specialist at its June 2006 meeting.

Source: IDAHO CODE § 33-4804, and the Office of Performance Evaluations' analysis of State Department of Education information.

In fiscal year 2005, the council distributed \$7.9 million to 114 school districts, 15 charter schools, and the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind for ongoing and one-time technology expenditures, as shown in exhibit C. In fiscal year 2006, funding for this grant increased and the council distributed just under \$9 million to 114 school districts, 24 charter schools, and the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind.<sup>2</sup>

## Current Status

Our recommendations focused on encouraging the board and the council to comply with the requirements of Idaho Code and to improve their

planning, guidance and advocacy, and accountability efforts. Our assessment of the progress made on each recommendation follows below. Appendix A includes the board's self-assessment of its implementation efforts.

## Planning

### Annual Review of Technology Plan

*Recommendation: To comply with the statutory requirements of the Idaho Education Technology Initiative of 1994, the State Board of Education should annually review and approve the statewide technology plan developed by the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning.*

The current state technology plan was developed and approved by the board in 2004. The council began efforts to actively draft a revised statewide technology plan in October 2005. At that time, the council proposed to submit the plan for approval to the board in June 2006. Although the council's 2006 report to the Legislature stated that the board agreed to annually approve the plan, the board has not formally done so.

<sup>2</sup> In fiscal year 2006, 114 districts received grants for ongoing expenditures; 110 districts received grants for one-time expenditures (4 school districts did not), which are currently distributed on an equalized basis. Through this formula, grant funds for one-time expenditures are not awarded to districts with property tax revenue in excess of the "state equalization percentage" developed by the Division of Financial Management in cooperation with the Department of Education's Bureau of Finance and Transportation.

### Exhibit C: State Technology Monies Distributed to Idaho Schools, By Allowable Use, Fiscal Years 2005–2006

|   | FY2005<br>Ongoing<br>Expenditures | FY2005<br>One-time<br>Expenditures | FY2006<br>Ongoing<br>Expenditures | FY2006<br>Equipment,<br>Software,<br>& Remediation |
|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Districts                               | \$2,883,329                       | \$4,909,876                        | \$3,815,840                       | \$4,737,219  |
| Charter schools <sup>a</sup>            | \$46,471                          | \$79,158                           | \$58,549                          | \$362,781  |
| Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind | \$6,440                           | \$10,966                           | \$15,611                          | \$0  |
| Totals                                  | \$2,936,241 <sup>a</sup>          | \$5,000,000                        | \$3,890,000                       | \$5,100,000  |
| Grand Total                             |                                   | \$7,936,241                        |                                   | \$8,990,000  |

Note: In fiscal year 2005, 15 charter schools received grants; in fiscal year 2006, 24 charter schools received grants.

<sup>a</sup> Totals do not sum due to rounding.

Source: Office of Performance Evaluations' analysis of Idaho Code and information from the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning, the Department of Education, and the Office of the State Controller.

Anticipating that the council would submit a revised statewide technology plan for board approval around August 2006, board staff felt the board had met its obligations with respect to our recommendation. However, as discussed in the next section, the council does not anticipate having a new plan ready for board approval until spring 2007. The council's delay does not affect the board's ability or obligation to fulfill its own statutory responsibility by annually reviewing and approving the plan currently in place.

We therefore conclude that the Board of Education **has not implemented** this recommendation.

#### Elements of Technology Plan

Recommendation: *The State Board of Education should ensure the statewide education technology plan has the following elements:*

- *Assessment of current goals and realignment with statute*
- *Timelines for achieving goals and objectives*
- *Standards or benchmarks for performance measures*
- *Standards and planning guidance for adequate district staffing for technical support*
- *Guidance on finance, budgeting, and cost-effective technology acquisition*

Although the Board of Education has permanent membership on the council, the board has not taken steps to ensure that the council's current efforts to redraft the state technology plan address the elements of this recommendation. By June 2006, the council had only agreed upon a mission statement, vision, and five broad goals that were aligned with the council's role in Idaho Code.

