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Article: The Gender Gap in Idaho’s “Go-On” Rate

By Dr. Linda Clark, President, Idaho State Board of Education

Idaho’s young women are more likely to continue their education immediately after high school than our young men.

In 2017, 52 percent of female high school graduates enrolled in a career technical program or went to college. The “go-on” percentage rate for their high school classmates who are male was just 38 percent – a 14 point gap that has been fairly consistent for several years, meaning over 60 percent of Idaho’s young men are choosing not to go on to some form of post-secondary education immediately after high school.

The gender gap occurs across all regions of Idaho and is certainly not unique to our state. Board researchers have found that the gap exists across all levels of academic achievement, including students who do well in high school. In a paper published last spring, State Board Chief Research Officer Dr. Cathleen McHugh wrote, “At every level of academic achievement, females are more likely to immediately attend college than males. In fact, the gap increases as the level of academic achievement increases. Specifically, the gender gap in immediate college attendance rates is largest for the highest achieving students.”

It helps to understand reasons why the gap exists. Idaho males are more likely to enlist in the military than Idaho females (Dr. McHugh estimates that of the 2015 graduating class, five percent of male graduates enlisted in the military compared

to one percent of female graduates). A sizable portion of Idaho's young male population also serve religious missions after high school. Additionally, when the economy is good, there are more entry-level jobs available for males without a career technical certificate or degree.

There may be other factors at play across our state. "Many Idaho families tend to hold more traditional values where male students seek to have a job as soon as possible, in order to purchase a vehicle, demonstrate financial independence and prepare for becoming a primary breadwinner," said Graydon Stanley, Vice President for Student Services at North Idaho College. "Add to that a mindset opposed to incurring student debt, and the task of getting more of our young men to consider furthering their education becomes more difficult."

Research conducted by State Board staff indicates the go-on gap between males and females narrows by about one third within three years of high school graduation.

If we are to meet our state's workforce needs, we have to find ways to encourage more of our male students to emulate what most of their female classmates are doing and continue their studies after high school, or to resume their education after completing other obligations.

Encouragement may come from the return on investment (ROI) of a college degree. According to a 2015 study by the Urban Institute, the median earnings for college graduates aged 25-34 were **70 percent higher** than the median earning for high school graduates. When you multiply that over a 40-year career, the ROI is there many times over.

Idaho is working to make that investment appealing to more students. Governor Otter, the Legislature and the Board have partnered to increase funding for high school students to earn college credit by taking dual credit courses while still in high school. We've also worked together to make additional Opportunity Scholarship dollars available including funds for adults to return and finish a certificate or degree.

College and career counselors are in place in many of our high schools working with students **and families** to make sure they understand the long term value of higher education.

Our institutions, particularly our community colleges are changing their business models by delivering programs at night and on weekends making it possible for students to work and go to college at the same time.

A \$15 per hour job looks pretty good right out of high school and right now there are employment opportunities available, but one must ask themselves how long will this economy last and what about opportunities for future advancement?

The State Board of Education is committed to promoting the value of a career technical certificate or a college degree. Training and education are investments *all* of our students should make after high school, not only for themselves and their families, but also for the future of our state.

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