

Task Force Recommendations – a Plan for Reaching Idaho’s Higher Education Goals

By the Idaho State Board of Education Executive Officers

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As members of the State Board of Education, we are constantly struck by the fact that Idaho is one of only two states (with Rhode Island), in which the State Board of Education has oversight of education from Kindergarten to graduate school. Such a structure provides tremendous opportunity for a true educational system in which students can move easily from one rung to another on the education ladder according to their abilities and interests.

Since 2013, the Idaho legislature and State Board of Education have influenced the direction of public schools with a clear focus on implementation and funding of the recommendations of the Governor’s K-12 Task Force. Enhanced emphasis on primary reading, improvements in teachers’ salaries, heightened professional development; initial work on master-based education, and the significant expansion of technology have impacted K-12 education in meaningful ways.

But what of post-secondary education in Idaho? The Board’s strategic plan clearly defines our focus -- educational attainment, alignment and work force readiness. Both the Higher Ed and Work Force Development Task Forces play an important role in achieving our long term goals, achieving significant improvement and ensuring a complete system. The recommendations of these task forces support the Board’s vision of an accessible, affordable, and seamless public education system.

The ultimate goal is to provide an integrated and student centric system that provides a higher level of service. The Higher Education Task Force heavily relied on the research and best practices of Complete College America and their proven “game changer” strategies. These strategies such as guided pathways, corequisite remediation, and outcomes-based funding have been proven to improve certificate and degree completion.

Further, when coupled with enhanced work force training, and expanded industry partnerships, the strategies recommended by the Workforce Development Task Force, when correctly implemented and supported, have the power to move us closer to our state's goal to have 60-percent of Idahoans ages 25 – 34 with some type of post-secondary certificate or degree.

To date, there has been substantial discussion surrounding a recommendation to create a staff position to carry out some specific recommended changes. The working title of this position was coined CEO, somewhere along the way. Perhaps the real function has been lost in terminology.

The recommendation to consolidate “back office” functions was predicated on making improvements in Idaho’s educational system by eliminating duplications and standardizing appropriate functions. Many states have embarked upon this process, with measurable success. No one state’s model will fit the realities of Idaho. Rather, as recommended by the Task Force, the State Board must undertake a study to determine what is feasible and most appropriate for Idaho, and then, based on the findings, develop a specific timeline and strategies for undertaking this important work. Real savings can be found and current duplicative expenditures can be refocused on academics and student support.

The study, planning and execution will take hard work, time and effort on the part of the State Board, and it is imperative that specialized staff be allocated to manage this important undertaking. Simply stated, the current staff members in the Office of the State Board of Education cannot be stretched further. Additional staffing is needed for initial oversight of the study.

It is important to state that the State Board of Education has no interest in moving to a so-called “chancellor” system. Changing our model to more cost effective operations and reallocating resources to better support students through a new delivery, better affordability and increased financial assistance for low income students is the vision for higher education. The Higher Ed Task Force recommendations are about improving Idaho’s educational system, and we urge support and funding of them.