

# State should use care in making changes to community colleges

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The community college bill looks like it may be on legislative sabbatical for this year. As it should.

This issue isn't going away. One of the bill's sponsors, Rep. Ann Rydalch, RIdaho Falls, promised another bill would surface soon — like next year — and the Senate unanimously passed a resolution calling for a summer interim committee to study higher education in Idaho, including community colleges. It is to be hoped committee members do their job and truly study the issue, because the current proposal to put one school in each of six districts might be good for the Treasure Valley, but it isn't necessarily the best thing for Eastern Idaho.

What would be the point of putting community colleges in both Pocatello and Idaho Falls?

To damage what's already in existence, namely ISU, Eastern Idaho Technical College and BYU-Idaho? There's no doubt ISU would be impacted, particularly in Idaho Falls.

ISU currently has 2,600 students attending classes at its Center for Higher Education in Idaho Falls, including 2,200 lower-division students.

At ISU, credit hours currently stand at \$202 for in-state students with a price tag of about \$2,000 per semester for full-time students taking eight credits or more.

At the College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls, one of the state's two existing community colleges, credit hours begin at \$95 for an in-state student, or \$950 per semester for 10 credits or more.

Ouch for ISU, but what a relief for a freshman working his way through college.

ISU officials had an assignment due today — to give the State Board of Education their recommendation regarding the local community college issue.

Without having much time to respond, ISU officials essentially suggest using resources already in place.

ISU already offers lower level core classes like English 101 — as well as upper level courses and certificates — in Idaho Falls, plus the Eastern Idaho Technical College has the vocational and technical training in hand.

Why reinvent the wheel?

ISU suggests making the community college an independent division of ISU in Idaho Falls. The new institution would charge less per credit hour and focus on the things community colleges do well, such as vocational and technical training, teaching the basics and providing their students with a solid support system.

This legislative independent study committee can't forget the funding question either, because the last thing Idaho needs is another unfunded educational mandate. If the state is to set up community colleges, then the Legislature must pony up the start-up funds and put a long-term funding plan in place.

Let's take our time and get this right.