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## **Idaho's Future Depends on Quality Higher Education**

By Debbie Critchfield, President, Idaho State Board of Education

Since late last year when a tuition freeze and subsequent budget cuts were announced for Idaho's public colleges and universities, a question I'm hearing often can be summarized like this: ...so now what?

We need to recognize that holding down tuition costs is only part of the equation and that an equally important part is figuring out a long-term plan both to sustain our higher education institutions and help them thrive. My fellow State Board of Education colleagues and I are encouraged by the support and interest we have received from people around the state who not only want to maintain, but also improve the financial standing of our institutions that have served generations of Idaho's students, transformed lives and helped build our great state.

Governor Brad Little has expressed his commitment to working with the Board on a plan moving forward. Just last week the Governor met with all eight presidents of our colleges and universities to begin mapping out the course for keeping college affordable for students and families, while meeting the operational needs of our institutions. It was a productive discussion, one of many conversations that are occurring to help us solve this problem together.

As the governance board for Idaho's entire public education spectrum spanning kindergarten to post graduate education, we do not and cannot play favorites. Decisions made to benefit one point on that education spectrum tend to impact other points further along the spectrum as well. We must think about all students

at all times. Our public education system requires strategic attention and support at every level, including policy development and a sustainable funding model.

The State Board of Education is committed to working with the Governor, the Legislature and our institutions to develop recommendations and ultimately a model for long-term stable funding. We recognize there are many levels of accountability in this process. As taxpayers, as parents and as students, we all have a say in this. Our world is changing at a rapid pace. Idaho cannot expect to keep up without quality public institutions of higher learning able to educate and prepare our sons, daughters and grandchildren to find their place and succeed in a new and evolving economy. Our future depends on it.

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