

The following are Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna's prepared opening remarks for the Students Come First Technology Task Force meeting on June 13, 2011.

Thank you for being here today. This is the first meeting of the Students Come First Technology Task Force.

I want to begin by personally thanking each of you for your willingness to serve on this committee. Your commitment of your time, talent and expertise will benefit Idaho and its children for decades to come.

The purpose and goal of public education must always be focused on higher and higher student achievement. There is really no other purpose; therefore, the work of this committee must be focused on increasing student achievement. As you evaluate programs, policies and ideas, ask yourselves over and over again:

- Will this improve student achievement?
- How will it improve student achievement?
- Can its effectiveness be measured? And if so, how?

The vision of this committee is the same vision that was established and agreed upon by all stakeholders in education. As members of the Education Alliance of Idaho, we all agreed that the vision for education in Idaho is: "Idaho is a global leader, providing high quality, cost effective education to its citizens." The mission is: "Idaho's public education system is accountable for the necessary leadership, resources, capacity, and instruction to guarantee high achievement for all students." All education stakeholders agreed that our efforts individually and collectively would be centered on this Vision and this Mission statement. And so it must be with this committee.

If the vision is to be a "global leader" and the mission is "high achievement for all students," then it is important for this committee and everyone within the education community and outside of it to know where Idaho stands as a global leader in education and how we are doing providing high achievement for all students.

So let's take a look at our state measures. Adequate Yearly Progress, or AYP, is one measure. Three years ago, 26 percent of Idaho schools met AYP. Today, 62 percent of our schools are meeting AYP. Idaho led the nation in the increase in the number of schools making AYP. Our schools have made progress.

Reading is another important measure. Why? We know reading opens the door to all learning, and if a student is not reading at grade level by the end of third grade, 7 out of 8 of them will never catch up. According to the Idaho Reading Indicator (IRI), over the past few years, we have seen improvement in the number of third graders reading at grade level. We have gone from 66 percent of our students leaving third grade reading at grade level to 77 percent of our third graders reading at grade level. That's impressive improvement, but we still have work to do.

Now, let's take a look at this series of pie charts to give us some more insight on statewide measures. Say you have a class of 100 students in Idaho. We know that 91 will graduate from high school because we have a 91 percent graduation rate. That's good news. Idaho has one of the highest graduation rates in the country. Now look at the next chart. Of those 100 students, only 42 will go on to postsecondary education, such as college or into professional education because we know the rate of students going on in Idaho is about 46 percent.

Once in postsecondary, 40 percent of those students will need remediation when they arrive, and 38 percent of them will not return for their sophomore year. I do not believe it is a coincidence that about 40 percent need remediation in postsecondary education and nearly 40 percent decide not to return for a second year.

When it all said and done, we know that about 34 percent of Idahoans, 25 years or older, end up with a post secondary degree or certificate.

Idaho has one of the highest high school graduation rates at over 90 percent, but when we look at those who go onto postsecondary education Idaho is one of the lowest in the country. Now, let's take a look at how Idaho students compare nationally among students in other states when it comes to student achievement in grades K-12.

Take a look at the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the assessment that compares students in math, reading and other subjects among states. On NAEP, students in eight states outperform Idaho's 8th graders in math. Students in 14 states outperform Idaho's 8th graders in reading. This data gives us a glimpse on how we are performing as compared to the rest of the country, but once again, our stated vision and goal is to be a global leader.

Where are we as a state, compared to other countries? Let's look at the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This international assessment provides the ability to see how individual countries are performing when compared to other countries. If you look at the global comparison, the state of Massachusetts ranks highest in the U.S. at No. 17. The United States ranks 49th in the world. Idaho is ranked No. 71.

This data begins to tell you how we compare with the rest of the world. Why is this important? Why is it necessary for our children to not only compete with students in America, but the world as a whole? It is necessary because economic competition is global, focused, fierce and unrelenting. Our children will and are competing in a job market that none of us have had to experience in our lifetime.

