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## **Idaho Schools: Giving and Gratefulness on Display this Holiday Season**

*From Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield*

(BOISE) – In the midst of the season of giving, I’d like to take a moment to consider what this spirit of generosity looks like in our schools and wider communities. Though this spirit is alive and well in our learning communities year-round, it’s never more visible than during the holiday season. The amount of giving that’s generated in our schools is inspiring, and I’d like to take a moment to give thanks to our educational communities for this generosity.

What does this spirit of giving look like in action? I’ve seen student leaders organize secret Santas and look for ways to support their fellow students. I’ve seen teachers go out of their way to help, support and lift up families. This spirit of generosity may look different place to place, but the reason behind it is always the same: we care about each other and the Christmas season brings that out best.

As superintendent, I’ve had the privilege to visit schools across the state, and this has included plenty of December visits. And our school communities really shine during this month! From elaborately lit trees to music, treats and more, the spirit of the season is alive and well in Idaho schools.

I recently had the opportunity to attend a Christmas concert at Timberline High School in Boise and was blown away by the production and quality. The community really came together for this event, making the school and the students a holiday focal point. From our biggest to our smallest schools, December is a time when students showcase their talents and contribute to their schools and communities.

In addition to organized events and performances, schools often find creative ways to make the season bright. Here’s a fun example from my hometown of Oakley: several years ago, I walked into the entryway of my kids’ high school and was greeted by a surprising twist on the traditional Christmas tree. In the middle of the hallway was one of the biggest and strangest Christmas trees I’d ever seen. Blown by the wind throughout its life, this tree had bent to a nearly 45 degree

angle. The students lovingly decorated it and found a way to bring their community together with a surprising take on a Christmas classic. While giving a bent tree a new lease on life, they also gave back to their school with a unique and fun holiday display.

I'd like to thank Idaho's educational communities for their obvious dedication to the positive things that this season brings us. As I've had the opportunity to visit various schools during the month of December, I see all the signs of light-hearted fun combined with feelings of deep generosity and appreciation for what *any* community – school or otherwise – can give back to its members.

Whether you're an educator, student, parent or community member, I hope that you have encountered the fun and giving spirit of this time of year and I wish you the very happiest of holidays.

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