



BLAINE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Superintendent GwenCarol Holmes, Ed. D.

Public Comment to the Joint Senate and House Education Committees
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From: GwenCarol Holmes, Ed.D., Superintendent of the Blaine County School District.

Chairman Mortimer, Chairman Clow, Members of the Senate and House Education Committees, I am GwenCarol Holmes, Superintendent of the Blaine County School District.

Thank you for this opportunity to express my views on the proposed Public School Funding Formula.

As I know you are aware, the Idaho Constitution recognizes the importance of education for maintaining a vibrant state and therefore calls for the legislature "to establish and maintain a general, uniform and thorough system of public free common schools." (Article IX, Section 1) Thank you for your relentless dedication year after year to make this happen for our children.

As Americans and Idahoans, we have long believed that education is the path to a better future, both as a collective body of people and as individuals. Horace Mann, with his gift of oratory, helped us recognize the importance of education in our country. He called education the great equalizer. (*Life and Works of Horace Mann*) He recognized that an education for any and every child is a gift, especially to those children who come from less fortunate circumstances. An education helps ensure these children become productive and contributing citizens of Idaho and of the United States.

This expectation that each and every child receive a free, uniform and thorough education has not always been an expectation of society. Again, Horace Mann noted that "the public school is the greatest discovery ever made by man." I am very proud that in our country and in the great state of Idaho, that a free and thorough education is not only the expectation for every child, but also the gift to every child.

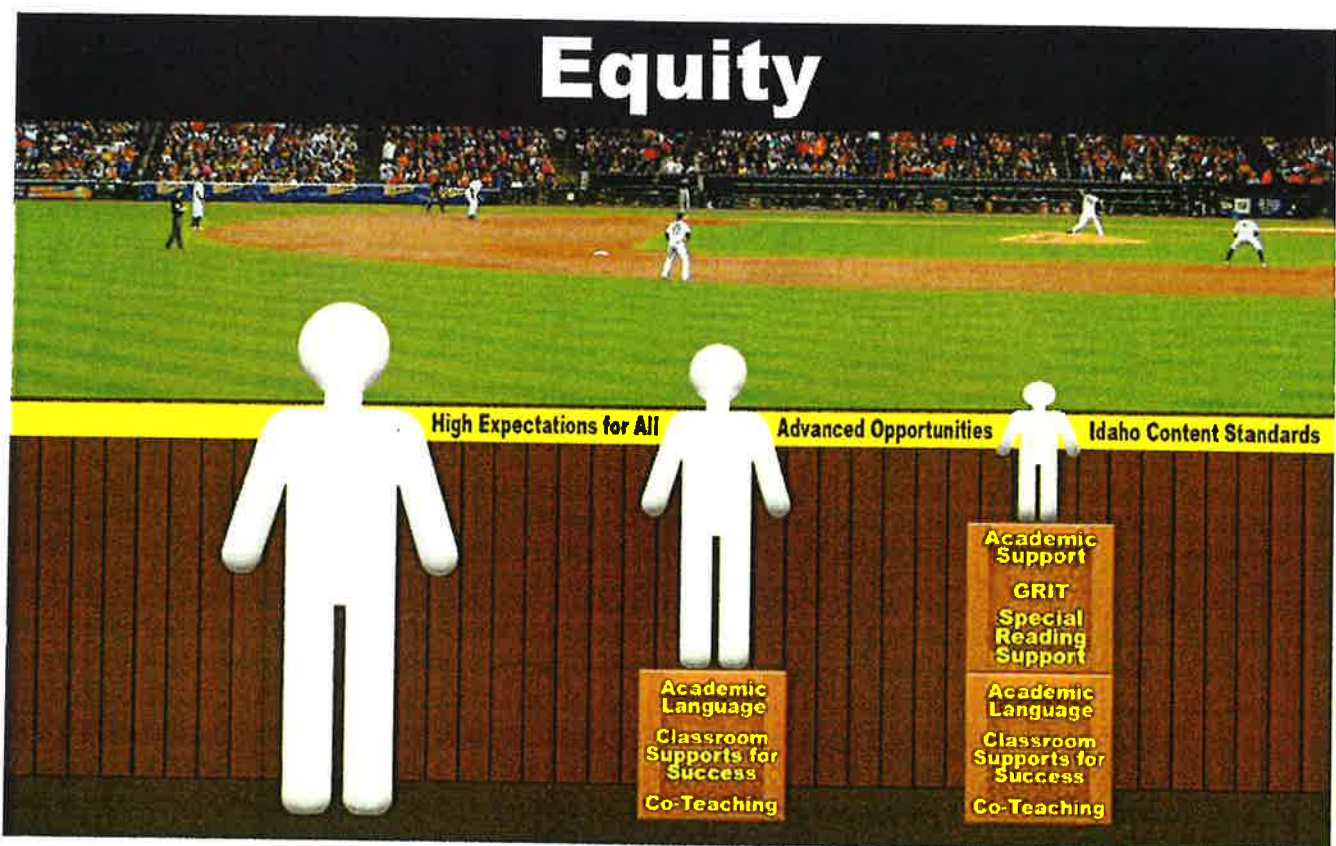
We work to ensure that every child has the same opportunities by having Idaho Content Standards that guide us in ensuring that children educated in Idaho, whether from the panhandle or the southeast or the southwest or even the central mountains where I live, graduate from our schools having received a uniform and excellent education.

Our children come to school, each one unique and precious, with the expectation, as given to them by our constitution, that each of them will be educated to the same high level regardless of their circumstances. As educators, our obligation and the expectation of Idahoans, is to make it happen for every child. There are no exceptions due to circumstances. This means our education system has to be based on equity, not equality. This is the fundamental priority that needs to be recognized if we expect to create an education system that assures that all students master the standards.

The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) defines two dimensions of equity in education:

- Fairness, which means ensuring that personal and social circumstances do not prevent students from achieving their academic potential.
- Inclusion, which means setting a basic minimum standard for education that is shared by all students regardless of background, personal characteristics, or location.

The proposed Public School Funding Formula is a recognition of the need for equity in fulfilling our constitutional obligation of a 'uniform and thorough system of free public schools.' The formula recognizes that all children must master the Idaho Content Standards and to do so will require that some children receive additional supports. In the Blaine County School District, we allocate staff and budget dollars based on equity formulas, not equality. We embrace the goal of ensuring all students master the Idaho Content Standards and understand that achieving this will require differentiation for each child. We often use this illustration.



The three children in this picture all want to watch the ball game. Being able to see over the fence is the minimum standard required. One child can do it on her own. Another child needs some support or a box to stand on. And the third child needs even more supports or two boxes to stand on. However, the end result is that all children get to watch the game.

This proposed funding formula directs our conversation to students. As we talk about funding schools we talk about how much base is needed for each student? How much additional support is needed for students that are learning English as a second language? For students with disabilities? For students from poverty or at-risk? For students that have a specific area of giftedness? For students attending small and remote schools? And so on. This conversation is about our children, our children. I welcome that and I applaud and support your efforts.

I have heard some of my fellow educators express concerns about the new formula having 'winners' and 'losers.' I have also watched the Interim Committee for three years work very hard to gather public input and continue to adjust the formula so that children in Idaho are attending schools that have the flexibility to use their resources to meet the unique needs of their students. They have worked hard to ensure our children are winners and that there are no losers.

While we will continue to debate what the weights should be, and what are the circumstances of our children that require additional supports, (Some of you have received emails from me debating this with you.) I strongly support the adoption and implementation of a funding formula that is focused on STUDENTS, not adults, and provides EQUITY for our students. A formula that expects the same great education for all our students while recognizing their often very disparate circumstances.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address the joint committees. I greatly appreciate your dedication to the children of Idaho.