

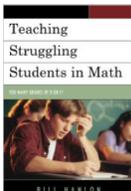
Nevada Public Education



Nevada's System of Testing is Pathetic

Bill Hanlon

In 2015, the state identified what they called experts in math to work with end-of-course exams being developed to be used for high school graduation. For those not up to date on these matters, the state has now dropped that requirement for graduation. And, because of their own stupidity, ignorance and desire to build their own little resume, are now going to reward high school diplomas to students who didn't pass previous high school proficiency exams dating back to the 80's.



Let's see, doing a little arithmetic, students who were 17 in 1980, are now in their 50's, will get a high school diploma retroactively – *if they apply*. While that's nice, a lot of doors were closed to them as they started their careers.

Back to the graduation exams, the state's own identified math experts told the NV DOE back in 2015, there were huge issues with the new exam. As usual, the state people did not listen and moved forward wasting millions of taxpayers' dollars creating, administering, and grading these tests, but also caused a great loss of instructional time – not to mention frustration and morale issues.

When the state superintendent and board did not listen to the concerns of their own experts, these experts had the where-with-all to place their concerns and recommendations in writing and sent them to the governor, state superintendent, State Board of Education, local superintendents and trustees. The state's response to these prophetic concerns was to insinuate that people involved in putting these in writing were putting their licenses in jeopardy because of the "confidential" nature of these tests. This is just another reason why Nevada is ranked dead last in education. Terrible decision-making that is more about resume building than about good education.

Since the Gibbons-Sandoval administrations, Nevada is now ranked dead last and has the worst ACT scores in the nation. Yet, the state superintendent proudly says we are improving because of our graduation rates. That's the narrative he'd like to put on his

resume. Yeah, no exit exam, no-fail policies, that doesn't lead to better achievement as can be seen on state and national tests, it's about politics, resumes and networking.

Keep in mind, ten years ago, CCSD was recognized nationally as the fastest improving district in the nation.

Why is this happening? Why has Nevada dropped to dead last? The administration of the NV DOE is more about **form** than **substance**. They constantly confuse “**activity**” with “**achievement**”. I can't keep up with the number of new programs started under this administration. They clearly don't understand that education is not sexy and glitzy, it requires hard work, every day, in the classroom. While expending all those funds on their resume building programs, they didn't fund what students need most; this group failed to recommend funding to guarantee students qualified, experienced teachers, who possess instructional and assessment strategies, have access to professional development, and resources to support their instruction. But, they love to talk about holding students accountable

Nevada's students cannot wait for a new Governor to replace state Board President Elaine Wynn, State Superintendent Steve Canavaro, and his deputy Barley, they have to go! If we are concerned about accountability, why are they still in those positions? Unfortunately, when the legislature “reformed” education, they made these positions political – clearly not accountable. They simply are not qualified to lead a state education department.

These math experts that were ignored by the state predicted what would happen if the state moved forward with these end-of-course exams and, as it turns out, they were right.

The “confidentiality”/secrecy of testing in this state borders on lunacy. Teachers and their students had no clue what was on these end-of-course exams – who does that? The AP, ACT, SAT, LSAT, GMAT, civil service exams all release test questions and practice tests to help students prepare for their exams. There are two testing consortiums created by the feds to create k-12 tests, one of them, PARCC, releases test questions and practice tests. The other, SBAC, NV's test, does not.

How is that fair for our students? How frustrating is that for our teachers? My belief is simple, we don't play “gotcha” with our students. Students, and their teachers, should know what we expect them to know, recognize, understand, communicate and be able to do as they are learning their assigned curriculum. And they should have an efficient and effective method to prepare for high-stakes exams that could determine if they are being promoted or eligible for graduation – not trying to guess what's on the test.

For these state people, superintendent and state board, ignorance is bliss, they now want students to take these SAME exams that have now been found to be inappropriate for graduation and use them to count for 20% of students' grades. Yes, I can see it now, 20 years from now, the districts will be asked to go back and change students grades that were based on these tests as they are now being asked to award diplomas from 30 years ago. And some really wonder why Nevada is ranked dead last? [This whole mess could have been avoided if the so-called leaders at the NV DOE were experienced, used common sense and listened to the experts they identified.](#)

But, and there's a real issue that is a little deeper to understand; community and business leaders are also at fault for supporting "friends" rather than good policy. These so-called business leaders like to talk about education, but they don't have the knowledge or understanding to ask more than superfluous questions. Community leaders are too much about supporting one-another, not supporting good education. The mentality, *he's my friend so I need to support him*, is hurting education in the state. The result, Nevada is ranked dead last in the nation – not the fastest improving as we were before all this nonsense.

If the community and business leaders really cared about education, they'd ask questions about students' experiences learning in the overcrowded classrooms with inexperienced teachers, not getting the resources or professional development they need to help students be more successful. That water is too deep for our business and community leaders. Without this mentality, how else could the governor get away with increasing taxes for education by \$1/2 Billion without one dime going to increase teacher salaries when the state was experiencing a teacher shortage approximating 1000 teachers and students sitting in classes like algebra with over 40 students? That kind of decision-making left local trustees with choosing to cut programs, increase class sizes and make budget decisions that are causing problems not recognized by the state. The alternative for local school boards was to increase the teacher shortage to 1500-2000 teachers? *Pathetic!*

Bill Hanlon, is a noted speaker, an author, educator, consultant and coach for schools, former Director of the Southern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program, and is a national presenter for organizations such as AASA, ASCD, ALAS, NMSA, NASSP, NSBA, and NCTM. He was the coordinator of Clark County School District's Math/Science Institute and was also responsible for K-12 math audits. He served as vice president of the Nevada State Board of Education, Regional Director of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) and as a member of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) States Partnership Board. He also hosted a television series, "Algebra, you can do it!" on PBS Las Vegas.

[Follow Bill on twitter and Facebook](#)