

**Statement on Idaho's school levies, from gubernatorial candidate A.J. Balukoff, Sept. 16, 2014:**

These statistics tell us two important stories about what has happened to our public schools under Butch Otter's tenure as governor. First, Gov. Otter and the Legislature have ignored the constitutional mandate to establish and maintain a general, uniform and thorough system of public, free common schools.

The results of their disinvestment in education have been disaster for our schools, including that 94 of 115 school districts have been forced to resort to supplemental levies just to keep teachers in the classroom and the lights on, while those that cannot pass a levy cannot provide their students with an education comparable to what's offered in wealthier districts. More than one-third of districts have cut back to a four-day school week. Class sizes across Idaho have increased to a point that compromises children's learning. Teacher pay is so low that some of our best educators are leaving for better opportunities in other states. The cuts to state educational funding show the lack of commitment to education by the governor and Legislature, while the increase in supplemental levies shows the people's commitment to education. Clearly, the elected officials are not representing the people. This only considers K-12 funding. Cuts to higher education have been even more drastic. Today, at a time when high-school graduates have to be prepared for college or a job in an increasingly competitive economy, there's nothing uniform or thorough about Idaho's public schools.

The second story these numbers tell us is that Gov. Otter's claim to have cut taxes is a shameful distortion of the truth. Many if not most Idahoans have seen their tax bills increase under Gov. Otter, at the same time that Idaho has raced to the bottom nationally in statistics like per-capita personal income and how much our state invests per pupil. For almost eight years under Butch Otter, Idaho has been heading in the wrong direction. Our kids deserve better than that.

The voters of the Boise School District recognize that we have one of the country's best public-school systems, and they have been consistently willing to support our schools. The result has been the highest student achievement in Idaho and high schools that rank among the best in America. The Boise School Board has prioritized maintaining excellent schools while managing our budget responsibly in the face of the severe cutbacks in education at the state level.