

IDAHO AT RISK

**HOW BOLD LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY
CAN PREPARE IDAHO FOR THE FUTURE**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PREPARED FOR THE

IDAHO STATE LEGISLATURE

2019



This research was funded by the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation. All views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation or ECONorthwest. We thank Jennifer Swindell of Idaho Education News and Tim Taylor of America Succeeds for their thoughtful comments, suggestions, and assistance.

AUTHORS:

Kevin E. Cahill, PhD
(Corresponding Author)

John Tapogna

Lauren Butler

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young Idahoans today face an economic environment where rapid technological advancement plays a central role. In many ways these technologies have improved our quality of life and enabled possibilities that were unimaginable just a generation ago. These technologies have also greatly altered the landscape of our job market. The highly skilled—those who can best navigate the pace of innovation—are in demand and rewarded while the lower skilled are increasingly substitutable and left behind. Now more than ever a subpar education poses major obstacles to economic advancement, and without bold leadership the economic outlook for the next generation of Idahoans looks bleak.

The storyline that the quality of public education in Idaho comes up short is not new. Idaho's educational system underperforms at nearly all stages of schooling from pre-kindergarten through postsecondary education, despite the strong efforts and good intentions of Idaho's educators and students. Only about one-third of three- and four-year-old children in Idaho are enrolled in some type of early education—11 percentage points below the national average—leaving approximately one half of the state's incoming kindergarteners unprepared to learn how to read. Nearly four out of ten third grade students are unable to read at grade level, and just over one-third of Idaho's fourth and eighth graders (40% and 35%, respectively) meet math proficiency standards on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a nationwide evaluation of student academic performance. More than two out of three high school students in Idaho are not college and career ready, and our graduation rate—approximately 80 percent—ranks near the bottom of the country. Over one-third (38%) of Idaho's first-year college students require remediation classes, and only about one half of Idaho's college students completed their degree within six years, a full 15 percentage points below the rest of the country. The details behind these measures are important, and are discussed in this report. Still, the takeaway is not subtle: Idaho's educational system grossly underperforms.

The consequences of Idaho's failing educational system are many. **Education is one of the strongest indicators of personal health and longevity and, societally, education enhances civic engagement, reduces incarceration, and relieves taxpayer burden.** For example, educational attainment is widely recognized as one of the strongest

indicators of participation in volunteer organizations, tolerance for different views and opinions, and involvement in religious organizations, while less-educated individuals demonstrate more distrust of democracy and their fellow citizens. Higher levels of education reduce criminal activity, which improves societal welfare, lowers costs for communities, and reinforces the long-term effects of more productive citizens and safer communities. Higher levels of educational attainment also increase the probability of labor force participation, reducing dependence on social programs and alleviating taxpayer burden.

The economic consequences of education are equally important and have become much more pronounced in recent years. One reason is that the fast pace of technological advancement benefits those with the skills required to navigate it, while leaving behind those who are unskilled. This dynamic has played out in the way earnings have evolved in recent decades. Beginning in the 1990s, the college wage premium—the difference in wages between college-educated workers and high school graduates—began to increase substantially, and by the early 2010s, college students were earning nearly double what high school graduates were earning (i.e., a wage premium of 100 percent). The changing trend in the wage premium has to do with many demand-side (employer) and supply-side (worker) factors, but a critical feature has been a shift in the importance of what economists call "knowledge capital."

Knowledge capital (skills) are what matter when it comes to preparing our students for success in our new, technology-based economy—not years sitting at a desk in school.

“YES, WE NEED TO INVEST MORE IN EDUCATION AND JOB TRAINING, **BUT OUR EDUCATION AND JOB TRAINING INSTITUTIONS ARE OSSIFIED, DESIGNED AND BUILT IN ANOTHER AGE TO MEET A VERY DIFFERENT SET OF CHALLENGES.** SINCE THE 1970S, WE HAVE Poured MONEY INTO THEM IN AN EFFORT TO MEET GREATLY EXPANDED NEEDS, SEEN THE PER-STUDENT COSTS SKYROCKET, AND THE OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS BARELY IMPROVE AT ALL.”¹

This past November, in his final (and 373rd) blog for *Education Week*, Marc Tucker, the president of the National Center on Education and the Economy, wrote about the need to modernize our educational institutions. Our institutions, Tucker argued, must be redesigned if we want to see higher performance.

