

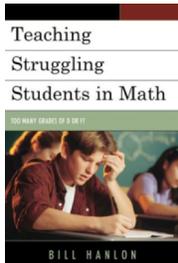
Nevada Public Education News



Teacher Shortage Predictable

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If you judge the quality of education by your child's experiences in school learning to read, write, mathematics, science, and social studies and their achievement levels, then you know the state of Nevada and this Governor are failing your children.



Outside students' parents, there is no one more important to a child's education than their teachers. The Governor's solution to the teacher shortage was way too little, way too late. His transformational "Educational Reform" agenda didn't address such an important critical need until Democrat leaders cut portions of his proposed budget to address the teacher shortage. Then, with only 8 days left in the Legislative session, the Governor grabbed the headlines by taking the savings made available by

Democrat cuts to his proposed programs and ran to the front of the line saying he wanted to address the teacher shortage with bonuses. That's the definition of leading from behind.

Many school districts across Nevada will face a teacher shortage this fall. Clark County looks poised to begin the year with just under 1000 vacancies. While 1000 vacancies sounds like a lot, a slightly deeper dive in math would suggest tens of thousands of students would not be taught by qualified teachers. Each secondary teacher has approximately 200 students per day. So, if the half the vacancies are in middle school and high school, eighty thousand students will be negatively impacted. Elementary teachers generally have 25 students per day, so that another 10,000 students being taught by who?

Some feel the Governor's actions should be applauded. I would suggest that it was too little, too late and should be severely criticized. To be frank, it's clear the Governor has been and continues to be advised by people with very little or no experience in education – and it shows. Where's the accountability he continually touts?

Anyone involved in education knows that the hiring season for teachers is February, March and April. Waiting till the last week in May to even recognize the issue suggests the Governor is out of touch with the needs of students enrolled in public education. By June, the pool of candidates has been pretty much exhausted.

What about the bonuses? Great idea, right? Again, much like his transformational educational reforms, they pass smell tests, but if you buy his concoction, you will end up with indigestion.

Using the Governor's solution, first year teachers will earn more than second and third year teachers. Now there's a great morale booster. In addition to that, no new funding was set aside in the Governor's budget to address teacher pay. So teachers are actually seeing their pay cut because of increases in their health insurance and PERS costs. And this Governor talks about attracting and retaining teachers, just who is he listening?

Adding to Nevada's problems are the working conditions for teachers. It's just too easy for students to get lost in large schools. A typical high school population across the country approximates 1100 students. Nevada's high schools average 3000 students. Class sizes in Nevada would be identified as outliers by many statisticians. It is not unusual to find secondary math classes with 38 – 42 students in them.

Secretary of Education Duncan, another non-educator, finally realized placing first and second year teachers and Teach for America candidates in at risk schools does not work. In other words, experience does matter. Nevada's Governor continues to believe that first year teachers are as good as experienced teachers. It is no wonder these kids face obstacles in trying to get a sound education. States with higher pay and better working conditions, like smaller class sizes and more support, are not facing teacher shortages. The children in those states have a definite advantage over Nevada's students.

Let's be clear, the Governor is being disingenuous when he indicates he gave enough funding for CCSD to give raises. He did not provide new funding for salaries. The \$1/2 billion dollar increase in taxes went to his resume building programs.

Misguided decisions that emphasize his own resume building at the expense of a child's education continue to plague the quality of education in Nevada. Just how many times do we have to experience that before we learn that rhetoric is just that - talk? This Governor and his inexperienced advisors have demonstrated an astonishing lack of understanding beyond soundbytes of the needs of students.

How's the quality of education when the students with the most need end up with first year teachers, teachers whose content knowledge may be suspect, that clearly don't have resources or instructional and assessment strategies to help students learn? Not to mention classroom management issues – safety concerns.

How's the quality of education for students when they have substitute teachers or multiple substitute teachers throughout the year?

How's the quality of education the next year when tens of thousands of students move on to the next grade or subject being without the prerequisite skills and knowledge to be successful because they did not have a qualified teacher?

Let's be clear, if students don't get a good foundation in first year algebra, the probability of success in second year algebra or the sciences is pretty low. In elementary schools, the research suggests one poor teacher can set students back a year or two. Two poor teachers at the elementary level sets the student up to be a future drop out. Using the Governor's plan, students are set up for failure.

Teachers matter! Experience matters! It's clear the Governor and his advisors need to go back and learn some fundamentals. One fundamental is that when the parents and community talk about the quality of education, they are talking about their children's experiences learning reading, writing, math, science and social studies which is affected by the quality of their teachers, not personal resume building programs and soundbytes. This Governor has not invested in teachers or teacher development, hence he has not invested in your child's education.

This might be news to the Governor and his less than knowledgeable education advisors, but experience matters, teachers matter.