



COMMENTS TO IDAHO EDUCATION TASK FORCE FORUM

My name is Cindy Omlin. I am the director of Northwest Professional Educators, a nonpartisan, nonunion association providing educators with classroom resources, professional support such as liability insurance and legal services, grants, and other benefits designed to advance academic professionals. We are not a union and we do not negotiate teacher contracts.

I'd like to speak to your goal of increasing effective teachers and leaders. We believe that positive change will only occur when all educators are heard and respected. Teachers have a variety of ideas and opinions to bring to the dialogue — many of which differ from that of teacher union leaders.

Innovation and achievement can only flourish when the structures, policies, and actions that promote union favoritism and group think are eliminated. Currently in the exclusive bargaining environment of the schools, many teachers remain silent or disassociated from the professional organization of their choice because they fear that expressing their views or refraining from union membership will cause them to experience pressure, retribution, or ostracism. This markedly decreases effective professional collaboration that can lead to higher student achievement and the development of teacher leaders.

We encourage the Task Force to promote legislation that will advance teacher professionalism, leadership and effectiveness by supporting a teachers' right to know and equal access bill that would implement an educational climate that is open to fresh ideas and a diversity of teacher voices. It would nurture cooperation and mutual respect by ensuring that teachers know their rights and what is expected under Idaho's right to work statute, inform them of their options for professional associations providing liability insurance and legal services, and require equal access for both union and nonunion teacher associations.

We further believe that a law promoting teachers' right to work and freedom of association will lead to increased teacher willingness to explore and implement decentralized models and appropriate decision making levels, including a variety of bargaining and collaboration models that best fit local communities.

Thank you for your consideration.