The first step toward improvement is an awareness of our situation and the ability to properly identify the problem. We cannot alter the global tide of economic advancement and, as such, the economy we face and the pace at which technological change occurs should be considered exogenous or taken as given. The problem, as we describe above and in detail in this report, is that **Idaho’s educational system comes up short in preparing students to navigate the pace of innovation.** The second step requires bold leadership, where meaningful goals are established, and individuals are held accountable for meeting these goals. We identify six considerations: focus on outcomes, implement data-driven strategies, leverage state income growth to increase equitable school funding, enable local control, improve education system support and

accountability, and promote system agility. Effectively implemented, these goals can put Idaho on a trajectory where the pace of technological advancement works in our favor. The status quo, in contrast, inevitably means that Idaho will fall further behind, to the detriment of our children.

IDAHO IS AT RISK.

Not only is Idaho coming up short with respect to educating our children, but we are doing so in an economic environment that can be punishing to those with lower skills. Left unchanged, our educational system will leave Idaho’s next generation ill-prepared, with limited opportunities and a low standard of living. Idaho, as a state, will suffer the negative social, health, and economic outcomes that stem from lower levels of educational attainment.

THE SIX CONSIDERATIONS

LEADERSHIP, GOAL SETTING, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

A critical challenge to changing Idaho's education system has been a lack of bold leadership, where meaningful goals are set and individuals are held accountable for meeting these goals. A good example is Idaho's teacher evaluations. Presently, 96.4 percent of Idaho teachers score proficient or better on their annual evaluation conducted by building principals, a number that has remained virtually unchanged over the past four years.² Teachers, like all professionals, have different levels of ability, and a meaningful metric would reveal a distribution in teacher quality. A zero-one metric indicating that 19 out of 20 Idaho teachers are performing proficient or better is highly problematic.

The focus needs to be on meaningful metrics applied to areas where change is possible. What our leaders can change is the degree to which our educational system prepares students to navigate our increasingly technology-based economy. **We identify six considerations:** focus on outcomes, implement data-driven strategies, leverage state income growth to increase school funding, enable local control, improve teacher support and accountability, and promote system agility.³

#1

Focus on Outcomes

Student engagement and achievement measures, like test scores, are better predictors of success than educational attainment alone.⁴ A focus on academic achievement, as opposed to time in the classroom, will therefore help ensure that the objective is to learn relevant skills and help Idaho's students realize economic gains. A focus on achievement could also be paired with accountability measures (see below) so that officials can better identify areas for improvement. Student engagement should be a particular area of focus. According to a 2018 Gallup Survey of K-12 School District Superintendents, approximately nine out of 10 respondents felt that both high school graduation rates and student engagement and hopefulness were key indicators of school effectiveness.⁵ Students who felt engaged in school and who were hopeful reported less absenteeism and had better self-reported academic performance.⁶

#2

Implement Data-Driven Strategies

Many of the proven successes demonstrated in other states can be applied in Idaho with significant expectations of success, even taking into account state-level differences.⁷ Increased data collection and improved data management tied to these strategies could further enhance Idaho's ability to assess educational outcomes and improve accountability.

#3

Leverage State Income Growth to Increase School Funding and Make It More Equitable

Idaho's current per-pupil spending is one of the lowest in the nation, constrained by Idaho's relatively small economic pie (i.e., GDP) and its relatively high population of school-age children.⁸ Critically, higher total spending on education, in and of itself, does not guarantee improvements in outcomes, but adequate funding can be a necessary condition for improvement.⁹ Further, funding should target workforce needs and provide career-focused learning experiences to students, and be distributed equitably throughout the state.

#4

Enable Local Control and Individual Choice

State centralized directions, especially in Idaho with its large geographic area and rural populations, can hinder local school flexibility and create inefficiencies when specialization is needed. Local control can promote experimentation by districts and, when supported with statewide performance accountability measures, can work to substantially improve student outcomes. Centralization can also present headwinds when it comes to innovation and improvements for Idaho's families and students. Charter schools are an example of how increased autonomy can promote innovation in Idaho while maintaining accountability and local control.¹⁰ In return for enabling local control, measures of accountability should be imposed. As it now stands, districts receive the same amount of funding regardless of how they perform.¹¹

#5

Increase Support and Accountability for Superintendents, Principals, Teachers, and School Boards

Investments in teacher quality can increase reading and math achievement more than reducing class sizes alone.¹² One way to improve teacher quality is to provide teachers ongoing training and support throughout their time as educators using proven best practices from educational research, and to better align recertification credit requirements and professional development with current teaching challenges. Most states allow recertification through continuing education, a pathway that includes: higher education coursework (43 states); workshops, conferences, and other professional development (42 states); job-embedded professional development (23 states); National Board Certification (17 states); and other efforts (22 states).¹³

#6

Promote an Educational System that Is Agile

In addition to taking direct action to improve the quality of teachers, students could benefit from more efficient teacher staffing decisions. For example, if layoffs are ever necessary, they could be decided based on teacher quality and past performance, not tenure.¹⁴

Following teachers, school leaders are the most influential factor impacting student achievement.¹⁵ Still, systemwide, Idaho did not have a school accountability system in place from 2014 until the fall of 2018, meaning that Idaho did not rank or rate the performance of its schools in these years.

