

- I'm Mark Wheeler, Dean of Extended Studies at Boise State. Senators, it's an honor to be in front of you today, talking about a subject I'm passionate about and have dedicated my career toward. That is: Helping Idahoans -- specifically working adults -- achieve a college degree.

My role at Boise State is to extend higher education beyond traditional borders. My staff work with faculty to put courses and entire degree programs online to provide access across Idaho ^{anytime & anywhere} and beyond. We also offer programs at outreach sites in Nampa, Twin Falls, Coeur d'Alene, and military bases.

And, the reason I am here today, we are huge supporters of the Adult Completer Scholarship. ^{as envisioned in} ~~from the~~ Senate Bill 1279

- As you know, it's estimated that there are over 200,000 Idahoans with some college but no degree or certificate. Encouraging these students to finish is the right thing to do -- for our citizens' sake but also the State's. When it comes to increasing the percentage of our population with a post-secondary degree, this is low-hanging fruit. They've already completed part of the journey and we just need to help them finish. With their life experience and soon a degree -- this population will play an important role in meeting employers' needs.

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- Last year Boise State had a campaign to reach out to students who had "stopped out" of ^{College} Boise State several years earlier. We wanted to know what happened and if we could help them re-enroll. What we heard from these students is how financial ^{pressures} matters caused them to have to increase their work hours, or left them without money for child care, or in some other way interrupted their studies. Some have less than a year to go to complete their bachelor's degree. Despite setbacks, these students haven't given up on the dream of a college education -- in fact many of them still identify education as the key to improving their family's situation. We're working with these students to get them re-enrolled, but there are many, many more people out

Mr. Chamberlain

there with similar circumstances. The Adult Completer Scholarship will help institutions engage with this large population.

- These adult degree-completers are hard-working Idahoans ~~I know because I was once among this population.~~ And these people are worth investing in. Boise State has invested in them. We have developed 35 fully online degree programs so ^{working} these adults across Idaho can complete a certificate or degree without relocating, quitting their jobs, and/or uprooting their lives. Why? Because we take seriously the State Board of Education's charge that we ensure access and opportunities for Idahoans to continue their education regardless of their location, age, and job responsibilities (SBOE Policy III.L). I can't think of a better way for this body to affirm the importance of continuing education -- regardless of age and job responsibilities -- than to approve this adult completer scholarship.
- Lastly, it is my sincere hope that this body approve the Adult Completer Scholarship, and that its implementation not exclude students pursuing bachelor degrees or studies at Boise State University. ~~I've heard~~ ^{know} that limited funding might require the State Board to severely restrict who is eligible for the scholarship. Given that Boise State has invested money in developing online programs for this exact population of degree-completers, I hope students will ^{be able to} use this scholarship to access these degrees. ^{choice to be} ~~many of~~ ^{many of} ~~the students who have testified.~~ ^{the students who have testified.} ^{have the}
- Thank you