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Higher Education “Systemness” Progressing in the Magic Valley

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

In the decade that I have served on the Idaho State Board of Education, “systemness” has been a top Board priority for public higher education in Idaho. It is a concept in which our system of institutions works together, thus becoming more effective and efficient with their limited resources. Systemness also enables our institutions to be nimble, creative and responsive to workforce demands in local communities.

Last month in the Magic Valley, we witnessed a prime example of how systemness can make educational opportunities available to people throughout our state while strengthening our higher education system and our communities.

The presidents of Idaho State University and the College of Southern Idaho signed a Memorandum of Understanding to support and expand career pathways for students in the Magic Valley without having to uproot themselves or their families.

“Collaboration between institutions of higher education is a key component of meeting workforce demands,” CSI President L. Dean Fisher said. “Our expanded

efforts with Idaho State University are a model of how we can work together to serve Idaho students and to strengthen the economy.”

“Idaho State University is focused on building and expanding effective collaborations and partnerships,” ISU President Dr. Robert Wagner said. “This agreement with the College of Southern Idaho is evidence of our commitment to partner with our sister institutions for the benefit of Idaho students. ISU and CSI are working together to provide students with seamless pathways into healthcare, engineering, and education degrees in the Magic Valley. These degree pathways, along with more in discussion, not only meet workforce demand but are areas of high interest to students. When we work together, the state wins.”

I couldn't agree more.

Here are other examples of how the systemness approach is working for Idaho students and families:

Co-admissions/Co-enrollment agreement signed two years ago by all eight institutions allows community college students who earn an associate degree to move directly into higher level programs at our four-year institutions if they choose to further their studies. The move is seamless because the students can co-enroll at four-year institution and begin taking classes immediately. The Board also established common numbering for general education courses meaning credits transfer seamlessly across all eight public institutions for the courses all students are required to take.

Online Idaho, the Board's digital campus provides students with a seamless digital educational experience no matter where they live in our state and not which institution they attend.

Direct Admissions is perhaps the best known systemness initiative because of the thousands of Idaho students who have benefitted from it since it was launched nearly a decade ago. Through Direct Admissions, high school graduates are automatically admitted to Idaho's colleges and universities free of charge. The program saves Idaho families hundreds of dollars in admissions fees and dozens of hours completing college applications.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield has described the systemness approach as a concept grounded in the belief that our system of public institutions is one in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. By

working together as one system, our institutions become more efficient, effective, and affordable, which creates value and builds support for higher education from the people and the employers of Idaho.

What transpired in the Magic Valley between the College of Southern Idaho and Idaho State University can and will be replicated in other parts of Idaho. The possibilities are endless.

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