

Basin 72 Community,

These past few weeks most everyone has read the papers and heard rumors about state Superintendent Luna's proposed education legislation. The primary focus of this legislation is to save money. We as a board thought it would be useful to briefly discuss what the main points of this legislation are and how it could affect us here at Basin 72 if it is passed in its present form. It consists of two separate parts: Public School Changes, and Labor Relations and Employee Entitlements. It is not feasible to go over both parts in detail due to its extreme length (about 150 pages) but it is possible to discuss the important points in each part.

Listed below are the main points of the legislation dealing with public school changes.

- 1) Funding divisors in grades 4-12 will be raised during the regular and summer sessions resulting in less state money for the same number of students which translates into fewer teachers and larger class size. According to Ms. Pilkerton, class size could increase by an average of 9 with one class reaching 15 students.
- 2) In grades 9-12 each student will be assigned a laptop and required to take a minimum of four credits of on-line classes to graduate. The intent is to substitute on-line classes for in-the-flesh teacher classes. Ask a student which method they learn more from.
- 3) Institutes a "pay for performance" program for teachers based on student achievement.

The main points of the legislation dealing with labor relations and employee contracts are listed below.

- 1) Requires that at least 50% of performance evaluations for administrators and teachers be based on growth in student achievement.
- 2) Replaces the current Category 1, 2 and 3 contracts for teachers with new Category A, B and C contracts. One result is that the board can do away with new continuing contracts (tenure) if it sees fit.
- 3) Allows districts to terminate certified teacher contracts if enrollment falls by more than 1%. The school board determines which employees are terminated.
- 4) Negotiations between employees and the board are limited to salary and benefits.
- 5) Master agreements for employees must be ratified each year.
- 6) Failure to ratify any negotiation results in the school board deciding compensation.

To put this attempt to save money into perspective, as you recall from last year, our state government had a budget shortfall and no new sources of revenue. Every school district in the state reduced the size of its budget and with it the services they provided and personnel. At the last minute the federal

government in Washington came through with about \$35 million in education enhancement aid to Idaho schools which helped us a great deal (we still lost several employees and everyone took pay cuts). This year we again have a budget shortfall and no new sources of revenue; however, this time we have no federal aid. If the legislature decides that they will keep education spending the same as last year we start with \$35 million less. According to the best estimate of our administration, if the above legislation becomes law and no new revenue is generated, the school district stands to lose at least \$250,000. This loss in revenue means fewer staff and services and larger class size. All of the school districts in Idaho will be affected by this proposed legislation in some way. Basin 72 is a rural district (which most districts in Idaho are) and as such has its own unique budgetary demands. However, this crisis will not affect us any less than the rest of the state's districts.

Despite these budget cuts over the last two years, and the resulting loss of salary for the employees at basin 72 schools, these people remain as dedicated as ever to providing the best education that they can for our kids; they are truly amazing. However, considering their modest incomes to begin with, they can only take so many pay cuts before they can't afford to pay their mortgages and take care of their families. It would be a shame to drive them out of Boise County looking for better paying jobs due to our lack of leadership and support.

The second part of this legislation deserves a special mention. As written, it severely constricts employee rights and puts a great deal of power in the hands of the school board. This is not necessarily a bad thing but it is always wise to distribute power in governing bodies to provide checks and balances. In a small district such as ours it is very important that each faction has the privilege of due process and fair representation to promote mutual trust. Without trust amongst our board, administrators, and faculty and staff our school district could not function effectively.

The above proposed legislation would institute a great deal of change to our educational system. Change in itself is not bad. There are parts of this legislation that could bring improvements, also it could save money. If it could save money it must be good, right? No, not if it diminishes the quality of education. What we do not want to see as a school board, the people who are ultimately responsible for providing a quality education for your kids, is an institutionalized and systematic reduction in the quality of education year after year for the sake of saving money. It appears that this legislation proposes to take a large step in this direction. We can save or generate money in other ways.

As a final message, we as a school board see the current legislature as presenting us with two problems to solve: Having to do more with less money each year, and trying to deal with legislation that

guarantees a reduction in the quality of education and our effectiveness as a district. This interpretation may seem extreme to you but we have been studying these issues for a long time and if we did not communicate to you the facts as we know them we would not be doing our job. We encourage everyone to e-mail or call your legislators and express your opinions. If you have questions please contact a school board member or a member of the administration. Thank you for your time.

Basin 72 Board of Trustees

Ken Gordon, Chair

Theresa Pledge

Brent Adamson, Vice-Chair

Lisa St. Claire

Rose Washam, Treasurer