The council has made considerable effort to realign this draft document with statute and has included some long-term timelines. However, more detailed and relevant timelines, benchmarks, and staffing and fiscal guidance have yet to be addressed.

We therefore conclude that the Board of Education **has not implemented** this recommendation.

#### District Project Plans

Recommendation: *To comply with the statutory requirements of the Idaho Education Technology Initiative of 1994, the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning should require school districts to submit a project plan as part of the application for annual grants. The plan should include a description of proposed purchases, effective classroom use, teacher training, and local matching funds.*

The council's 2006 report to the Legislature stated that the primary education subcommittee and members of the professional organization, the Idaho Educational Technology Association, were collaborating to address this recommendation. Idaho Code requires the council to ensure grant applicants submit technology plans that address four elements:<sup>3</sup>

- Purchases
- Classroom use
- Teacher training
- Local matching funds

Statute also requires the council to evaluate school districts' educational technology projects and recommend exemplary programs.<sup>4</sup> Collecting information about proposed school district projects will assist the council in carrying out this responsibility.

However, the council has delayed efforts to revise the grant application process until fall 2006 and has not shown clear intent to collect district plans for proposed projects from districts applying for technology grants.

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<sup>3</sup> IDAHO CODE § 33-4806.

<sup>4</sup> IDAHO CODE §§ 33-4805(f), (j).

We therefore conclude that the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning is **in the process of implementing** this recommendation.

### *Guidance and Advocacy*

As part of this follow-up, we surveyed 753 district superintendents, school principals, and technology coordinators with valid e-mail addresses in 114 school districts, as well as charter schools, and specialized and correctional schools. We asked a series of questions designed to determine the types of information and guidance the council has provided to schools and districts. Those responses are shown in exhibit D.

### **Exemplary Programs, Practices, Products**

*Recommendation: To comply with the statutory requirements of the Idaho Education Technology Initiative of 1994, the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning should identify and recommend to the State Board of Education exemplary education technology programs, practices, and products.*

Nearly one-quarter (24 percent) of superintendents, principals, and technology coordinators who responded to our survey indicated they had received general best practice information from the council. In April 2005, the council agreed to address this recommendation by asking districts to submit examples of best practices to be published annually and distributed to school districts. This process is not expected to begin until July 2007. The delay does not, however, impede the council's ability to independently recognize and recommend best practices to the board. The council has adopted, as the primary goal of its draft technology plan, an objective to become "the single authoritative source for technology policies, standards, guidelines and best practices for teaching and learning by 2010."

At its June 2006 meeting, the council discussed a number of best practices such as those that might help districts efficiently administer computer-based testing without disrupting classroom learning. The council, however, stopped short of formally identifying or communicating these best practices to the board.

### **Exhibit D: School and District Staff on Information Received from the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning**

Survey question: What kinds of information have you received from the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning in the past year? (Please mark all that apply)

|  | Percent of<br>Respondents (N=288) | N  |
|--|-----------------------------------|----|
| General best practices   | 24.0 %                            | 69 |
| Information Technology Resource Management Council (ITRMC) policy guidance | 14.2                              | 41 |
| Tools or guidance on ways to assess educational technology programs        | 13.2                              | 38 |
| Guidance for planning technology purchases and improvements                | 13.2                              | 38 |
| Guidance on ways to improve financial reporting                            | 7.3                               | 21 |
| Ratios, calculators, or other guidance on IT staffing                      | 4.5                               | 13 |

Source: Office of Performance Evaluations' survey of public school superintendents, principals, and technology coordinators, May 2006.

We therefore conclude that the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning is **in the process of implementing** this recommendation.

#### ITRMC Policies as Guidelines

Recommendation: *To comply with the statutory requirements of the Idaho Education Technology Initiative of 1994, the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning should consult with Idaho Technology Resource Management Council (ITRMC) staff for guidance on adherence to ITRMC policies that would benefit school districts in their use of state technology dollars.*

The council can address its guidance role by encouraging cost-effective information solutions through standardization and similar best practices. In December 2005, council staff reviewed ITRMC policies, such as connectivity and transport protocols, and developed a report that contained general recommendations regarding the relevance of those policies for school district operations. This document is still in draft form; council staff indicated the document may be submitted to the council for publication or distribution approval in December 2006.

