

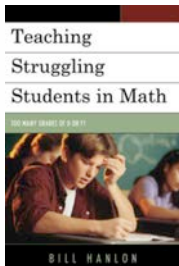
Nevada Public Education News



Nevada Ranked Dead Last in Education

Bill Hanlon

Education Week's ranking placing Nevada dead last in education is a direct result of policies coming from Carson City. It is exactly what happens when a state does not invest in classroom education.



Governor Sandoval's performance with respect to classroom education is a disgrace by anyone's standards. His own budgets are evidence that he supports special interests and those who are politically connected at the expense of classroom instruction - students.

Just follow the funding. During his first budget, when the new math (common core) and English Language Arts standards were introduced, he cut professional development by over 60%. Then complained when the teachers and their students did not know the new standards and their test scores reflected that ignorance. That funding found its way to special interests.

In his budget this year, the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) are being introduced across the country. Southern Nevada districts consisting of Clark, Esmeralda, Lincoln, Mineral and Nye counties got no additional funding to make teachers aware of the new standards – even though he knew the current budgets in science and technology are woefully inadequate. But his politically connected friends got funding again. Will he now complain and demand accountability for poor student performance in science in southern Nevada?

Why do the southern Nevada districts continually get shortchanged in the Governor's budgets? Those 5 counties represent over 80% of the student population in the state and received 0.0% of the funding for the new science standards. The Governor, former state superintendent Dale Erquiaga and Elaine Wynn apparently need a class in ratio and proportion.

Nevada has some of the most outrageous class sizes in the country – it's not been unusual to see first year algebra classes with over 40 students. On top of that, many students are taught by multiple substitutes each year which diminished their opportunity for educational attainment. This governor, his former State Superintendent of Public Instruction Dale Erquiaga, and State Board of Education President Elaine Wynn did not seem to know about the teacher shortage issue until 8 days before the legislative session ended.

What students want, what parents want and what the community expects are classroom teachers who know their content, know the standards that students will be tested, have acquired instructional and assessment strategies that help their students learn, know where students typically experience difficulty, know what was taught in previous classes so they can build on that foundation and know what will be taught in subsequent classes so ensure their students are set up for success. That's just common sense.

The community evaluates public education based on their children's classroom experiences and student performance – test scores. The Governor, his former state superintendent Dale Erquiaga, whose only qualification to be state superintendent was he was a boyhood friend of the Governor, and Elaine Wynn want you to confuse activity with achievement – slight of hand. The Governor has built quite a resume for himself; Zoom Schools, Victory Schools, Achievement Districts, Educational Savings Accounts, to name a few. But, what have they done to ensure your sons and daughters have experienced qualified teachers in their classrooms who have the professional knowledge to guarantee a great education? The answer - nothing.

The results are in, because the Governor has placed his own resume building above the needs of Nevada students, not only did our state finish dead last in the Quality Counts study, but the other indicators also suggest he misdirects budget priorities. Nevada's graduation rate is third from the bottom nationally. African American graduation rates in Nevada are dead last nationally. Our NAEP scores (nation's report card) are also near the bottom nationally, and the state could not even administer the Smarter Balanced exams based on the new standards – another failure. And, they didn't have the smarts to purchase the test prep materials for students and teachers as other states did.

The Governor and his team have subtracted resources from public education and given them to their networking cronies under the guise of improving student achievement. The Governor, entering his 6th year in office, with the help of Dale Erquiaga, and Elaine Wynn have managed to drive Nevada's rank nationally to dead last on the Quality Counts study.

What this Governor and his vastly inexperienced advisors don't seem to understand is ***“what works is work”*** and that work happens in the classroom. They would rather we continue to confuse activity with achievement, fund their politically connected friends, build their own resume, and come up with catchy phrases and designer programs than address the real work that happens in the classrooms everyday across the state. His political agenda has trumped your children's education - again. And Nevada's national ranking reflects it.