



# BLAINE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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*Superintendent GwenCarol Holmes, Ed. D.*

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Dear Blaine County Neighbors,

When thinking about learning and teaching, I almost always think about what I would want for my own children. They are both grown now and making their way in the world, but I still think about them as my standard for what we should be doing as educators. There has been a good deal of debate about the new standards, both nationally and at the state level. I sometimes wonder in these debates how many folks have really looked at what the new standards are asking. Let's look at one math sample to compare what we might have asked our children to understand under the old Idaho standards and what we expect them to understand now under the new Idaho Core Standards.

## Old Standards Task:

Which of these numbers is the smallest?

- a. 23.42
- b. 23.18
- c. 23.21
- d. 23.35
- e. 23.24

## New Idaho Core Standards Task:

Five swimmers compete in the 50-meter race. The finish time for each swimmer is shown below. Explain how the results of the race would change if the race used a clock that rounded to the nearest tenth.

Swimmer A: 23.42  
Swimmer B: 23.18  
Swimmer C: 23:21  
Swimmer D: 23:35  
Swimmer E: 23.24


I don't know about you, but I would want my child challenged with the task from the new Idaho Core Standards. That task requires that my child not only know place value of decimals, but that they are also able to round, analyze data, and communicate to others about the data. In addition, this deep learning with real-life application is much more engaging to the vast majority of students. As a mother, the thing I wanted the most from my children's schools was learning opportunities that engaged and drew them in.

When teachers hold the expectation that students analyze data and/or facts and then explain their thinking to others, their instruction engages students and leaves them with a thirst for more. Recently, I saw this in action in a math class at WRHS. The students were using multiple data sets to find the models that were best for identifying if bones were male or female. The students dutifully did the calculations and determined which data sets made the more accurate models. Upon questioning, the students were able to take it to the next level. The students were asked why they selected the models they did. The students responded that those models were closest to the number one. The students were then asked so why do you want the model closest to the number one? The students were

then able to draw a picture of a graph to show that the more perfect the correlation, the closer to one it becomes. This learning could have stopped with students identifying the best models, however, the additional questioning allowed students to further develop their thought process. The conversation engaged them more deeply in learning as they exchanged ideas with their peers.

The teachers of Blaine County School District are working hard to ensure all of our students are critical thinkers and highly engaged in school. Next time you are with a student, join us in asking them to think critically with questions that begin with 'why.' When you see or hear a child thinking critically, thank their teachers.

With gratitude for the high expectations this community holds for its children,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "GwenCarol Holmes". The signature is written in a fluid, connected style with a long, sweeping underline.

GwenCarol Holmes  
BCSD Superintendent