



Idaho Digital Learning Academy

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Dear Governor Otter,

Thank you for your support of innovation! The Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA) is recognized both nationally and statewide for its innovative approach to online education. With a firm foundation in online pedagogy and the entrepreneurial and creative efforts of its staff, it has created a culture and system for partnership and collaboration with Idaho school districts that has not been seen before in other educational reform efforts. By providing access to highly qualified faculty trained in online learning, it provides equity and access to thousands of students statewide in nearly all of Idaho school districts.

The Idaho Digital Learning Academy Board of Directors is charged with oversight and accountability through Idaho Code Title 33, Chapter 55. In reviewing the memo from your office dated February 4, 2010, we are concerned about some of the misconceptions about online learning and the impact of IDLA on the general fund. The following table provides additional information regarding the questions that were raised in the memo:

<p>How is IDLA funded?</p>	<p>IDLA is funded through IC33-1020 which is an enrollment driven formula. Enrollment growth is funded similar to a public school district – as more students are taught, more funding is generated. Because of the budget reductions in public schools and cuts to critical educational programs, IDLA has experienced record growth as demand for online teachers and courses has increased. IDLA has offset the impact of school district cuts resulting in a small increase in the line item for IDLA.</p> <p>We, as the Board of Directors, are dedicated to ensuring financial accountability for state funds and provide annual reports to the Idaho legislature, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, legislative services, and the State Board of Education. In addition, this past October, IDLA met before the Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee and provided a progress and financial update to inform JFAC of the growth in online education and how school districts are relying more on IDLA during tough budgets.</p>
<p>How much does IDLA cost taxpayers?</p>	<p>IDLA is part of the general budget for education representing less than ½ percent of the education budget. In fact, IDLA generates a cost savings for the state Idaho of approximately \$3.9 million through economies of scale, district consolidation, and leveraging assets statewide. See attached Cost Savings and Value documents.</p> <p>If the funding formula is changed similar to the Florida Virtual School, there will still be an impact to the taxpayers since Florida</p>

	<p>Virtual is funded as a school district. The only differences will be <u>additional</u> costs for calculating prorated services, additional administrative overhead, and declining opportunities for online education as school districts deny opportunities for students because of declining budgets.</p>
<p>Is there overlap between what IDLA does and the work of the Department of Education?</p>	<p>No, IDLA does not overlap duties of the Department of Education as IDLA is an <u>online school</u>. It teaches online courses to students across the state using Idaho-certified teachers. IDLA implements the standards that the State Department of Education and State Board of Education establish much like a school district. It does not duplicate services provided by the Department of Education. It translates the standards into an online environment so that teaching and learning can occur. For additional information on the appropriate services and costs associated with state virtual schools, please see the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) cited in your memo http://publications.sreb.org/2006/06T03_Virtual_School_Costs.pdf</p> <p>Online teaching and learning require a shift in thinking and a transformation of the educational process. As stated in the memo, Florida Virtual, which was established in 1997 and is the largest state virtual school, is a model for online education. I encourage you to review Florida Virtual’s website and see that our positions and responsibilities, albeit on a much smaller scale, are modeled after the Florida Virtual School. Florida Virtual and IDLA have been collaborating since our inception sharing resources and ideas. http://www.flvs.net/areas/employment/Pages/JobDescriptions.aspx</p>
<p>Is it true that IDLA provides this service “cheaper and better” than any other source?</p>	<p>Yes, IDLA was established in 2002 because the Idaho legislature recognized that “choice, accessibility, flexibility, quality and equity” are important for Idaho students and that supporting a state virtual school was a critical part of the education budget. It was not seen as “subsidizing” but as a critical component of the comprehensive educational plan for Idaho. IDLA is better because it meets Idaho standards, uses Idaho teachers, and develops Idaho capacity for online learning.</p> <p>The state of Idaho has seen an amazing “return on its investment” through 40,000+ enrollments, 98% adoption by Idaho school districts, leveraging access to highly qualified faculty (a requirement under NCLB), creating statewide equity to advanced placement courses, dual credit courses, and upper level math/science courses, preventing high school dropouts, and propelling Idaho into the 21st century and a national leader in online education. According to the SREB, it is estimated that 10,000 one semester enrollments should cost \$6 million; IDLA is running at a more cost efficient level serving over 14,000 enrollments in its budget allocation. http://publications.sreb.org/2006/06T03_Virtual_School_Costs.pdf</p>