The fact is that everybody in the world wants our jobs and the standard of living that comes with them. For the first time ever, they have the means to take them. Too many jobs in Idaho and around America are going off shore, not just because of tax breaks or cheap labor or government regulations, but it is because that is where the educated work force is. Intellectual capacity is the currency of the 21st century. Other countries have figured this out.

So what do we do? Denial is always an option, and probably the most common one today. But that is surely not going to help us adapt to the new reality all around us. Not making a decision

is a decision, and it's usually the wrong one. Another option is that we could limit our response to today's economic challenge with traditional economic remedies: tax cuts and incentives, lower interest rates, ease up on credit, invest in research and development, the usual approaches. There is no doubt that they will have a positive impact, but none of them will fundamentally change the path we are on, which is intensifying global competition. That threatens to sweep away with it a great deal of what we as Idahoans and Americans have come to believe is our birthright.

So our response today, to today's challenges, demands a whole new approach. It must include a systemic, comprehensive change to the way we approach and deliver education. If we want to give ourselves and our children a fighting chance, we must dramatically improve both the output and efficiency of our schools. A country's ability to compete economically is no longer based on who has the greatest amount of natural resources or capital. That is the past. The new competition is in innovation, invention, creativity, productivity and vision. Integral to all of these is learning.

Our future, and most importantly our children's future, depends on brains, not brawn. The best, or I should say the best-trained brains, will win. It is no longer good enough to have our children do well in school. We want them to do well outside of school, in the real world. In order to achieve this, we need change that is transformational, not gradual and incremental. It means twice the educational output, however measured, with limited resources now and in the future. It means that every student who graduates from high school not only graduates but goes on to college, professional-technical school or the workplace, and once there, does not need remediation. It means that education is at once more rigorous and more engaging, not for just some students. It is more rigorous and engaging for all students.

This is where a heavy dose of properly implemented technology, coupled with historic amounts of professional development for educators, comes in. We must educate more students at a higher level with limited resources. We can't just tinker around the edges. If we are truly committed to dramatically increasing student achievement, then we must be willing to make historic, systemic changes to our public schools. This won't be easy. I know that. No one ever said it would be easy; disruptive change never is.

The fact is we cannot continue to do more of the same. Our education system today relies on millions and millions of dollars in new funding every year just to continue to do what we have done in the past. If we want to do anything new, like more needed technology or professional development, we need millions and millions more. Those days are behind us, at least in the near future. They may never come back. Our education system must adapt to meet the realities of this new normal in our economy by providing new and strategic investments into the classroom so every student – no matter where that student lives – has access to the best educational opportunities.

We have to transform every classroom in the state of Idaho. Some are already on their way there, but not all. For the most part, we have been trying to prepare our kids for the 21st century using a 19th century model. We can no longer fit a square peg into a round hole. Times have changed. Our economy has changed. Our students have changed. Our world has changed. Our education system must adapt to those changes, too.

We have to bring 21st century technology and all that it makes possible into the classroom. We must have 21st Century Classrooms to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The 21st Century Classroom is not limited by walls, bell schedules, school calendars, local staff certifications and endorsements, and most importantly, geography. For no other reason than where they live, many students do not have access to the same opportunities that other students enjoy and that many of us taken for granted.

Instead, the 21st Century Classroom is focused on what the student needs when the student needs it and ensures every student has access to a highly effective teacher, the necessary technology, and high academic standards that are comparable with any other country in the world. This past legislative session, the Legislature approved Idaho's new achievement standards for math and English language arts. These new standards are fewer, clearer and higher. They are career and college level, and equal to any academic standards in the world.

The Legislature also restored funding for technology that had been completely eliminated a couple of years ago. By putting the right technology with the right professional development for every teacher, we can bring a world of information and knowledge into every classroom for every student no matter where they live or go to school. Part of this task force's work is making sure that every classroom and every teacher has the tech-savvy tools to teach and engage our tech-savvy students. This is what every classroom in the 21st Century Classroom must look like.

