

Nevada Public Education

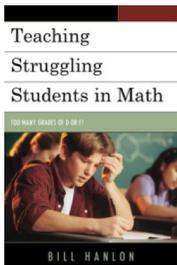


Profiteering Educational Non-Profits Subtracting Resources from Our Schools

Bill Hanlon

Non profits receiving taxpayer funds should not be paying their directors \$400,000.00 salaries.

Non-profits have enjoyed a pretty good reputation over the years, some of them will ruin the reputation of all non-profits. Most non-profits beginnings are based on a community need, their intention is to add value to the community. But, a number of these educational non-profits' mission seems more in tuned to creating high paying jobs for their friends. ***Rather than adding value, they are, in fact, subtracting scant resources*** from the people they say they want to help.



These non-profit schemes seem to follow a pattern, somebody wants to fulfill a legitimate need in the community. They collect a number of well intended leaders in the community to be on their boards to add credence to their mission. These people often jump on these boards, it's a nice a resume builder. Then, using those names and their influence, go out and raise private funds to support their mission. Up to this point, I can normally support their undertakings.

But what happens next is concerning. When these people cannot raise enough funds by going to the community philanthropically, they go behind the taxpayers back and seek government subsidies – they call them partnerships.

My advice for educational non-profits is simple, raise your funding privately and keep the program at a level your contributors can support! Don't go the city and county governments, the school districts, and the Legislature to get the funds the community refused you. Because when you do go after taxpayers money, you are literally subtracting resources from the very people you say you are trying to help. In other words, you put the needs of the organization above the needs of the people who need the help – all the while paying outlandish salaries to your friends.

A case in point, Communities in Schools (CIS), is a wrap-around program to help students succeed in school by addressing a multitude of problems. I support CIS's mission, but I can't

support CIS because rather than spending time raising private funds, they spend approximately \$1 million per year lobbying governments to get at taxpayers dollars. And they take care of their “friends” by seemingly rewarding them with high paying jobs.

Elaine Wynn, President of the Nevada’s Conflicted State Board of Education and national chairperson of Communities in Schools, seems to provide a great example how these non-profits reward friends and subtract resources from schools – on the taxpayers’ dime.

The former State Superintendent of Public Instruction (state superintendent) Dale Erquiaga worked very closely with Elaine Wynn acting in her capacity on the board. This conflicted group has been real generous with their friends, other non-profits, giving taxpayer funds under the guise of professional development of teachers. In fact, the teachers of southern Nevada’s students did not get training on the new science standards in a timely manner because the board thought rewarding these funds to their “friends” was more important than students having qualified science teachers. *It is important to remember that ten years ago, the Clark County School District was recognized nationally as the fastest improving district in the nation. Since then, under the leadership of Sandoval, Wynn and Erquiaga, Nevada’s educational ranking has nosedived to last in the nation.* Why? Their focus has not been of your child’s classroom experiences learning about math, ELA, science, or social studies.

Erquiaga’s reward for ensuring other non-profits were profiteering, he left the state superintendent position under Elaine Wynn from a salary of approximately \$140,000.00 to a salary of approximately \$400,000.00 with, you guessed it, Communities in Schools, of which Elaine is the national chairperson – a coincidence I’m sure.

Representatives of Communities in Schools just presented their case before legislative committees last month, telling them about all their successes when seeking continued funding at students’ expense. They didn’t mention other governmental contributions, nor what they charge schools for their services. Or that some schools have discontinued their affiliation.

As of 2014 990 report, CIS has some well paid executives. As mentioned Erquiaga is now earning around \$400,000.00 nearly triple his previous salary. It’s a good thing his salary was not based on his performance in NV. Four people earn over \$200,000.00 and three people earn over \$150,000.00. And, they spent over \$700,000.00 for lobbying that year. This does not include other staff.

Excuse me for not wanting to finance Elaine Wynn’s ability to reward a friend with a \$260,000.00 raise. I’m sure CIS will say they those salaries are paid out of money they raised privately. They will argue the money they get from taxpayers goes to schools, but that certainly frees up their privately raised funds for other purposes – like exorbitant salaries, doesn’t it? In my opinion, the money going to pay these executives’ excessive salaries should be going to

schools so they don't have to be an additional burden on taxpayers. Clearly, if CIS was not receiving public funding, their executive pay would not be an issue.

The end result of rewarding cronyism and special interests in Nevada results in lower funding in education for Nevada students. ***Before this Governor or State Board provides funding support for their friends in these profiteering non-profits, the state should ensure students have experienced, qualified teachers, that students have access to textbooks, that students have the supplies and resources to help them reach their academic needs, that students experience class sizes that accommodate academic growth – 40 students in algebra is too many. And their teachers receive the professional support to ensure their students' classroom experiences are optimized.***

There is no doubt that public education is underfunded in Nevada. That is highlighted by the teacher shortage, large class sizes, no textbooks or the state's educational ranking of dead last under Wynn and Erquiaga. Until we fund education adequately, it is foolish to spend our scant resources to support profiteering non-profits who are somehow able to pay their CEO's \$400,000.00 salaries.

Unfortunately, CIS isn't the only educational non-profit at the public trough. These non-profits are siphoning millions of dollars per year from an already underfunded education budget.

For those who support Communities in Schools or these other educational non-profits and don't mind paying these artificially inflated salaries to their CEO's, the solution is simple. Send them your privately earned dollars and keep them away from taxpayers dollars.

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