

Nevada Public Education



Special Interests vs. Students

Bill Hanlon

Ask yourself this simple question? Do we send our students to school to learn how to read, write, and compute, then use that basic knowledge to learn about math, science, technology, English and social studies, you know, to be educated?



If the answer to that question is “yes”, then you need to ask legislators and policymakers some very basic questions to ensure our students are getting the most out of the education being provided to them.

Anyone who has lived in Nevada for over six months knows the state is experiencing a teacher shortage. They also know that to alleviate that shortage, the state has watered down teacher licensing standards and downplayed the shortage. That has resulted in many of our students being taught by underqualified teachers and a dead-last ranking on exams like the ACT.

Knowing that, wouldn't you expect your sons and daughters' math teachers to receive professional development in the content they are teaching our students. In fact, shouldn't teachers be taking classes in the content they teach, strategies to teach and assess that content, and creating resources that support those? If you answered “yes”, then you might ask policymakers, legislators, superintendents and school trustees some questions to get them more focused on your child's experience learning in the classroom.

Nevada has seen an explosion in special interest groups and non-profits going after the state's educational resources while our kids sit in algebra and geometry classes with 38-42 students, no books, few supplies, rationed resources, and very little or no training for their underqualified teachers to ensure some level of competence in the field they are teaching.

The state's solution: require teachers to enroll in ELL and Family Engagement classes for re-licensure. Does anyone really think that teacher requirement for re-licensure is going to increase our math scores? Yes, parents supposedly concerned with their child's education and minority organizations clamoring because their students are not successfully competing with their counterparts have lost their way and think “their” demands are more important than having their son or daughter in a classroom with an experienced, qualified teacher that actually knows the subject, knows how to teach it in understandable terms, knows how to assess that knowledge and can manage a classroom.

It's time these non-profits who are paying their national directors over \$400,000.00 per year get out of the taxpayers' pockets and stop diverting money from Nevada's classrooms. It's time minority organizations understand that in order to compete with the best, we need to demand of our students what the best are doing. It's also time that parent activists re-think why they got involved in education the first place – to improve the learning experience of their students in their classrooms learning about math, science, technology and the social sciences. It's time the state realizes that all their “reforms” and programs are only as good as the teachers using them.

Until then, and until we understand that outside the parents, teachers are the most important commodity in education, Nevada will continue to languish at the bottom of the nation's educational rankings. A state that doesn't value or invest in their teachers is a state where the educational experiences of our students will continue to be inferior to those that focus education on students' experiences learning in the classroom – not programs or bowing to the wants of special interest groups. Simply put, if we want to improve our students' futures, we better understand the importance of classroom teachers and the notion of “*what works is work*”.

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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