Idaho's current plan to comply with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act meets the minimum in accountability.¹⁶ As part of the current plan, Idaho will identify only the five percent lowest-performing schools and assist with school-improvement plans but will not assign schools with summative ratings, instead using multiple indicators to "monitor and differentiate among the state's schools."¹⁷

Another example is that Idaho provides extra funding for career counseling and literacy improvements, and schools have local control over spending, yet these funds are not tied to performance or outcomes, as noted above.¹⁸ More must be done in terms of accountability—tying funding to performance—if we want to see real improvements in Idaho's educational system.

The top priority of America Succeeds' Agility Agenda is for agility to be a foundation of public educational systems. The premise for an agility agenda is that it will likely be impossible to predict how educational systems will need to respond over the coming decades. As such, systems must be able to adapt, and caution must be taken so that the educational system we create today is not irrelevant in the near to intermediate term.

Regardless of how education needs to adapt, five basic principles should remain a priority for all regions within the state: 1) all children in Idaho should have reading, mathematics, and science skills that are in line with their grade level; 2) all children in Idaho should have access to health and physical education; 3) all children in Idaho should have access to art and music education and history; 4) all children should be taught in a way that builds problem-solving skills and determination; and 5) all children should have a foundational understanding on how to use technology.

IDAHO IS AT RISK. Not only is Idaho coming up short with respect to educating our children, but we are doing so in an economic environment where those with lower skills fall further behind. Left unchanged, our educational system will leave the next generation of Idahoans with limited opportunities, a narrow window for economic advancement, and a lower standard of living. Idaho, as a state, will suffer the negative health, civic, and social consequences of a society that cannot compete economically.

