

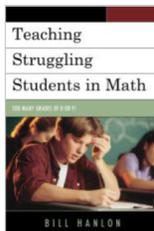
Nevada Public Education



Lack of Consequences has Consequences

Bill Hanlon

What's more important to students and parents in our community, safe schools with positive learning environments or a higher graduation rate that conflicts with actual student achievement data?



In a nutshell, that decision by the governor, state superintendent, state board of education and leaders in some school districts have undermined learning and has resulted in our schools being deemed unsafe by our own students and parents.

The new metric, pushed by the National Governors' Association, and adopted by Sandoval has created unintended consequences that affect our students experiences in the classroom and their feelings of safety at school. That decision is basically, increase graduation at all costs – a political ploy. The new improved graduation rate is clearly not consistent with level of student achievement.

The message to improve graduation rate at all cost results in keeping students in classes who continually distract others from learning and disrupt academic classes has its downside. Some bad actors know the game and are playing it well – at your sons and daughters' expense. When there are no serious consequences for bad behavior, that's interpreted as that behavior has become acceptable.

I hesitate to call some of these offenders' students, some of these young people walk up on teachers physically threatening them – yet they stay in school. They call teachers names, they don't respond to directions, they disrupt classes, but they stay in school. Just what do these politicians and policymakers think we are teaching these kids.

As a community, we need to apply the Goose–Gander Rules; that is, what's good for the goose is good for the gander.

I'm absolutely sure that if I attended a school board meeting or legislative meeting and began calling members names, refused to be quiet or sit down, the meeting would be halted - recessed, and I would be either arrested or trespassed so the meeting could go on without interruption.

Why can't classroom teachers have them same courtesy afforded them? Why do the rest of their students have to suffer academically because teachers are continually dealing with the same problem students? Those students should be removed – not coddled.

Academic expectations have been so lowered to accommodate these disruptors that schools and districts have adopted Minimum F policies and retrieval programs to accommodate the graduation rate, leaving non-performing and resistant students in class with their negative influences and distractions. These policies have resulted in behavioral expectations being lowered and an increased concern of students about being safe on their own school campus.

I get it, as educators, we like to give people second and third chances, that's in our nature. Politicians want to appear like they are doing something useful. But what has to evolve in our understanding is that students' rights to disrupt, distract or make our schools unsafe ends where other students' rights to be safe and to learn begins.

Nevada has been recognized nationally as having the highest student-teacher ratios in the country. Having 38-42 students in classes like algebra and geometry is terrible. But when you add in these bad actors in those classes, its beyond nuts.

In addition to having the nation's highest student-teacher ratio, our individual schools are one and a half to two times the size of schools nationally. Under these circumstances, we cannot have high academic expectations without having the same high behavioral expectations, they go hand-in-hand.

Having predators in school results in innocent kids making bad decisions like bringing weapons to school to protect themselves.

And on top of all that, when principals remove troublemakers from schools, their school's grade – the state's evaluation system based on stars, gets dinged. So, a school trying to ensure their students a safe environment by removing offenders loses points on their school's evaluation. Doing the right things gets you lowered marks in Nevada. That's just another unintended consequence of the Governor's and NV Department of Educational reforms. Sad.

Principals should not only have the right to keep your child safe by removing troublemakers from their schools, they should have the responsibility and authority to remove those who disrupt the education of others and/or places the safety of others in jeopardy. And, their school should not be punished for doing so.

So, rather than placing the emphasis on an exaggerated graduation rate to accommodate a governor's resume, let's place it where it belongs, on our students' experiences learning in the classroom – in a safe environment.

Being last academically and first in school violence/safety would seem to hand-in-hand and we have already reached the first goal.

Let's use common sense.

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 on 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.

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