We therefore conclude that the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning is **in the process of implementing** this recommendation.

#### Technology Staffing Standards

Recommendation: *The Idaho Council for Technology in Learning should develop a standard ratio of computers-to-district technology support (measured by full-time equivalent employees).*

The council's 2006 report to the Legislature stated the council was working with the Idaho Educational Technology Association and would submit a ratio or formula to the council for approval in fall 2006. In March 2006, council staff reported that this recommendation was being addressed by the council's revision of the state technology plan. The council has delayed this drafting process until spring 2007, and the draft plan does not indicate an intent to address specific

staffing guidance. Only 13 out of 288 superintendents, principals, and technology coordinators who responded to our survey indicated they had received any form of guidance on technology staffing from the council.

We therefore conclude that the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning **has not implemented** this recommendation.

### Accountability

#### Improved Data Quality

Recommendation: *Idaho Council for Technology in Learning staff should improve the quality of technology information maintained and reported to the Legislature and reduce the duplication of financial reporting requirements placed on school districts by*

- *coordinating with the State Department of Education's Bureau of Finance and Transportation and the Division of Accounting and Human Resources to obtain audited financial information already submitted by districts;*
- *taking steps to improve quality controls of district technology inventory data, and using existing electronic information when available, in coordination with the State Department of Education's Bureau of Finance and Transportation.*

The council's 2006 report to the Legislature stated that the department was working to "streamline data collection for the school districts." To accomplish this recommendation, the Bureau of Technology Services and council staff must develop a collaborative relationship with the Bureau of Finance and Transportation, which collects audited financial information from school districts. In addition, legislation in 2005 and 2006 require the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to report on the expenditure of council funds for technology and remediation. To accomplish this requirement, the Department of Education's Bureau of Finance and Transportation has agreed to collect the

information in its fiscal year 2006 Idaho Financial and Reporting Management System (IFARMS) data collection.

To meet federal requirements, the department collects professional development expenditures through the council's grant application process. Council staff have not systematically used existing IFARMS data for other district technology expenditures. Instead, council staff continue to request duplicative financial information and narrative descriptions of expenditures directly from school districts. Narrative descriptions of expenditures may have anecdotal value. However, quantitative fiscal data gathered from district technology staff are undocumented and unverified. District staff described some of this data as "guesstimated." The council should avoid requirements that obligate school district staff to compile and report duplicative and poor quality data.

The council's efforts to improve data quality may benefit from (a) encouraging districts to use the established financial codes for technology within IFARMS as a condition of grants, (b) ensuring the Bureau of Finance and Transportation provides annual reports on these expenditures to the council, (c) eliminating its narrative expenditure reports, and (d) limiting its financial reporting requirements to professional development expenditures from technology funds.

Regarding the second part of this recommendation, council staff have included definitions of instructional, lab, reference/library, teacher, and administrative computers in the latest (2006) school district inventory survey. However, the council's formal communications with schools and districts have not provided additional guidance to improve the quality of inventory data. Furthermore, the council's formal communications have not provided guidance to help districts improve the quality of the financial information submitted to the council. While a draft document provided by council staff indicates an intent to revise the data collection process, as

part of efforts already discussed, these efforts have been delayed until fall 2006.

We therefore conclude that the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning is **in the process of implementing** this recommendation.

#### Technology Assessment Tools

Recommendation: *The Idaho Council for Technology in Learning should review the CEO Forum's technology assessment chart, used by other states, and develop a plan, including needed resources, for implementation of a similar assessment tool to meet Idaho's needs.*

The council does not have a plan for development of a technology assessment chart, nor an estimate of the resources that might be required to successfully complete it. According to the council's 2006 report to the Legislature, council staff have reviewed the CEO Forum technology assessment chart, along with information from the International Society for Technology in Education. Council staff also told us that efforts to incorporate this research and address this recommendation have been combined with the council's development of a new statewide technology plan, which has been delayed until spring 2007.

We therefore conclude that the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning is **in the process of implementing** this recommendation.

