

Nevada Public Education News



Does Class size matter?

Nevada's newly appointed state superintendent, Jim Guthrie, has suggested that class size does not matter. For those that don't teach, it clearly does not matter. For students it does, for parents of students it does.

In southern Nevada, Clark County, the average class size of a first year algebra class is between 37 and 42 students. A class period is typically 50 minutes. The students in these classes, by design, are not homogeneous.

What that means is students who have worked hard and earned the opportunity to enroll in this class because of their own hard work are mixed with special needs students, students with 504s, students who may not be taking their meds to control their behaviors, students who are charged with crimes in the judicial system, students who do not attend school regularly, students who have not acquired the prerequisite knowledge and skills to be successful in the class. And, of course, there are kids in those classes with average or above average intelligence who really don't care, cause class disruptions and distractions that continually take away from students who want to be there.

Well, we all know we won't let that happen in sports. As the kids get older, they tend to separate by aptitude and interests. In community leagues they have the equivalent of junior high, 9th

grade sports, junior varsity, and varsity teams so student athletes can be grouped by their performance levels and better developed if the student-athlete would like to continue. Kids who don't show up to practice, don't get to play. Students who break team rules don't get to play and can be suspended or thrown off the team. If students mess around during practice, often times get thrown off the team. The coaches don't have time to mess with kids who are not paying attention.

For most in the community, this seems right. They want their kids on teams where their kids can play, be safe and play competitively, they don't want their kids playing against much bigger and more agile kids that might result in their child getting hurt.

Why can't students enrolled in academic classes have the same type of expectations as there are in sports? Why should students who truly want to be in a class, who have worked hard to get there and want to excel have to have time taken away from their quest as their teachers have to deal with all the distractions and disruptions.

In other words, our very best and brightest students will have their education shortchanged because teachers will be occupied with students who need a lot help, just can't do it, and those that really don't care.

The *one-size-fits-all* model is a recipe for disaster.

The authors of the common core want to do away with “tracking” in the public schools. That’s interesting because two of the authors teach at the university level. To get into *their* classes, students first have to get accepted to their university (pass a test and earned an acceptable gpa), then, even with that, the students still have to take placement tests, and progress along a path with certain grades to get into their classes – now that is how you define hypocrisy.

And when you look at the position of the new state superintendent, a person who has never taught in k-12 schools, you can readily see the inconsistency in his reasoning as well. His belief, if kids do not attain the necessary skills in elementary grade levels, they should not be promoted to the next level.

But, as some of those same kids reach secondary schools, they should be pushed into the next class whether or not they attained the skills necessary to be successful. Is that not a little inconsistent?

To be fair, tracking in schools has not been successful in the past. Students who were tracked into remedial classes were actually trained to act out – not to do well compared to students going on with their education. That type of tracking has to be eliminated.

That does not mean we should eliminate proper placement of students, it should mean that if students are not prepared for a class, then they receive remediation. They are placed into classes that will get them up to speed so they can perform well in regular classes. In the past, once a student was placed in the remedial track, it was like a life sentence. Again, that mentality has to be eliminated. What should be occurring is a student is placed into a class based upon their needs and given a plan and timetable that is accelerated so that student can get back on track.

We know the two extremes don’t work. The new “*one-size-fits-all*” model will clearly be an impediment to implementing new, more rigorous common core standards in mathematics. The old, ship-them-out to remedial classes hasn’t worked either.

If the newly appointed state superintendent had any classroom experience, he would know that class size makes a tremendous difference – especially when you do not have homogeneous grouping.

If parents want their kids in classes in which they have not earned the grades to be successful, then they should have to sign a contract that stipulates that if their kids don’t attend school regularly, or if they disrupt or distract students in the class, don’t seek the help they need to be successful and keep up with the class, then they will be removed. Why should good students have their education diminished because some adults are trying to pad their resumes with political sound bytes or by some students who are not in the class to learn?

The common core standards are a pilot program, over the next couple of years, suggestions and recommendations will be made by professionals all over the country to make these standards better, to make them both reasonable and attainable. This *one-size-fits-all* requirement is one that needs to be addressed. And as long as this thinking persists, then class size really does matter.