

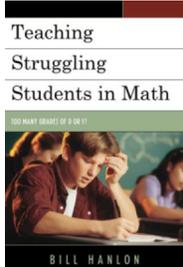
Nevada Public Education News



NEVADA - Acts like a Third World Country

Bill Hanlon

Nevada can be best compared to third world countries when it comes to our tax dollars. The United States regularly uses our taxes to support third world countries. We expect those countries to invest those dollars in their infrastructure, health and education to support the people with the greatest needs. As a nation, we criticize those governments when they take our foreign aid and give our dollars to their “friends” instead of the people we intended to have our tax dollars help.



In Nevada, the Governor creates a budget from our tax dollars and submits it to the Legislature for approval. The problem we have is the same as in third world countries, our tax dollars are meant to support the state’s infrastructure, health and education, etc. But just like in third world countries, the funds get diverted/earmarked to “friends” and does not get down to the people it was intended to help.

Now the foreign governments that receive our aid often argue that their “friends” are performing functions that are important, necessary, vital – whatever. The same is true in Nevada. The Governor’s or Legislator’s “friends” will argue they are providing an important service to the community – even if it at the expense of the people that need it the most.

Nevada is full of non-profits and foundations that are championed by some of the state’s wealthy, politically connected or celebrity. These groups were formed to help public agencies, like education, by raising private funds – BY RAISING PRIVATE FUNDS. Let’s just say that one more time. These groups were formed to help public education by RAISING PRIVATE FUNDS. And by doing so, could be helpful to local schools and school districts.

It should be noted that schools and school districts should only accept donations if they are aligned with its own goals and objectives.

What we have seen is many of these non-profits have failed! They have failed to convince the community that their program should be supported financially. Putting it simply, these non-profits have failed their primary mission of raising private funds to support their educational initiatives – so now they are looking for a handout at the very expense of the people they say they want to help by using tax dollars - just like our foreign aid.

That failure should result in them either going out of business or scaling back their own goals and objectives. Ahh, but these non-profits are politically connected – they have juice. Therein lies the problem. These non-profits are now going to the Governor, Legislature, School Trustees, and local governments and requesting taxpayer dollars because they can't raise their own money. And, of course, our representatives are very obliging to big names to the point where it sometimes just embarrassing to watch them fall over themselves to be seen with these people of importance.

As we should know in Nevada, as streams of water are taken out of the river, less water gets down stream. The same is true with tax dollars, when the Governor places a priority, earmarks, on special interests, on non-profits who are supposed to raise their own funds, there is less funding for our regular students or with our students with greatest needs. Now, the Governor and special interest groups, the non-profits, will tell you the vital role these play – just like third world countries tell our government when we see our tax dollars going for “their friends”. After the Governor has his turn supporting his friends, legislators then get their turn. Who suffers, the students.

Now, to be frank, I support the ideas behind many of these non-profits, they are addressing real needs, concerns, real issues, but they need to do so by raising private funds! Not competing with the entities they are supposed to be helping.

If funding was adequate, if money was not funneled away with these personal earmarks, Nevada students could succeed at much higher levels.

Two legislative sessions ago, Nevada's teachers, hence their students, were in the forefront of receiving professional development to teach to these new standards. Then, during that legislative session, professional development funding got sidetracked. Of course, it was suggested that this was a way to give school personnel more choice. What really happened was funds were diverted to two school districts which in turn provided funding for a program where a senator's spouse worked.

The end result, during the next two years, students did not get what they needed because their teachers were not getting trained on the new standards and resources were not being developed for teachers to use in their classrooms. The Legislature fixed that last session by putting that funding back into professional development. But make no mistake – two years were lost. Two years our teachers could have been receiving training that would lift our students from the bottom of educational achievement nationally.

While the Legislature fixed what they had done in the previous session, the amount funded for professional development for teachers and administrators is woefully underfunded statewide as reported by a report Guinn Center and Nevada Succeeds. While Nevadans continually live with these realities, it's salt on the wound when the Governor or legislators provide funding for their “friends” at the expense of the students they say they want to help.

These groups like to say they have “partnerships” with local school systems. First, if they would like to form partnerships, form them with their business friends to raise their own money.

Second, they like to be called partnerships because they somehow think they have a “right” to public funds each year. There should be NO partnerships with public education agencies, if there is anything, then it should be a “business” relationship. That is, perform or you are out! And when I mean perform, I mean perform in what is expected of public education - that can be measured by student achievement. If they want to be measured by some other metric, then they should not be working with public education.

In my opinion, these so-called partnerships are network opportunities for the elected, including school trustees, and the school administrators that hold position for their own personal benefit.

Nevada’s educational infrastructure has been long neglected. Class sizes are huge often having 38-42 students in a first year algebra class. Students don’t have books, teachers are short on materials and supplies, and professional development opportunities are lean. Until Nevada can support its own infrastructure, health, education, and pensions, it has no business supporting special interest groups who are supposed to be raising private funds. As we demand earmarks be stopped in Washington, we should demand it in Nevada too.

With Nevada’s well documented underfunding of its own infrastructure, health and education which has resulted in the state being embarrassed, we can no longer accept our tax dollars being diverted to the well connected, the wealthy or celebrity.

Make no mistake, when our tax dollars are funneled and earmarked to these special interest groups, “friends”, not only do the average students get shortchanged, so do the taxpayers. When the Governor or legislators give money to their friends instead of funding education’s infrastructure, taxpayers will be asked to pay more so the well-connected, wealthy or celebrity don’t have to pull their own weight to support their own programs.

Carson City is in danger of being renamed Earmarks City, Nevada does not have to operate like a third world country. If the Governor and legislators continue earmarking dollars to the politically connected, wealthy or celebrity rather than education’s infrastructure, we will remain at the bottom in terms of public education.