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## **A New Day for Higher Education in Idaho**

By Debbie Critchfield, President, Idaho State Board of Education

The Idaho State Board of Education had a rare and opportune moment to hire new presidents at our four-year college and universities, all within the last year. What this means is we now have a team of new leaders in place who the Board believes will help us transform Idaho's entire higher education system in the coming years.

At last month's Board meeting in Pocatello, the new presidents, joined by the presidents of Idaho's four community colleges and the statewide CTE administrator pledged to "work together to synergize one another's efforts, play to our unique strengths, and better serve the people of Idaho by helping students pursue a better life."

For several years, the Board has been advocating the concept of "systemness" for public higher education in Idaho. The concept is grounded in the belief that our system of institutions is one in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Addressing the Board on behalf of his colleagues, Idaho State University President Kevin Satterlee said the presidents have agreed to a unified vision and shared mission: "This system would be born not out of competition and institutional self-interest, but born from a vision of collaboration and coordination and ultimately create what can be a truly new and more effective ecosystem of higher education in Idaho."

I think I speak for the entire Board when I say that this was music to our ears.

Resources for higher education are limited and we cannot waste time or those limited resources waging turf battles. Idaho has one public system with each institution serving a specific system need. There will always be unforeseen issues and disagreements that undoubtedly will come up. By focusing on the needs of our collective system first, I believe we can more effectively work through differences while supporting the needs of each institution and their students.

When hiring our new presidents, we took careful consideration of how their skill sets met the needs of each institution's specific characteristics. We also thought a lot about how each president could use their strengths to complement the whole system.

The presidents are beginning to work towards these ideals, holding monthly meetings of the "Presidents Leadership Council." As a Board, we expect a lot from this group. They have pledged to work together for the betterment of our entire higher education system and we intend to hold them to it.

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