

January 20, 2010

Governor C. L. "Butch" Otter
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, Idaho 83720

Dear Governor Otter:

Thanks to your leadership and the work of innovative educators in your state, Idaho has taken its place at the forefront of K-12 online learning in the United States. As President and CEO of The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL), I relish pointing policymakers toward Idaho as a state that embraced online learning early and in a comprehensive way. With multiple virtual charter schools offering a full-time online option plus one of the nation's leading supplementary online programs, Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA), connecting over 20,000 Idaho students in 40,000+ individual courses they could not otherwise take, it is no wonder that Idaho has been celebrated by the Center for Digital Education and others for its achievements in this area. And now the newly announced Idaho Education Network (IEN) intends to leverage public and private investment to ensure that Idaho's schools have the high-speed access and connectivity tools they need to take full advantage of online learning opportunity.

That is why I was so troubled to hear that your Budget recommends phasing out funding for the IDLA. I am writing today to urge you to reconsider for the sake of Idaho's students and greater online learning future.

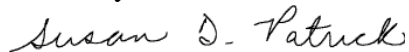
I am sure you would agree that IDLA has been the primary engine for Idaho's online learning revolution. Since its founding in 2002, IDLA has provided a model for the nation in its ability to respond to the needs of students and school districts with cost-effective online curriculum and instruction. Idaho public schools now rely on IDLA courses to provide credit recovery, Advanced Placement, higher level math and science, foreign language and technology courses that both the state and its students need to for success in the 21st century. IDLA was one of the first K-12 online programs in the country to offer Dual Credit courses – 75 college credits available at last count – to provide Idaho students a leg up on college. IDLA is also serving as a remarkably efficient provider of professional development courses for Idaho teachers.

Governor Otter, I admire and support your commitment to frugal stewardship of your citizens' tax dollars, which in this year more than ever means finding effective ways to do more with less. I would submit that your state's investment in K-12 online learning is

perfectly consistent with that overall effort, providing as it does a mechanism by which school districts can access world-class curriculum and instruction that they would otherwise simply not be able to afford. The addition of the IEN as a network and clearinghouse should mean that districts can access IDLA courses, along with other exciting synchronous and asynchronous instructional content, faster and more cost-effectively than ever before. As complementary advances in online learning infrastructure, IEN and IDLA together can catapult Idaho even further into the K-12 online learning lead in the U.S.

Other states that have invested wisely in K-12 online learning over the past decade, as Idaho has, are now exploring options for sustainable funding that reduces the need for separate annual line-item appropriations. But iNACOL always advises these states to be certain that any new approach to funding ensures that any student in the state has access to the online learning opportunity that is right for him or her – that no student be denied an AP or dual credit, foreign language, credit recovery or other course because the state’s online learning funding structure puts that course out of reach. iNACOL believes that IDLA is as essential to that rule of thumb for Idaho as online learning itself is to Idaho’s brightest future.

Sincerely,



Susan Patrick
President and CEO

cc: Superintendent Tom Luna
Senate Leadership
House Leadership
Senate Education Committee
House Education Committee
Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee