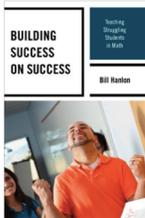


Nevada Public Education



NV Teachers Must Strike It's More Than Just About Money

Issue 2 of 6: Teacher Quality – Teacher Evaluation



If you want to increase student achievement, our students need fully qualified, experienced teachers who have the content knowledge, instructional & assessment strategies and resources to support their instruction. And as we discussed in Issue 1, academic and behavioral expectations that are enforced.

In a nutshell, our students are not provided those basic opportunities. Those were conscience decisions made at the district, state and national levels – not the school level.

You might recall just over a decade ago, the Clark County School District was recognized nationally as the fastest improving district in the nation. What happened to change that trajectory? A new local superintendent was hired with an inexperienced deputy and an outside consultant. Their “big” plan – money-ball. Rather than hire the best teachers available, they determined they could hire new teachers at less of a cost, or hire alternatively licensed teachers whose academic backgrounds were more than just suspect. For instance, teachers from TFA who had a “business” degree were hired to teach high school mathematics. The top course in a business degree is one class lower than an entry level class in for a math degree. These people don’t know vocabulary, notation, how to connect common concepts or how they are applied.

My experience working with fully qualified competent teachers has been when you make a suggestion, they listen and indicate they will try it. When I deal with teachers who don’t have solid backgrounds, not as competent, they see any suggestion as a threat, are very defensive, and are very reluctant to change instruction to help their students learn.

Adding to the issue of teacher quality, the NV State Board of Education, fully aware of the teacher shortage, new standards, and the lowering quality of new teachers, diverted professional development money to their “friends” in non-profits so these teachers’ students chances to succeed were compromised. Students get shortchanged at every level – but adults seem to win.

When speaking to middle and high school principals, they often identify their math department as great. When I contradict that assessment, they look at me like I’m rude. A typical example, a principal identified a teacher as an “A+” teacher. I responded by saying the teacher was, at best, a C, probably a “C–”. Clearly, there is a wide disconnect between people observing math with a

math background vs. someone observing who thinks they know math. And adding to this contradiction is that many of these same principals will not allow their teachers to send home a letter without their approval first. That doesn't spell "confidence" in their evaluations to me.

I certainly would not expect a high school principal to know a lot of math or know if concepts or skills were taught or being taught correctly. Let's make a simple point; Just translate the following math, a universal language, into English; $D_{(a,b),k}(x,y) \rightarrow (a + k(x-a), b + k(y-b))$. Can't do it? Because of underqualified teachers, neither can your students. That lowers achievement.

Would it be nice if our teachers knew the Pythagorean Theorem, Distance Formula, Equation of a Circle, Trig Identity $\cos^2x + \sin^2x = 1$ are all the same formula, just written differently because they are being used in different contexts. Those linkages make learning math so much easier.

Unbelievably, some students want to know what they will ever use the math they are learning. When our students learn about parabolas, they learn how to find the vertex, axis of symmetry, and focus. To create a little interest and enthusiasm in learning math, it would be nice that the properties of parabolas were discussed as applications so students could apply them to amphitheatres, flashlights, headlights, lasers, parabolic microphones, satellite dishes, etc. Students not receiving these expectations because of low teacher quality and an evaluation system that does nothing to improve instruction lose – achievement suffers.

So, what do we do in this state when we know that many of our math teachers are underqualified? We require them to take classes in ELL, Parental Engagement and Restorative Discipline. Does God really make people this stupid or are we just working overtime to accomplish that? Why not math?

To address teacher evaluations, the state created a new teacher evaluation tool, (NEPF), supposedly to "improve" instruction. How can anyone evaluate a math teacher who doesn't have a math background? Is that a joke? Teachers who don't receive high quality recommendations will continue to do what they have always done – no improvement.

Our parents and teachers must take back control of our schools so our students are in a safe secure environment conducive to learning with qualified, experienced teachers. Degrees must be posted so parents and students have some clue of the qualifications of their teachers. And an evaluation instrument that does not require a person with subject matter expertise on the evaluation team will never be effective

To accomplish this, teachers, with parent and community support, must strike – not just about funding issues – about educational issues. Our students deserve no less.

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.

Follow Bill on twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook