

Testimony before the Senate Education Committee 2/27/17

Thank you Chairman Mortimer and members of the Senate Education Committee ~~for allowing me the opportunity to testify.~~ My name is Russ Heller - I am retired from the Boise School District where, for 41 years, I taught history and social sciences and then supervised the social studies and world languages programs for the Boise School District. In 1973 I co-authored the Boise School District's American Humanities curriculum and then team-taught that course for several years. I am here as a parent and grand-parent of children who have and will attend public schools, and to share the views of the National Council for History Education (NCHE) where I serve as Vice Chair of the Board of Directors. I am testifying against rule change 08-0203-1601 - the proposed change in graduation requirements for the Humanities ~~and in favor of the House Education Committee's vote to excise that rule change from the State Department of Education's proposal.~~

I ^{SEE} believe this rule change is a solution looking for a problem. What exactly is this change seeking to accomplish? If "clarification" is the object, what needs clarifying? What specific and consequential shortcoming in current graduation requirement language is relieved by this change? What effect is anticipated by the change? On what basis and with what evidence is this change supported? And, how will the effect of this change be assessed, taken to account - particularly in light of testimony to the House Education Committee that the SDE "will not be policing" how districts implement this requirement?

If the fine or performing arts should be part of every student's education, why does the SDE not make such courses a specific requirement? Why not a "creative arts" or "performing arts" requirement? If world languages should be part of every student's education, why not make such courses a requirement? Then, at least, the argument for these additional graduation requirements will stand on their own merits. I believe this would be a more ^{DIRECT} straightforward approach than creating a bundled together option that does neither but which redefines what constitutes a sound education in the humanities.

~~We should be careful not to alter time-honored academic definitions with convenient adjectives.~~ Please consider what is meant by the term, "interdisciplinary" in the context of this rule. Listing qualifying courses that need be combined and taught with equal coverage and in equal depth creates a standard unique to the graduation requirement's third option* and insensitive to humanities disciplines that are inherently integrative. Options in the fine and performing arts are not held to the standard of this third option. ~~Is clay-sculpting integrative?~~ Most important to NCHE, why are literature and history courses, standing on their own, excluded from the requirement and, worse, mandated to be taught with "equal depth and coverage" when coupled to meet this requirement? How in the world are studies in letters and history delivered in equal doses - and explored in equal depth? Are seat time, instructional time, or students' cognitive time the measures? History is by its very nature an interdisciplinary study. Exploring the arc of societies and

* ARTS, WORLD LANGUAGES
AND THIRD "INTERDISCIPLINARY"

cultures, over time, necessarily includes an examination of creative expressions (e.g., religion, philosophy, jurisprudence, the fine arts and the other liberal arts).

Examining the record of the past and *making sense of our humanity* is the role of the historian and the subject of the history student. And students' schedules should not be effectively restricted from ^{including} taking more of such courses in order to meet an ethereal goal of combining disciplines in "equal coverage and depth." Universities and Humanities organizations recognize and embrace history as an integrative discipline and celebrate historians and the study of history as central to their mission in promoting a liberal arts education – an education in the Humanities (examples include the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Idaho Humanities Council, myriad colleges and universities including Harvard and our own state's system of higher education).

Idaho lawmakers recently addressed the issue of strengthening civics education – an important goal. Don't we hope that civic engagement is informed? We strive to educate students toward familiarity with our structures of governance and how they were shaped over time by people and events and by a thoughtful study of our place in the world - in short, ***a perspective informed by our study and appreciation of history. Isn't this a time to emphasize and encourage a greater understanding of history rather than squeeze out opportunities for students to achieve more than minimal credits in that discipline?***

If the State Department of Education aims simply to require a deeper education in the humanities, why and how would a graduation requirement satisfied by any of the discipline options under the common definition of the humanities *not* meet that goal? In my experience, school district boards, curriculum administrators, principals, and teachers are best positioned to effectuate such a responsibility, and not simply by "default" when the SDE commits "not to police" the implementation of a standard. Your long and commendable history of respecting the authority and judgment of locally elected school boards is not in jeopardy on this issue. But I believe a nod to district discretion in this case makes sense and in no way compromises a "thorough" education for Idaho's students.

Thank you for this opportunity to share these thoughts. With that, I am happy to stand for questions.

Respectfully,
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