

July 31, 2008

EDUCATIONAL SUMMIT YIELDS POSITIVE GAINS FOR IDAHO STUDENTS

(Boise). Idaho students who are deaf/hard of hearing or blind/visually impaired will realize significant gains in the quality of their education as the result of a collaborative summit in Boise. The gathering, which is sponsored by and facilitated through the Idaho State Board of Education, brought together more than 200 stakeholders, educators, lawmakers and affiliated persons of interest for two and a half days of intense review and strategic planning of specialty sensory education in Idaho.

"I found everyone here engaged, committed and ready to do whatever we need to in order to provide the best educational experience possible for these students," said Mary L. Dunne, Superintendent of the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind.

"I was thrilled to have the opportunity to be heard and my ideas considered," said Faith Stein of Melba, parent of a 3-year old boy who is hard of hearing.

"It's been a very interesting experience," said Carolee Eslinger of Boise, a program administrator. *"It's a diverse group of stakeholders, all with an opportunity to provide input. I'm hopeful that it will guide our state in a positive, meaningful direction."*

"The focus has to be on the kids," said James Solem, chairman of the Planning Commission of the State Independent Living Council. *"Our whole philosophy moving forward with educational services must be centered on the kids."*

"We made a real concerted, exhaustive effort to accommodate everyone's needs and ideas," said Deaf or Blind Education Transition Coordinator Aylee Schaefer. *"It's key to have all the groups here, engaged and heard. We're all acutely invested in the future of these children's education in Idaho,"* said Schaefer.

Although there are 72 students currently served at the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind, more than 1,000 students in Idaho have some sort of sensory limitation (blind or visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing) and receive local services to aid in their individual education. Idaho spends approximately 8 million dollars a year on specialized educational services for students at the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind in Gooding. Local school districts also incur additional costs relative to meeting individual student educational needs.