

November 9, 2006

Idaho Launches New Tool For Improving Student Achievement

Just for the Kids – Idaho Empowers Parents with School Performance Data

BOISE — Parents, teachers and policy makers have a new tool to make sense of student test scores.

The Idaho State Board of Education in partnership with the Idaho School Boards Association and an extensive group of stakeholders have teamed up to help Idaho become part of Just for the Kids. The website, www.just4kids.org, is a practical, easy to use website to see how well schools are achieving, and offers exemplary practices from successful schools that can help with school improvements.

"The State Board is committed to helping parents, policymakers and educators get the best information possible on student achievement," said Laird Stone, President of the State Board. "Just for the Kids makes it easy to see just how well schools are doing without having to dissect hundreds of pages of data."

"Just for the Kids website is a great tool that brings the data together in one place to help the public understand how well the children of Idaho are achieving," said Ernest Jensen, President of the Idaho School Boards Association and a trustee from Idaho Falls School District.

For as long as school test results have been reported and compared to one another, parents, teachers, and school administrators have voiced concern that school results do not accurately reflect achievement and provide little information to help schools improve student performance. *Just for the Kids-Idaho* provides fair comparisons of schools. Each school in the state is compared only to schools that have similar or harder-to-educate students (based on the percentages of students that are economically disadvantaged and other factors such as limited English proficiency, school size, and number of students tested).

Through *Just for the Kids-Idaho*, each school's potential for growth, or its "opportunity gap," is identified in a simple bar chart format. An "opportunity gap" is the difference between the achievement of an individual school and the achievement of the five highest achieving schools in the state serving similar or harder-to-educate students. It represents the school's potential for improvement, which might be achieved by studying and implementing the effective practices of higher achieving schools.

Just for the Kids-Idaho plans to garner private financial support in the months ahead to initiate best practice studies of Idaho elementary, middle, and high schools. These statewide best practice studies

in consistently higher-performing Idaho schools will be posted with the findings of 20 other states on the public website to help not only Idaho schools, but also other schools nationwide.

Idaho eventually will be part of the national database of best practice studies that can be used for professional development and school improvement strategies. This database presents practices and exemplars at the district, school, and classroom levels, and offers a web-based survey, or "self-audit," for educators to examine and compare practices in their own schools with educational practices found in consistently higher-performing schools.