

Nevada Public Education

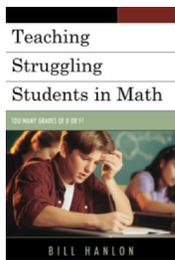


Teachers matter!

Who wants to come to Nevada under these conditions?

Bill Hanlon

Dear Legislator:



Programs are only as good as the teachers using them. Nevada has endured a teacher shortage in some areas since the mid-eighties. Those shortages continue today in additional areas. Those shortages shortchange students and result lower test scores.

Nevada has been unable to compete with other states for teachers in the critical areas of math, science and special education because of inadequate state funding. Local school districts cannot offer competitive salaries unless the legislature funds it.

An example of Nevada's shortsightedness can be demonstrated at the conclusion of the last legislative session. Even though there has been public emphasis on *recruiting and retaining* teachers in the state because of the teacher shortage, the Governor did not provide funding so the state's school districts could successfully compete for teachers last session. The half-billion dollar increase in taxes had **NO** funds earmarked to ensure Nevada could compete for teachers – unbelievable.

Unlike the Governor and Elaine Wynn's Conflicted State Board of Education, the community *does* understand the importance of teachers and how they relate to student success. Business and community members could not understand how a tax increase of that magnitude did nothing to attract and retain teachers. His budget forced the district into choosing between two bad options; no raises to fill vacancies or cut programs and increase class sizes. Naturally, the Governor disavows any responsibility.

If the Governor was seriously concerned about the quality of education in the state, he'd realize teachers matter! It's hard to attract, recruit and retain teachers when the state doesn't offer competitive salaries. It's hard to attract or retain teachers

with class sizes out of control; having 40 plus students in an algebra class is way over the top. It's hard to attract and retain teachers when students don't have or lack up-to-date textbooks that align with the new standards, lack of resources and supplies doesn't help either, lack of professional development doesn't help and having a one-size-fits-all evaluation system doesn't help that does not take into account the students the teacher is being evaluated. With no funding, teachers' health insurance costs go up while benefits go down resulting in the Teachers' Health Trust dipping into their reserves to provide coverage. Not so appetizing for families to come here. And, just to add salt to the wound, the average teacher spends approximately \$500 per year to subsidize public education. That's not how we get teachers to want to come to Nevada.

Now, if dealing with that is not enough, imagine how teachers feel as they begin to give end-of-course exams this week. These exams are spread over the next few weeks because there are not enough computers to accommodate the students – it's April. How would you like to try and teach students math with 5 or 10 students missing each day over that period of time? Then we wonder about student performance?

Wouldn't be nice if end-of-course exams were actually given at the end of the course – late May or June? And wouldn't be nice if the students were prepared for these exams that impact graduation with the same transparency as the ACT, SAT, AP, LSAT, and civil service exams? That is, practice exams and test items released so students knew what and how to prepare for the exam instead of leaving students and their teachers in the dark.

Since Sandoval was elected, Nevada has had four state superintendents. Two had absolutely no clue or experience in k-12 public education and their testimony and practices have given Nevada students the short end of the stick. They just don't get it as can be seen by the timelines given for these tests, the lack of transparency, and wanting to use these tests for graduation and teacher evaluations.

People at the Nevada Department of Education seems to believe, by their actions and testimony, that the best teachers have the best test scores and want that reflected on teacher evaluations. That clarifies these guys are really that far out to lunch. The teachers with the best scores often have the best students. As an example, if I am teaching an 8th grade algebra class, I can assure you my test scores will be higher than students of teachers teaching 9th grade algebra. Why? Students in 8th grade algebra classes earned their way into the class by previous classwork, by their conduct and teacher recommendation, they have the pre-requisite skills, and the class sizes are limited - 30 students and below.

Who takes algebra in high school? Everyone. All students in the spectrum, from special education to honors, there is no selection process, and the class sizes seem closer to 40 with many students not ready for more abstract learning.

How is it fair to evaluate *Teacher A* and *Teacher B* under those conditions **and** when they are not allowed to see what and how standards are tested? I can say with 100% certainty that teachers with the highest test scores are not necessarily the best teachers.

Then, on top of all this, teachers have to deal with the “***no fail***” policies put into place so the Governor can claim a fake increased graduation rate. Teachers are scrutinized if their D/F rates effect the graduation rate so they are subtly pressured into passing failing students. The teachers are then soundly criticized when the inconsistency of grades and scores come out on state or national exams. The last three state superintendents pretended that their policies and regulations had nothing to do with these discrepancies. ***They are, in fact, the reason for low student test scores and why students don't have access to vocational courses. They are the reason the Clark County School District went from being recognized as the fastest improving district in the nation to a state that is now ranked dead last.***

There is no single thing that can be done to improve student performance in the classroom. However, there is a one thing that can be done to absolutely sabotage a student's education; that's either by not having a teacher or not having a qualified experienced teacher. Teachers matter! That means funding from the Legislature matters.

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