<p>Aren't there private providers doing the same thing without government subsidy?</p>	<p>Private providers are not doing the same thing as IDLA. There has been discussion in Idaho around the idea that private providers can supply online courses at a lower cost than IDLA. There is, however, absolutely no evidence to support this claim.</p> <p>Private providers operate full-time online charter schools in Idaho and other states. These full-time schools are not the same as IDLA or the state virtual schools in other states. There is no state in which private providers are playing the same role as a state virtual school. In fact, Florida has recently considered having private companies provide supplemental online courses; the Florida Department of Education recommended that this change to Florida education not be made until the data systems exist to demonstrate quality at the course level basis. These data systems do not yet exist in Florida, Idaho, or any other state.</p> <p>In addition, taxpayers would pick up the bill when private providers are purchased without student academic results, when private providers focus on 'cheaper' prices at the expense of quality and standards, when student-teacher ratios significantly increase to reduce costs, and when Idaho "outsources" online learning expertise to out-of-state and out-of-the-country providers.</p>
<p>Since funding for public schools is being reduced again this year, will IDLA funding also be decreased?</p>	<p>IDLA's funding per enrollment has decreased over the last several years. IDLA's formula is calculated based upon salary based apportionment. As salary based apportionment is reduced by the Idaho legislature, IDLA receives a proportionate decrease. IDLA is serving more enrollments with less and has been for the last several years.</p>
<p>Does the Governor's budget propose eliminating IDLA?</p>	<p>The IDLA Board of Directors is encouraged that the Governor recognizes that IDLA provides "ground-breaking educational opportunities". IDLA is a school and <u>connects Idaho teachers to Idaho students</u>. IDLA trains Idaho teachers and administrators for the 21st century and transforms how they think about teaching and learning in their physical classrooms. IDLA is a collaboration and consolidation of Idaho school districts and a partnership providing online training in schools on how to implement online learning for student success. In addition to 200+ online teachers and 165+ online courses, IDLA provides a student orientation, ISAT preparatory materials, training of district staff for student online success, webinars and online professional development, regional support, administrative services, technology support for online learning, continuous school improvement based upon student and school district input, blended learning, teacher accountability including pay for performance and most importantly develops Idaho capacity for online education.</p>

<p>Have other states accomplished this (funding)? If so, what were the results?</p>	<p>According to the 2009 Keeping Pace with Online Learning http://www.kpk12.com/downloads/KeepingPace09-fullreport.pdf , Florida Virtual and the Idaho Digital Learning Academy are the <u>only</u> states who have created funding growth formulas for their state virtual schools. All other states fund state virtual schools via annual appropriations or one-time grants. The funding of online education is complex. What works in one state may or may not work in another state based upon local needs, culture and priorities.</p> <p>In response to your concern, the IDLA Board of Directors is convening a task force to examine this complex issue. The task force will be made up of legislators, school administrators, IDLA Board members, and representatives from school boards and the State Department of Education. We would like to invite a member of the Governor’s office to participate in this task force. The goal will be to generate an Idaho proposal for the 2011 Legislative Session based upon a thorough analysis of the complex issues and ramifications of a proposed change.</p>
<p>Is there any evidence to show what the Governor has proposed would be an improvement?</p>	<p>According to the SREB report cited in your memo to the Idaho legislature, <i>“From both equity-of-access to quality education and cost-savings perspectives, funding state virtual schools makes sense. These schools do not duplicate effort, and states can hold them accountable for the courses they teach and the students they serve. Most traditional public schools would not be able to equal the quality and range of courses provided by virtual schools for the same cost. But as state virtual schools have developed, and questions about their effectiveness have receded, their funding models generally have not kept pace with their growth. With the early years of implementation now past, it is critical to long-term state educational improvement that the budgets of state virtual schools be established as an integral part of the budgets of public education.”</i></p> <p>http://publications.sreb.org/2008/08T03_crit_transition_svs.pdf</p> <p>Idaho’s current funding formula for IDLA supports growth in online education and supports the guidance of the SREB. Regardless of allocating on a macro level or on a per pupil basis, funding for online education should be a part of the education budget.</p>

<p>Is the Governor trying to eliminate IDLA to benefit the Idaho Education Network (IEN)?</p>	<p>The IDLA Board of Directors believes that the Idaho Education Network through increased bandwidth is an integral component of access for Idaho students and schools to opportunities within IDLA. As a public school choice learning environment within the K12 public school system (Title 33, Chapter 55), the IDLA Board of Directors would like to reiterate our previous request given to the Department of Administration to receive equipment and bandwidth through the IEN in the first phase. As stated in Idaho code 67-5745D(6a) that the first phase includes connections for IDLA to "share educational resources with any other location" and support the state's efforts in this project.</p>
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The funding for public schools was created prior to online education and was designed for the 20th century. It did not envision online education, removal of geographic boundaries, online access to highly qualified faculty throughout the state, and innovative technology and applications such as smart phones, desktop videoconferencing, kindles, twitter, blogs, and wikis. It requires rethinking the learning process; it requires rethinking education for students; it requires rethinking our financial priorities for public education for the 21st century. IDLA is school district consolidation at its finest and is supported by Idaho school districts, school boards, parents and students throughout the state.

IDLA has proven itself since 2002 and has resulted in widespread adoption by public schools, academic achievement and access by Idaho students, and cost savings through district consolidation of online teachers, curriculum, and technology support. The overall impact to the public schools budget is minimal. In an era of uncertainty and fiscal volatility, IDLA makes sense. We look forward to continued dialog with your office in the future.

Best Regards,



George Boland
 IDLA Board Chairman &
 Superintendent, Idaho Falls School District



Donna Hutchison, Ph.D.
 Chief Executive Officer
 Idaho Digital Learning Academy

Cc: Members of the Idaho House of Representatives, Members of the Idaho State Senate, Superintendent Tom Luna, Wayne Hammon, IDLA Board of Directors, Idaho Association of School Administrators, Idaho Education Association, and Idaho School Boards Association