

May 23, 2003

Idaho State Board of Education Addresses Several Issues at its May Meeting

The Idaho State Board of Education considered several items on a full agenda at its May meeting, which typically is reserved for a retreat and strategic planning. Highlights from the day included:

Discussion on charter schools - At the April meeting, Board President Blake Hall assigned a subcommittee to look at charter schools in the State of Idaho and prepare a report to be submitted to the Governor. At yesterday's meeting, Laird Stone, Board member and chair of the subcommittee, gave an update and said a full report will be ready for the December 2003 meeting. The Board listened to presentations regarding charter school issues that may require a solution before the end of the year. Mr. Stone said his committee will consider the issues and, where necessary, have recommendations for short-term solutions at the next meeting.

University of Idaho affiliation with the Sun Belt Conference - After much thought and deliberation, the Board voted, 5-3, to authorize the president of the University of Idaho, or his designee, to pursue and accept an invitation as an all-sports member of the Sun Belt Conference.

In the past, the Vandal football team has competed in the Sun Belt Conference, which is 1-A, while all other U of I teams competed in the 1-AA Big West Conference. However, the Big West Conference would like to become an all California conference and is interested in terminating its affiliation with the University of Idaho. The Sun Belt Conference is recruiting the University of Idaho to be a full conference member because in order to be recognized by the NCAA as a Division 1-A conference, the Sun Belt Conference needs to have member institutions that participate in all sports. The University of Idaho contends that joining the Sun Belt Conference at this time is the most prudent move to ensure the viability of all U of I sports for the future as well as help to maintain and enhance the alumni and booster support for the university. Several members expressed concern in voting to approve the request but acknowledged the arguments presented by the U of I. "Board policy recognizes the role of intercollegiate athletics as a legitimate and significant component of institutional activity," said Laird Stone, Chair of the Athletics Review Subcommittee.

Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind - the Board voted to have its executive director work with ISDB Superintendent Angel Ramos in developing a plan of action addressing fiscal, HR and information technology issues.

IDANET -Pam Ahrens, Director of the Department of Administration and Chair of the Information Technology Resource Management Council gave a presentation to the Board addressing the participation level of higher education in the IDANET high-speed telecommunications network. After some discussion Board President Hall asked Rod Lewis, Chair of the Instruction, Research & Student Affairs Committee, to discuss with the institutions their interest in IDANET and any other opportunities for high-speed connectivity including the proposal made to the Board from IBM.