



## **Statement from Kelly Edginton, Head of School for Idaho Virtual Academy, on graduation rates**

**January 26, 2016**

The reason Idaho's graduation rate fell is that it recently adopted the federal government's four-year cohort graduation calculation. It is wrong to blame Idaho's online schools for the state's declining graduation rate. It is statistically impossible for the state's overall graduation rate to have been significantly impacted by Idaho's virtual schools, which serve only about one percent of the student population. Further, using the federal government's four-year cohort to measure graduation rates for online schools is woefully unreliable.

The federal graduation rate was designed for traditional schools, not online schools, even though these schools are successfully helping students, including under-credit transfer students and drop-outs, earn the required credits to achieve high school diplomas. Under the federal calculation, students who took more than four years to graduate, earned a GED, or earned a diploma from adapted guidelines as special education students are considered "non-graduates."

The federal graduation rate assumes that students remain in the same school upon entering high school since most students are zoned into their local school. That is not true for online schools and other alternative schools. Online schools are schools of choice and, for many families, the only public school option available to them. They serve a high percentage of high school transfer students who enter behind in credits and not on track to graduate in four years. Under the federal calculation, serving these under-credited transfer students immediately and negatively impacts a school's graduation rate.

**Research shows that 35% of students who transferred to online schools in grades 10, 11, or 12 were behind in credits at the time of enrollment. The numbers are even higher at Idaho Virtual Academy (IDVA). Between 2011 and 2015:**

- **Over 51 percent of new 12<sup>th</sup> grade students were behind in credits**
- **Over 47 percent of new 11<sup>th</sup> grade students were behind in credits**
- **Over 34 percent of new 10<sup>th</sup> grade students were behind in credits**

**A closer look at the data shows that IDVA is successfully graduating students on time (in 4 years) when they remained at IDVA through their high school career:**

- **90 percent of the students who enrolled in 2011-12 school year and remained enrolled until 2014-15 graduated on time.**

Virtual schools are also a part-time solution for many students. However, when students transfer out of the virtual school, it is difficult and sometimes impossible to document the new school they entered

because state data systems do not effectively track students from school to school. The federal graduation rate does not account for such mobility and unfairly penalizes schools.

**Idaho Virtual Academy did not receive the required information for 71.6% of the students who transferred out of the school and were calculated negatively into its 2014 graduation rate. Under the federal graduation rate model even if these students were enrolled in a different school they were considered “non-graduates” and were counted against IDVA’s graduation rate.**

The ineffectiveness of the federal government’s graduation rate to measure virtual schools is why [experts and researchers](#) in the field of online learning have recommended reforming graduation rate calculations for online schools. Graduation rates should measure student progress toward graduation for the *actual time* the student is enrolled, rather than relying on a four-year cohort designed for traditional schools.

Idaho Virtual Academy has been a fixture in Idaho’s public education system for over a decade. The school has been in good standing with the state and has a consistent record of quality, compliance, and high accountability. Our team of teachers and school leaders are committed to serving the needs of all students regardless of their academic needs and despite how it may impact our graduation rate.