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## **Career Technical Education; a Top Priority for Idaho**

By Debbie Critchfield, President, Idaho State Board of Education

I recently attended a national education conference focusing on how public schools can prepare students to enter the workforce, succeed and help meet demand for skilled workers. Sitting next to me was State Senator Dean Mortimer, chairman of Idaho's Senate Education Committee. The senator turned to me and asked for a quick verbal report on the "return on investment" of \$66 million the state spent last year on career technical education (CTE) and how are we serving more students?

His question triggered a good discussion. We talked about how the Board is partnering with Governor Little's Workforce Development Council and Idaho industry to create more access to technical programs. We discussed how we are bringing industry folks into the classroom, creating internships, apprenticeships, and more flexibility for prior learning experience in the military and the workforce to count as earned credit at our colleges and universities. To be clear, we've made good progress in recent years making it easier for students to transfer credit, increasing the number of CTE instructors in high school and college programs and creating pathways connecting students to high demand careers.

Statewide data shows that students who take CTE classes in high school "go on" to college at a higher rate – over 60 percent - and many enter CTE-related professions including health care, technology and trade fields.

Senator Mortimer and I also talked about areas that need improvement and we know that despite progress made, there is still a significant demand for a skilled

workforce in Idaho. As such, Board priorities for CTE include improving access, creating more capacity for more students and better career placement after graduation. These priorities align with the Governor's overall goal to train and retain a highly trained workforce and encourage former Idahoans to return to our state to live, thrive and contribute. It also aligns with the State Board of Education's goal that 60-percent of Idahoans aged 25-34 will have a have a professional certificate or college degree.

A Board working group is forming to study the current state of CTE, national and international best practices, and make recommendations to strengthen CTE instruction in Idaho. The work group will conclude its work and provide a report by November 1, 2019. Board Members Dr. David Hill and Dr. Linda Clark will lead this effort.

National reports show us that enrollment in technical and other post-secondary programs are directly tied to employment outcomes. If clear pathways for jobs are evident, participation increases. North Carolina has employed a clever play on words, to appeal to its citizens calling it "My Hire Education." Thinking about continued education in these terms invites more scrutiny for delivery, access and alignment, which all can be improved.

"It is important to remember that the State's 60 percent goal is for some form of post-secondary qualification, not just a degree," Dr. Hill said. "CTE programs offer a critical component of the educational opportunities available to Idaho students that prepare them for the workforce of the future."

Senator Mortimer isn't the only one asking questions about the commitment to provide more, and think differently about, workforce training. The State Board of Education is focused on continuous improvement by preparing recommendations for legislative consideration, ultimately aiming to benefit our people, our workforce, our employers and our future.

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