

## ATTACHMENT 4

Testimony before the Idaho Senate Education Committee given on 1/13/16 by  
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Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Briana LeClaire, and I am the executive director of the Idaho Federation of Independent Schools, a statewide private school organization. Our members include Holy Rosary Catholic School and the Watersprings School in Idaho Falls, The Alzar School in Cascade, Classical Christian Academy and Genesis Prep in Post Falls, Holy Family Catholic School, Lake City Junior Academy and LAM Christian in Coeur d'Alene, St. Edward's and Lighthouse Christian in Twin Falls, Nampa Christian, The Ambrose School, Cole Valley Christian and Sheridan Academy in Meridian, and Bishop Kelly, Calvary Christian School and Riverstone International School in Boise. Our members belong to the Federation to protect their freedoms to educate children well, and to promote private schools and private school choice.

The demand for private schooling in Idaho exceeds its availability. A school choice survey conducted by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice revealed that the first choice of 27 percent of Idahoans is a private school. However, only **three** percent of Idaho's k-12 students are enrolled in one.

A survey of the schools showed that between 2500 - 5000 seats are available right now in Idaho's private schools, and that 94 percent of private schools award financial aid.

Several thousand open seats in schools Idahoans clearly prefer show it's not possible for many Idahoans to pay for school twice: once through taxation and again through tuition. This is even though median tuition for private elementary schools is \$3,550 and median high school tuition is slightly more than \$5,000.

Yesterday you heard from Tony Bennett, former Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction, who emphasized the importance of school choice when it comes to raising student achievement. Right now, too many good schools are off the table as choices for most Idahoans.

Our hope is that the State of Idaho will grow the funding of students, not systems, beyond the public charter sector. The Legislature should extend school choice to meet demand through vouchers, education savings accounts, tax credit tuition scholarships, and other mechanisms. If the Idaho Constitution is the problem, particularly the part known as the Blaine Amendment, then please fix it.

At the college level, public money follows the student to private schools, including religious schools, all the time. A Pell Grant is nothing more than a federal voucher, and a college student can take his to the University of Idaho, or NNU, or BYU-Idaho, or just about anywhere he pleases.

Through fate, some children already are positioned to attend the k-12 schools their parents desire. Maybe they're born into a family of means. Maybe they're on one of the full-ride sponsorships Cole Valley Christian School gives to current and former residents of the City Light Home for Women and Children. Perhaps they're able to take advantage of other private schools' financial aid programs.

But why should a child have to be lucky in order to attend the school that's best for him? It should be public policy for all Idaho schoolchildren to have access to the education suiting them best, even if it happens to take place in a religious or secular private school.

Thank you, and I welcome your questions.