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The Community Page

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IT'S TIME TO PUT OUR KIDS FIRST! (AHEAD OF UNION BOSSES)

America's schools have been in trouble for the last three decades. American kids are not keeping up with the rest of the world in the basics. Not even close! Many of the solutions are simple. But the Unions will not let them be implemented. Union bosses fight against testing, pay-for-performance, school choice, and any method of holding teachers accountable for results. They scare teachers into believing their job will not be safe if any methods of measuring results or accountability are implemented within the school system. The result has been devastating! In a recent study of the top 30 developed countries, American kids ranked 25th in math and 21st in science. The same study pointed out that with the global economy American kids no longer compete with just American kids for jobs. They compete with all kids, in all nations. Unless we change our schools, our children will continue to be at a distinct disadvantage.

Idaho schools must seize the opportunity!

Like most states, Idaho has been hit hard by the recession. Tax revenues are down. But kids still deserve the best education we can give them. To give them the education they deserve, Governor Otter and Tom Luna have proposed sweeping changes to the Idaho school system. The proposal is innovative and exciting! But it will be met with extreme resistance from the Union bosses. The legislation has barely been proposed, but the rhetoric is heating up. Before the smoke clears, you can expect the Union to go to great lengths to stand in the way of progress! The idea that we could actually have a school system that would put the interest of our kids ahead of Union objectives will not be tolerated by Union bosses. To understand their outrage, one must understand their objectives.



Melaleuca: the Wellness Company®, knows Idaho's schools. 96% of our 1,678 Idaho employees' families are educated in Idaho.

Great teachers—our most valuable asset!

Teachers are our heroes! They deserve our praise and our respect. Our teachers deserve a much better reward system. Studies show that among all the variables, the quality of a child's education depends mostly on the quality of the teacher. Yet, unbelievably, our current system doesn't even measure the quality of the teacher. There is no financial reward for being the best. Mediocrity is rewarded at the same level as excellence.

Union objective—mediocrity is the standard.

Unions are not known for creating quality, efficiency, or a strong work ethic. To the contrary, their goal is to make a safe haven for even the lowest performer. They understand there is power in numbers. Mediocrity is the standard. In most Union shops if an employee decides to give an above average effort or superior performance, they are asked to tone it down a bit. The result is always destructive to the employer. The demise of General Motors, Chrysler, Ford Motor Company, the entire airlines industry, and the American education system are indicative of the devastating impact that unions have on the industries they serve. Strong unions create failing systems.

Tenure—the sacred cow!

Above all else, Union bosses want to preserve the concept of "tenure." Tenure is what protects even the worst teacher from ever having to worry about losing his or her job. The concept of tenure promises that once a teacher has been employed for three years his or her future employment is guaranteed for life regardless of how poorly he or she performs in the classroom. In theory, tenure still allows administrators to move a poor teacher out of the system. But in reality, there is so much hassle, bureaucracy, and expense that most administrators find it is just not worth the trouble. Some argue that Idaho teacher contracts don't recognize "tenure." But of course that's just semantics. We have the same thing, we just call it "continuing contract." In Idaho, even the worst of teachers stay in the system. When school administrators have had the courage and the energy to remove a poorly performing teacher, they soon discover that the cost of doing so can be in excess of \$150,000. Given their budget, that is deterrent enough. The result is, our kids end up with teachers who are not qualified to teach.

A serious problem!

The national numbers are indicative of the problem. Last year, one out of 57 doctors lost their medical license because of incompetence. One out of 97 attorneys were disbarred. But only one out of 2,500 teachers lost their job because of lack of performance. Studies show that teacher excellence is the most important factor determining the quality of a child's education. Certainly there are many wonderful teachers in the country. But not all of them are wonderful. And thousands of kids across our nation are taught by teachers who have no business being in the classroom.

Where performance is measured, performance improves.

A well-known business axiom states:

- 1) Where performance is measured, performance improves.
- 2) Where performance is measured and reported, the rate of improvement accelerates.
- 3) Where performance is measured, reported and rewarded, the rate of improvement will be optimized.

Measurement, accountability and reward systems are the key to every successful business, every successful sports team, every successful organization and every successful school system.

Some kids can't learn!

One argument that Union bosses encourage teachers to make when arguing against concepts like "pay-for-performance" is: "Some kids just can't learn! In other words, 'What if I get assigned to a few kids who just can't learn? Is it fair to judge me as a teacher if some of my kids just can't learn?!'" There are several simple answers to this concern. Most pay-for-performance proposals suggest a beginning measurement and an ending measurement of each child. Reward systems can be built in so that if a teacher gets a student who is behind at the beginning of the year, there can be extra rewards for getting that child to move ahead in his or her learning achievements as opposed to the "average" child. As a parent, if you had a child who had difficulty learning, would you want that child to be taught by someone who felt they could make a difference and who would be financially rewarded if they could make a difference for the child? Or would you rather have your child taught by a teacher whose theory about your child was, "Some kids just can't learn!"

Courage and Leadership Necessary!

It will take tremendous courage and leadership for our legislature to change the system. The teacher's Union has an extremely powerful lobby. Union bosses have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on recent Idaho elections. In the past, Idaho's legislature has never quite had the courage to stand up to the powerful Union bosses. This time it will be even more difficult. We can expect the national union to become involved. There will be organized marches, demonstrations and intense lobbying. It will take a tremendous amount of leadership and courage for our legislators to do the right thing. The business community supports Governor Otter and Tom Luna in endorsing the changes they are trying to make for the benefit of our children. We hope that our legislators will have the courage to stand up to the powerful Union bosses and set an example to the nation and prove that in Idaho we put our kids first!