The work of this task force also will focus on bringing all of our high schools to a one-to-one ratio of mobile computing devices to students. Within the next five years, Idaho's high schools will have a one-to-one ratio of students to computers, not just some but all. We'll make them mobile so each local district can determine how these devices will be integrated into the curriculum, the classroom, and everything in education. For example, these mobile computing devices will be the textbook for every class, the calculator in math, the word processor in English, the research device in science, and the portal to a world of information and knowledge in every subject area. We know that 15,000 schools all across America have already reached the one-to-one ratio. In response to shrinking revenue and to provide new ways to meet the needs of all students, states like Indiana, Oregon, Florida, and Louisiana have adopted online science materials in place of printed material. This must happen in all of our schools not just some.

As this committee begins its work, we must always remember and never forget that more technology alone is not the answer. Without proper implementation, many of the promises and opportunities of technology will be lost. Take a look at this slide. It shows student achievement data and other measures in schools without a one-to-one ratio, schools with a one-to-one ratio, and schools that properly implemented a one-to-one ratio.

If you look at the bar graph focusing on the reduction in the dropout rate on this slide, you will see that schools with a one-to-one ratio did see an improvement in the dropout rate of about 58 percent. But look at those schools that implemented the one-to-one ratio properly. They saw even better improvements in their dropout rates of about 89%. That is a 31-point difference. Therefore, much of the work of this committee will focus on the proper implementation and professional development.

Along with all this new technology, it is essential and critical that historic amounts of professional development are provided to classroom teachers and educators. As I already stated, much of the work that we will do in this task force and subcommittees will be focused on implementation. As we move toward new ways of educating students in the 21 century, we must also look for new ways of providing professional development. We are not talking about training teachers on how to turn on a computer or run a clicker program or use a whiteboard. They already know how to do that. What we need is data-driven professional development that is focused on the needs of the individual teacher and ensures that all technology is integrated into the school, classroom and curriculum. I encourage you to explore those ideas. In fact, rather than only focusing on and searching out the “best practices,” we should focus on “next practices.” Think completely outside the box as you look for answers to all of the questions you address.

What we are talking about is finally closing the digital divide. Three years ago, the Idaho Rural Education Task Force identified the technology gap as a major concern that required immediate attention. Even with our timeline, which some have called ambitious, we are still five years away from reaching a one-to-one ratio in all of our schools. How much longer are we to expect these students to settle for fewer opportunities and fewer offerings, for no other reason than where they live? Do we wait for the economy to improve? Do we wait for increased revenues? We can't wait. We must be willing to spend the money we have differently. We have to ensure that every student has access to the same educational opportunities.

For these same reasons, we must expand virtual learning. The State Board of Education will determine the number of online credits a student must receive to graduate from high school. The requirement will be in effect for the class of 2016. That's five years from now. Five years from now, our students will engage in more virtual learning, not less. We have to prepare our students to be successful in this new learning environment, in the same way we are preparing them today to be successful in math, reading, or science. Recently, at the State Board meeting in Moscow, the university presidents all discussed their expanding use of online education. The College of Western Idaho stated that 30 percent of their courses are taken online. Boise State reported that 10 percent are taken online, and it is the fastest-growing offering they have. Some reported that students are not as prepared to learn in an online environment, and that as the demand grows, our high school graduates must be better prepared. Many of our students are already taking online courses, but not all.

Five years from now, we know that the majority, if not all, of our students will be expected to engage in online learning or working online in some way when they graduate from high school. We have to prepare them for this. Anyone who thinks or believes otherwise is not accepting the realities, the possibilities, and the expectations of the 21st century. As the world changes, so must our education system.

As we begin this most important work, as we consider solutions and options to today's challenges, remember the vision and the mission statement adopted by all education stakeholders and leaders in Idaho: Idaho will be a “global leader” and all students will be high achievers.

One last thought: Imagine what is possible when we get past the 'that's impossible' stage. Thank you for your service. Good luck, and I look forward to working with you.