END NOTES

- ¹ Tucker, M. (2018). *I Love the Uneducated*. Bethesda, MD: Education Week. <http://ncee.org/2018/11/i-love-the-uneducated/>
- ² Corbin, C. (2017a). *97 Percent of Teachers Earn Top Marks on Latest Evaluations*. Boise, ID: Idaho EdNews. <https://www.idahoednews.org/news/97-percent-teachers-earn-top-marks-latest-evaluations/>
- ³ These recommendations are based, in part, on those identified by Hill, P.T. (2013). *Frontiers of K-12 Reform Options for Idaho*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education. <https://www.jkaf.org/content/uploads/2015/07/IdahoK12Reform.pdf>
- ⁴ Calderon, V.J., & Jones, J.M. (2018). *Superintendents Say Engagement, Hope Best Measures of Success*. Washington, DC: Gallup, Inc. <https://www.gallup.com/education/243224/superintendents-say-engagement-hope-best-measures-success.aspx>; Calderon, V.J., & Yu, D. (2017). *8 Things You Need to Know About Students*. Washington, DC: Gallup, Inc. https://www.gallup.com/education/231752/things-need-know-students.aspx?g_source=link_wwwv9&g_campaign=item_243224&g_medium=copy
- ⁵ Gallup. (2018). *Leadership Perspectives on Public Education: The Gallup 2018 Survey of K-12 School District Superintendents*. Washington, DC: Gallup, Inc. https://www.gallup.com/education/241151/gallup-k-12-superintendent-report-2018.aspx?g_source=link_wwwv9&g_campaign=item_243224&g_medium=copy
- ⁶ Calderon & Yu. (2017); Gallup. (2016). *The 2016 Gallup® Student Poll: A Snapshot of Results and Findings*. Washington, DC: Gallup, Inc. <https://www.sac.edu/research/PublishingImages/Pages/research-studies/2016%20Gallup%20Student%20Poll%20Snapshot%20Report%20Final.pdf>
- ⁷ For example, when evaluating the implementation of Standards Based Accountability (SBA) as part of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (20 U.S.C. § 6311 et seq.), greater than “80 percent of superintendents in California, Georgia, and Pennsylvania found results from local assessments to be more useful for decision making than state test results” (Marsh, J.A., Pane, J.F., & Hamilton, L.S. (2006). *Making Sense of Data-Driven Decision Making in Education*. Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2006/RAND_OP170.pdf, p. 5). This may be a result of the relatively quick turnaround time for results, the frequency at which the tests can be administered, and closer alignment with coursework. Under NCLB, each state could establish its own SBA with seven core components including: standards for math, reading, and science; adequate yearly progress calculations; interventions and sanctions; an additional academic indicator (e.g., graduation rates); annual assessments; achievement standards for math, reading, and science; and annual measurable objectives in math and reading; (Hamilton,
- L.S., Stecher, B.M., Marsh, J.A., McCombs, J.S., Robyn, A., Russell, J.L., Naftel, S., & Barney, H. (2007). *Standards-Based Accountability Under No Child Left Behind Experiences of Teachers and Administrators in Three States*. Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND_MG589.pdf).
- ⁸ J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation. (2014). *The ReThink Series: Idaho Education Funding*. Boise, ID: J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation. <https://issuu.com/jkaf/stacks/647cea3697f-d4795a85769868ecc578d>
- ⁹ J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation. (2014); Hanushek, E.A. (2003). The Failure of Input-based Schooling Policies. *The Economic Journal*, 113(485), 64-98. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0297.00099>; Gupta, S., Verhoeven, M., & Tiongson, E. (1999). *Does Higher Government Spending Buy Better Results in Education and Health Care?* Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/1999/wp9921.pdf>
- ¹⁰ ECONorthwest. (2014). *Shifting Sands: Idaho’s Changing Student Demographics and What it Means for Education*. Portland, OR: ECONorthwest; Hill. (2013).
- ¹¹ School appropriations are distributed according to Idaho State Legislature. (2018). *Title 33, Education: Chapter 10, Foundation Program – State Aid – Apportionment. Idaho Code 33-1002*. Boise, ID: Idaho State Legislature. <https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH10/SECT33-1002/>
- ¹² Rivkin, S.G., Hanushek, E.A., & Kain, J.F. (2005). Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement. *Econometrica*, 73(2), 417-458. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0262.2005.00584.x>; Hanushek, E.A. (2011). The Economic Value of Higher Teacher Quality. *Economics of Education Review*, 30(3), 466-479. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2010.12.006>; Darling-Hammond, L. (2004). Standards, accountability, and school reform. *Teachers College Record*, 106(6), 1047-1085.
- ¹³ Tooley, M., & White, T. (2018). *Rethinking Relicensure: Promoting Professional Learning Through Teacher Licensure Renewal Policies*. Washington, DC: New America. https://s3.amazonaws.com/newamericadotorg/documents/Rethinking_Relicensure_v10.pdf
- ¹⁴ Kraft, M.A. (2015). Teacher layoffs, teacher quality and student achievement: Evidence from a discretionary layoff policy. *Education Finance and Policy*, 11(4), 1-41; Boyd, D., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2011). Teacher Layoffs: An Empirical Illustration of Seniority versus Measures of Effectiveness. *Education Finance and Policy*, 6(3), 439-454. https://doi.org/10.1162/EDFP_a_00041; Goldhaber, D., & Theobald, R. (2013). Managing the Teacher Workforce in Austere Times: The Determinants and Implications of Teacher Layoffs. *Education Finance and Policy*, 8(4), 494-527.

¹⁵ Lieberman, A. (2017). *A Tale of Two Pre-K Leaders: How State Policies for Center Directors and Principals Leading Pre-K Programs Differ, and Why They Shouldn't*. Washington, DC: New America. <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/tale-two-pre-k-leaders/>

¹⁶ Corbin, C. (2017b). *House Education Approves New School Accountability System*. Boise, ID: Idaho EdNews. <https://www.idahoednews.org/news/house-education-approves-new-school-accountability-system/>; a summary of the consolidated plan can be found at: Idaho State Department of Education. (2017). *Idaho's Consolidated Plan Summary: An Overview of Purpose and Programs*. Boise, ID: Idaho State Department of Education. <https://www.sde.idaho.gov/topics/consolidated-plan/archives/08-10-2017-Idaho-Consolidated-State-Plan.pdf>

¹⁷ Idaho State Department of Education. (2017). *Idaho's Consolidated Plan Summary: An Overview of Purpose and Programs*. Boise, ID: Idaho State Department of Education. <http://www.sde.idaho.gov/topics/consolidated-plan/archives/08-10-2017-Idaho-Consolidated-State-Plan.pdf>, p. 4.

¹⁸ School appropriations are distributed according to Idaho State Legislature. (2018). *Title 33, Education: Chapter 10, Foundation Program – State Aid – Apportionment, Idaho Code 33-1002*. Boise, ID: Idaho State Legislature. <https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title33/T33CH10/SECT33-1002/>

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER.

J.A. and KATHRYN
ALBERTSON FAMILY
FOUNDATION



ECONorthwest
ECONOMICS · FINANCE · PLANNING



IDAHOATRISK.COM

Roger Quarles

J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation

501 Baybrook Ct., Boise, ID 83706

©2019