

# Nevada Public Education News



## *Turnaround Schools* *Turnaround Human Resources*

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A number of poorly performing schools were recently identified by the district for potential restructuring, schools that are “restructured” are reassigned to the Turnaround Zone (TAZ). They can be reconstituted, which results in the principal and staff being replaced or they can be identified as transformational which means the principal may or may not be replaced and the principal has the ability to hire new staff.

Up to 12 members of the existing staff can then be reassigned to other schools, you can almost see how excited the principals of other schools might be about that possibility. That is not to say that staff that is released are strictly composed of poorly performing teachers, but I’m betting many might think they are not the best – which might not be a real fair assessment.

Of the dozen or so schools on the possible restructuring list, only three were chosen to join the Turnaround Zone. All three are being classified as transformational.

Schools that were placed in TAZ had the principal reassigned immediately, a temporary principal assigned until a replacement is identified for the next school year. The schools receive additional help, priority staffing and possibly more funding. The question is; under what conditions should a school be identified in the first place? Are there any extenuating circumstances?

There is clearly a negative connotation that goes with a school being restructured – particularly for the school principal. One school in particular had quite a few teacher vacancies. In the math department alone, there were three or four long-term substitute teachers. I’m guessing that alone might have a negative impact on student understanding of math concepts and skills as well as student achievement.

The responsibility for hiring does not belong to the building principal. That’s the duty of the Human Resources Division. That division has been so busy reorganizing, restructuring, and “reforming”, that they did not fulfill their primary responsibility – making sure students had qualified teachers in the classroom. What a loss of focus – so much for rigor and student achievement.

So, how fair is it to blame a principal or teachers at that school for poor performance when the district did not fulfill their end of the bargain by assigning highly qualified teachers to the school in the first place? In other words, the school, through no fault of their own, was playing short-handed.

Principals have been griping all year that the Human Resources Division has not been doing their part and has not been responsive to them about their vacancies in all areas – not just teachers. So, the issue is not just with school restructuring.

If the school needs to be “restructured” because of poor performance, under what conditions and when is the district going to “restructure” the Human Resources Division because of their poor performance that leads to poor student performance?

When asked about this, I was told the restructuring needed to occur because it was “about the students”. Good to know, but why wasn’t it about the students in August and September, the beginning of the school year, so students could have benefitted from having qualified teachers for the entire school year?

Whether the school should or should not have been restructured is not the question, the issue is the central administration did not hold up their end of the bargain, the school was taken over, the principal was replaced, and the real culprits, the people responsible for ensuring schools are staffed, the Human Resources Division, walks away like they had no hand in this debacle.

And then, adding salt to the wound, the district’s Public Relations Department can tell a very gullible community the hard line the district is taking to address student achievement. What they fail to mention is the central administration’s role in creating the problem.

The announcement the district is going to hire 1700 teachers next year with the savings from the cutting teacher salaries might sound great to people who don’t know much, but the fact remains the district has close to 300 vacancies this year that were not filled even though there was money in the budget to fill those positions. Last time I checked, the district had 27 high school math vacancies, a little math suggests over 5000 high school students didn’t have a math teacher this year. And those students who did, had first year algebra classes that ranged from 37 to 42 students. So, if I’m understanding the announcement correctly, next year’s algebra classes will range from 35.5. to 40.5. Rounding, that looks like a range of 36 to 41. Yeah, let’s celebrate!

The trustees should consider reconstituting the Human Resources Division, placing it in TAZ, removing the head, and getting that “turned around” so the actual priority is about getting qualified teachers in the classroom. If teachers and administrators are to be held accountable, so should the people responsible for providing crucial services to those schools.

Maybe the cash-strapped school district’s 12 person, million dollar, Public Relations Department can “spin” this for us too.