#### Charter School Grant Distributions

Recommendation: *If the intent of the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning is to disburse technology grant program dollars directly to charter schools, the council should modify the funding formula to reflect this.*

The council addressed this recommendation in fall 2005 by adopting a revised funding formula that distributes funds directly to charter schools, as shown in exhibit E. We therefore conclude that the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning **has implemented** this recommendation.

### Clarification of One-Time Expenditures

Recommendation: *The Idaho Council for Technology in Learning should clarify annual appropriation bill intent language for the use of one-time funds for ongoing expenditures (including personnel) and communicate this intent to school districts.*

In 2005 and 2006, appropriation bill language alleviated the need to accomplish this recommendation by specifying funds were to be used expressly for the purchase of equipment and software or for costs for Idaho Standards Achievement Test remedial instruction.<sup>5</sup> The

council communicated this intent to school districts in 2005 and 2006.

We therefore conclude that the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning **has addressed** this recommendation.

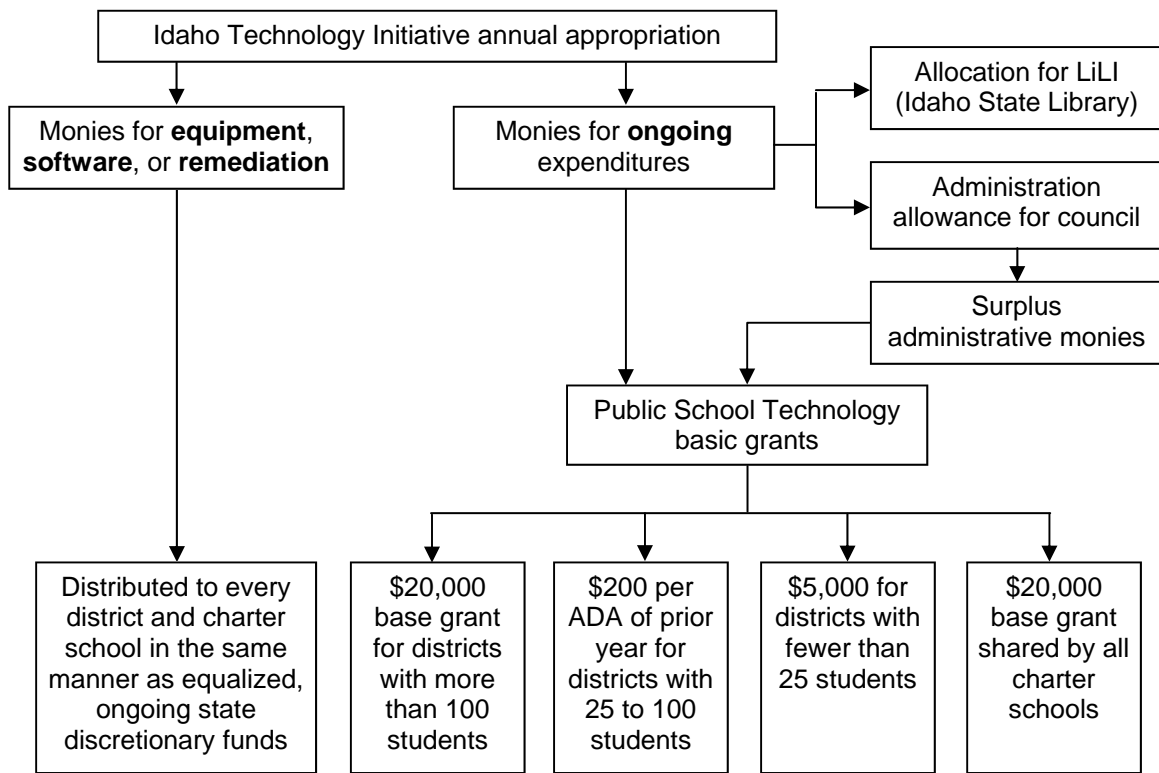
### Eighth Grade Technology Standards

Recommendation: *The State Board of Education should formally revisit Idaho's eighth grade technology standards, their purpose, and implementation relative to the requirements of the statewide technology plan and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.*

The Board of Education formally approved eighth-grade technology standards at its October 2005 meeting. We therefore conclude that the

<sup>5</sup> S. 1223, 58th Leg., 1st Sess. (Idaho 2005), §4; H. 846, 58th Leg., 2nd Sess. (Idaho 2006), §4.

