



October 26, 2021

The Honorable Merrick B. Garland
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Garland:

My name is Sherri Ybarra, and I am the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of Idaho. I am writing to you in response to your memorandum dated October 04, 2021, in which you wrote, “There has been a disturbing spike in threats of intimidation, harassment, and threats of violence against school administrators, board members, teachers, and staff who participate in running our schools.”

In that same memo, you directed Boise-based Federal Bureau of Investigation agents to contact and interview me and other Idaho education leaders about whether parents here are engaging in such conduct as would constitute a violation of criminal federal laws. I am writing you this letter in advance of that scheduled interview to let you know what I will say to the FBI. In short, it is ludicrous to suggest that organized violence is propelling Idaho parents to illegally protest local school board actions.

As you cited in your memorandum, “Spirited debates over policy matters are protected by our Constitution.” And, although some exchanges between parents and board members in Idaho have been heated, nothing has risen to a level requiring FBI involvement. As you are well aware, the COVID pandemic has sparked inflammatory debates over masks and vaccines. Additionally, Critical Race Theory is becoming a controversial subject that has added to the tension between parents’ rights and decisions being made at the local level, by our elected school board members.

I know that you testified before the House Judiciary Committee last week and denied labeling American school parents who choose to exercise their right to protest as “domestic terrorists.” However, when you cite just one source such as the single memo you received as the basis for calling out the FBI nationwide, you adopt wholesale the language and allegation of that memo as your own.

I am saddened that you “threw gasoline” on already heated and divided communities, by conducting federal level interviews based on ONE mischaracterization from the National School Boards Association (NSBA) about all local school board meetings across our nation. Calling parents “domestic terrorists,” was inflammatory, inappropriate, and unfounded. We WANT parents and patron engaged in our public schools – we have sought their involvement for years. Research shows that active parent involvement is the single best predictor of student success.

Obviously, it is never appropriate to subdue free speech in the United States when a debate becomes “spirited” and a parent speaks freely with animated emotions. As a former teacher, vice principal, principal, a parent, and now a state elected official, I can say with full confidence that high emotion does not require the shedding of our First Amendment right to speak freely about matters that concern our children at school board meetings.

As a former school building principal, I understand clearly that intimidation, harassment and threats must never be taken lightly, especially in this day and age. However, elevating an accusation to the level of “domestic terrorism” and implying the power to prosecute is comparable to expelling a student without giving that student the right to due process.

As I said, we have had angry and confrontational incidents at school board meetings in Idaho with local law enforcement involved. I have watched the videos and read the comments from the emails of concerned citizens in my state. Some of our parents’ behavior is unacceptable, their language is certainly inappropriate, and the red faces and yelling probably deserve a “timeout” or even an in-school suspension.

However, with my perspective on disciplinary matters in our schools based on 20 years of experience, we would never expel a student without warnings, escalated penalties, adequate proof and a full due process hearing. Parents deserve no less. I agree that training to avoid such incidents and subsequently investigating every alleged unlawful incident at the local level is the most appropriate course of action. Knee-jerk reactions, based on inadequate information, indicate questionable leadership and poor decision making.

In closing, I will confirm to the FBI that school safety is serious business in Idaho. Student and staff well-being is an everyday priority. We are legitimately concerned and observant about issues like masks or Critical Race Theory, without wrongly demonizing parents. Properly understood, interactive, emotional debate is a valuable component of today’s educational process and needs. Parents are their students’ most ardent advocates and best protectors, NOT “domestic terrorists.”

Most Sincerely,



Sherri A. Ybarra, Ed.S.
Superintendent of Public Instruction

Attachment: Idaho School Boards Association Statement on NSBA Letter

cc: Rafael Gonzalez, Acting United States Attorney for the District of Idaho

October 13, 2021



ISBA Statement on NSBA Letter to President Biden

The Idaho School Boards Association Executive Board would like to issue a formal response regarding our participation – or, lack thereof - in the National School Boards Association September 29, 2021 request to President Biden for federal intervention regarding threats, intimidation, and harassment towards locally elected school board members.

ISBA was never asked to provide input nor were we informed that the letter was being sent. Despite that, it had the appearance of carrying the endorsement of every state association and its members. Had we been asked, we would have readily pointed out the mischaracterization of parents and patrons in our communities as domestic terrorists who merited federal investigation. We *want* parents and patrons engaged in our public schools – we have sought that for years. ISBA values local control and believes situations that require intervention are better handled by a locally controlled operation close to our communities. While we look for support to our state and federal governments, we do not seek the involvement of federal law enforcement in local decisions.

We would be doing a disservice to our members, however, if we did not point out the disruptive and – at times, frightening – behavior that has shown up in school board meetings in Idaho and across the country. There is no justification for physical or verbal threats directed against school board members, their staff, and certainly not the students. Leadership requires tough decisions and uncomfortable conversations. Serving on a school board is not a popularity contest, and certain decisions are almost guaranteed to be unpopular to some portions of our communities. ISBA was founded on and continues to support the authority of local boards to govern the public schools of this state. Elected officials and appointed leadership who are closest to the community are best suited to make those decisions.

We are all tired. Parents are tired. Teachers and school staff are tired. School board members and administrators are tired. The sooner we recognize that we all want the same thing, the faster we can emerge from divisive tactics and be the leaders our children deserve. Our number one priority is keeping students safely in school and engaged for in-person learning. We call on the citizens of Idaho to exude qualities of leadership – including ethical and civic-minded rhetoric, respect, and the mutual understanding that we're all showing up for the benefit of children in our communities.

"Empower Local Boards for Student Success "