

Attachment 2

Good morning Chairman Mortimer and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Peggy Hoy and I teach 6th grade math at Vera C. O'Leary Middle School in Twin Falls. It is my honor and pleasure to stand before you today in support of HB 300.

Alternative education is very important to me. In 1997, I had the honor of being a member of the very first staff of the Twin Falls Bridge Academy, the first alternative middle school in the Magic Valley. Opening a new program was exciting, but the best part was having the opportunity to work with 7th and 8th grade students who struggled in a regular classroom setting, helping them find success in learning. I was able to work with students who may have needed a small class environment, a clear focus on core subjects, or removal from outside distractions. I wanted to help them find success in school. It was a pleasure to watch them rise to the occasion, succeed, and in many cases transition back to the regular classroom. Since that time, many of Idaho school districts have moved to the middle school format, grades 6-8 instead of the traditional junior high 7-9.

In 2007, the Middle Level Task Force was created by the State Department of Education. Its purpose was to examine middle school issues as recommended by the high school redesign efforts. Two goals of the task force were to ensure all students are prepared to be successful in high school, and to increase academic engagement and student accountability for Middle level students. The task force came up with the Middle Level Credit System. That system was put into place following the 2010 legislative session. The rule change required each local district to design and implement a credit system. If students fail to meet the credit requirements then an alternative mechanism would be put in place to help them become successful. Many districts across the State of Idaho, including the Twin Falls School District, successfully implemented an alternative school as their alternative mechanism for grades 7th and 8. However, we currently have no mechanism for failing 6th graders. Sixth graders who, a majority of them in Idaho, attend a traditional middle school with 7th and 8th graders.

Let me tell you a story of one of my students, we will call Ann. Ann is a 13 year old 6th grader, the average 6th grader is 11. Ann is smart, both academically and street smart. She has a huge desire to learn, but there are many distractions in her life. Just last month her mom was arrested in Nevada on charges of possession and being under the influence of Meth. Ann now lives with her grandmother. Her grandmother provides basic living needs for her but does not seem to have the energy to help guide her through her schooling. Ann has absolutely no educational support from home when it comes to completing homework or preparing for tests. Without outside intervention and support, Ann has a high likelihood to fail, become a dropout, another statistic of a failing Idaho student. Let me remind you, she is 13 and in 6th grade, and already you can see her struggling and headed in the wrong direction. If the intent of the Middle Level Task Force was to provide a setting to prepare these students for the rigor of high school, we are failing students like Ann. She needs the small setting, the strict structure and the rigor our alternative school can provide for her to be successful.

I would also like to share a story of a student we will call John. John entered my 6th grade classroom two years ago as a very angry student. He hated school, and anyone else who tried to hold him accountable. He was on our weekly team meeting agenda, we had parent meeting after parent meeting. We made arrangements for him to stay 3 nights after school for one on one help. It didn't matter, he spent the majority of his 6th grade year on probation and many nights at the juvenile detention facility. As a seventh grade student John qualified to attend our alternative school. He was in a small class, got the one on one attention he desperately needed and by the end of 8th grade, he was ready to transition into

Twin Falls High School. I saw John recently working at a local fast food restaurant. He is passing school, and doing quite well. I am confident that without our alternative environment, he would never have felt the success he did and would not be where he is today. Just imagine if we could have intervened a full year sooner.

Ann and John are only two of many stories concerning 6th grade students who would benefit from an alternative school setting. Studies have shown that the earlier interventions are established, the greater likelihood that a struggling student will succeed. Your support of HB 300 would allow districts around the State of Idaho to tap into the same resources we have established for 7th and 8th grade students and extend them to the 6th grade. We need to meet the needs of students like Ann and John at an earlier age...helping them be future successful citizens of our state and nation.

Peggy Hoy
TFEA Co-President
6th grade Math Teacher