## Exhibit E: Revised Formula for Distribution of State Technology



Note: ADA = average daily attendance

Source: Office of Performance Evaluations' analysis of information from the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning, and H. 846, 58th Leg., 2nd Sess. (Idaho 2006), §4.



Idaho Council for Technology in Learning **has implemented** this recommendation.

**Statewide Student Information System Audit Recommendation:** *Should the State Department of Education invest state or federal dollars into the development of a statewide centralized student information management system, legislative financial auditors should consider including a review of the department’s technology-related financial and budgetary practices as part of their periodic audit work.*

In 2006, the Legislature authorized the Board of Education to adopt rules for “a student

information management system.” However, the state has not yet moved forward with a system used by districts statewide and centrally-located—such as a centralized data warehouse or centralized student information management software.

We therefore conclude that this recommendation **is not germane** to the state’s current plans. However, should the Department of Education or the Board of Education pursue any statewide, centralized system—such as a centralized data warehouse or “longitudinal” data system, or centralized software—this recommendation **should be addressed**.

*We appreciate the cooperation and assistance we received from the Department of Education, the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning, and the Board of Education in conducting this follow-up review. Rachel Johnstone of the Office of Performance Evaluations conducted the review.*

**Joint Legislative Oversight Committee (JLOC)**

Sen. Shawn Keough, Co-chair  
Sen. John Andreason  
Sen. Bert Marley  
Sen. Kate Kelly

Rep. Margaret Henbest, Co-chair  
Rep. Maxine Bell  
Rep. Debbie Field  
Rep. Donna Boe

**Office of Performance Evaluations**

Rakesh Mohan, Director



## **Appendix A**

### *Board of Education's Self-assessment of Implementation Efforts*





## IDAHO STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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May 15, 2006

Mr. Rakesh Mohan  
Ms. Rachel Johnstone  
Office of Performance Evaluations  
PO Box 83720  
Boise, ID 83720-0055

Re: Follow-up Review of the Report on Public Education Technology Initiatives

Dear Rakesh and Rachel:

Thank you for the opportunity to update the Office of Performance Evaluation (OPE) on the progress the State Board of Education (Board) has made on the recommendations set out in the January 2005 Report on Public Education Technology Initiatives.

Listed below are each of the recommendations and the Board's progress on each recommendation:

*Recommendation 1.a. – The State Board of Education should annually review and approve the statewide technology plan developed by the Idaho Council for Technology in Learning.*

The Idaho Council for Technology in Learning has developed a statewide technology plan. That plan will be reviewed and approved at their June meeting. If approved, the plan will be submitted to the Board for their approval at the August 2006 meeting.

*Recommendation 2 – The State Board of Education should ensure the statewide education technology plan has the following elements: a. Assessment of current goals and realignment (if necessary) with statute; b. Timelines for achieving goals and objectives; c. Standards or benchmarks for performance measures; d. Standards and planning guidance for adequate district staffing for technical support; e. Guidance on finance, budgeting, and cost-effective technology acquisition.*

The technology plan that will be presented to the Board in August 2006 contains all of the recommended items.

*Recommendation 9 – The State Board of Education should formally revisit Idaho’s eighth-grade technology standards, their purpose, and implementation relative to the requirements of the statewide technology plan and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.*

The eighth-grade technology standards were originally approved by the State Board of Education at the April 2004 meeting. Because of technical difficulties with both the audio and written minutes of the meeting, there was no record available of the approval. In order to assure there is a record of the approval, the eighth-grade technology standards were approved once again by the Board at the October 2005 meeting.

Therefore, the State Board of Education believes they have complied with the recommendations set out in this report.

Please let me know if you have any further questions or if I can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen Echeverria".

Karen L. Echeverria  
Chief Administration and Governmental Affairs Officer