

**January 19, 2004**

**State Board Concerned With Policy, Not Politics**  
**Blake Hall, State Board of Education President**

As a father of six children, I know that nothing is more important than the quality of education they receive. Through new and innovative programs, Idaho is moving forward so our children are prepared to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Idaho's education system is building on the successes created by our dedicated and caring teachers.

To help our teachers, we are providing them with more tools to identify students' needs. In the fall, 177,000 Idaho children took the ISAT. This gives teachers, parents, and students the ability to assess what an individual student's strengths are and what areas need more improvement. We have also established academic standards so when our kids graduate from high school they are ready to enter college or the workforce.

This progress could not be possible without teachers, parents, students and administrators working together to forge ahead. As a parent and the President of the Idaho State Board of Education, I'm pleased with the positive direction our state is moving.

The State Board of Education is made up of seven members appointed by the governor for five-year terms and the state superintendent as an ex-officio, voting member. Every member of our State Board of Education is a committed volunteer who brings a unique perspective to the Board. Our Board includes mothers, fathers, small businessmen, lawyers, teachers and principals, former city council members and, most of all, individuals who are committed to assuring that Idaho's children learn and reach their full potential.

The State Board of Education was created by the Idaho Constitution, section IV and throughout Idaho Code, particularly section 33-107, the State Board is designated as the executive education body. We are charged with supervising all levels of education in Idaho from kindergarten through post doctoral programs.

Some suggested that the State Board is attempting to wrestle power and money from the State Department of Education, particularly when it comes to federal funding. State law requires federal funds to be forwarded to the State Board of Education, which then forwards the vast majority of the funds onto the State Department of Education.

The State Department is administering more federal money now than ever before. In fiscal year 2003, the Superintendent administered and passed through to local school districts \$141.7 million in federal

funds according to state budget documents. For fiscal year 2004, the Superintendent received \$159.8 million. Of that, the State Board will only administer roughly \$5 million for assessment and accountability, teacher training programs and operations. The State Board of Education has confidence in the Superintendent's ability to administer the federal funds or it wouldn't agree to pass on more than \$155 million by the end of the fiscal year.

Critics have implied that because the Board is following the law by overseeing federal money, that it is robbing the State Department of Education of funds and staff. Nothing could be further from the truth. The State Board of Education is not hoarding money to build its own bureaucratic kingdom. When I came onto the Board in September of 2000, the Board employed 20 full time people; today the Board employs 17. In the same time frame, the Superintendent's staff has grown to approximately 144 people.

Any time reform or change occurs, some will try to construe it as political. I've read editorials suggesting that political games are being played. The Board is made up of eight unique and independent individuals, each with their own ideas on education. We don't always agree, but most of the time we do. In the more than 6,000 votes cast since I joined the Board - 98 percent of the time the State Superintendent and I voted the same way. My wife wishes I agreed with her that often.

When we did disagree, it was on policy matters, not political issues. For instance, I voted to support charter schools -- to offer parents the opportunity to have a choice in education; the State Superintendent did not. We also disagreed on the how the state could certify professionals who want to use their education and experience to teach our children. I voted to pursue an alternate form of teacher certification so engineers, doctors, scientists, accountants and other professionals can become certified to teach using their existing college degrees. The Superintendent and I also disagreed on the amount of fees students pay at our colleges and universities. She voted for double digit increases; I did not.

Results from the fall 2003 ISAT indicate differences between students in ethnic/racial groups:

While we, as Board members, may not always see eye to eye on every issue, we can disagree without being disagreeable. At all our State Board meetings, the Superintendent has been treated with respect and in the professional manner that an elected official deserves. The State Board of Education members and staff will remain professional when disagreements arise.

Rest assured the State Board is fulfilling its legal responsibilities by overseeing federal funds and passing them directly to the State Department for local school districts. The State Board remains committed to ensure that Idaho's children receive the type of education that will make them competitive in the world market.