



January 28, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter in support of the Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA) and its approach to providing Idaho students with a quality, cost-effective solution for equitable distribution of educational resources throughout all the schools of Idaho. As the CEO of the Virtual High School Global Consortium (VHS), I have over thirteen years of experience in K-12 online education. VHS is an educational non-profit that partners with over 600 schools in 31 states and 43 countries to provide rigorous online courses to expand educational choice for students while also developing their 21<sup>st</sup> century skills through our global, cohort-based model of online course delivery. VHS has been in the forefront of quality online education, with its professional development model of preparing classroom teachers to teach online, with its online course and teaching standards, and with its web 2.0-based online course design model of 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning for online and classroom instruction. My experience in online education also extends to experience of the various state-led and other online programs that have been developed since VHS first started in 1996, and it is from that experience that I would like to share my viewpoint on the Idaho Digital Learning Academy.

IDLA began in 2002 and has since served nearly 40,000 Idaho students. The Idaho legislature has had an unprecedented return on its investment: the creation of an online program which not only has served students, but also teachers and schools throughout the state. IDLA's leaders and staff are to be commended for developing and nurturing a program which complements public schools, rather than competing with public schools and teachers. IDLA's teacher-led online courses do not diminish the role of the teacher, rather they enhance a model of 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching that is applicable to both online and classroom teaching. By preparing teachers to teach online, IDLA is modeling the use of the online environment for a state vision of what 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching can and should be for all teachers in Idaho.

Continued support of IDLA is critical at the executive and legislative levels. K-12 online education is entering a critical stage, where competitors are promising lower-cost programs. However, the lower cost programs come with a different price – lost opportunity costs, lower educational quality and loss of equity and opportunity to students across the state. The opportunity to develop a blended learning model for all Idaho classroom teachers will be lost by bringing in an online program that does not emphasize good online teaching. The other lost opportunity is for Idaho's students – offering them a lesser program, when IDLA's program has demonstrated strong results

in increasing student learning. Idaho has seen rising test scores and academic results statewide through the increased opportunities offered by IDLA, to such an extent that Idaho is ranked #3 in the country for online learning policy and practice by the Center for Digital Education, and #3 for adoption of online learning on a per capita basis (Keeping Pace, 2009). Idaho and the IDLA have achieved a remarkable level of penetration of IDLA courses to students throughout the state, at a level met by very few other states. IDLA has taken the promise of technology and the Internet and created an outstanding program of quality education and access for students throughout the student. The argument others can do it cheaper is a misnomer because IDLA is more than just courses. It is a cooperative between Idaho school districts, building online learning capacity in Idaho schools, providing training and professional development in online teaching and learning for Idaho schools, systematic technology support for IDLA courses, access to 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning experiences for Idaho teachers, and jobs for Idaho educators.

Thank you for this opportunity to lend my support to the Idaho Digital Learning Academy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Liz R. Pape". The signature is written in a cursive style with a loop at the end of the last name.

Liz Pape  
President and CEO  
Virtual High School Global Consortium

**VHS Inc.** 4 Clock Tower Place, Suite 510, Maynard, MA 01754 **T** 9780897-1900 **F** 978-8978-9839