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For Immediate Release

“No Accountability” Legislation: Bad Policy, Wrong Message

*Statement from IEA President Layne McInelly*-

The Idaho legislature will be considering a proposal during the upcoming special session that could create chaos and distrust in our state. At a minimum, it sends a message that is the exact opposite of what we should be communicating to our parents, educators, school districts, and communities.

The “No Accountability” legislation, also known as the Special Session Liability Bill, is filled with flaws and trap doors. The state has issued a clear directive that local districts are responsible for both instruction and the health and safety of students and educators—this legislation would enable them to abdicate that responsibility. The legislature has had six months to address the COVID-19 crisis and craft policy around public schools. The best they can come up with is granting blanket immunity to those entrusted with keeping us safe?

If districts were able to unilaterally determine that safety protocols are “impractical”, they would be able to disregard their safety plans and do an end run around the responsibility and accountability they have been charged with. The input of parents, educators, and medical professionals that were the lynchpins of the safety plans passed by elected school boards. Under this legislation those plans could easily be rendered meaningless. Parents and educators deserve safe school environments and transparency as they make decisions on returning to school buildings during a pandemic that is far from being under control in most parts of the state.

Rather than focusing on immunity and end runs around accountability, the legislature should be putting their efforts into providing safe school environments for our students and educators. That means things like enough teachers to accommodate staggered schedules, more nurses and counselors, sufficient technology for remote learning, a robust pool of qualified substitute teachers, cleaning supplies and safety equipment, face coverings, support staff, and safe transportation options for students.

The very fact that this legislation is being considered should raise red flags about what they *are not* telling us about the safety of our school buildings? Big business would benefit from this legislation--Idaho schools would not. Our elected officials can, and should, do better. We encourage all concerned to contact their legislators and convince them to pull the plug on this harmful legislation.