

Nevada Public Education



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

Issue 3 of 6: Setting Students Up To Fail – Student Placement



The decisions made by non-school based personnel are the major factors public schools are facing difficulties. Decisions made by people at the national, state, community and central office level who don't have to deal with the consequences of those decisions have negatively impacted public school education. While they are busy building a name for themselves, self-promoting, trying to be "new & Innovative" and being on the "cutting edge" so they appear more relevant, classroom teachers can see through the BS and know what really

works is work.

To be frank, if teachers and school administrators were more involved with these decisions, public schools would not be in the mess they are in today. Student placement is another example of non-educators making educational decisions. That placement should be based on students' readiness, ability, work ethic and interests. But, political types, people who want to be recognized as being on the cutting edge don't put students first.

The best example I give came from the National Governors' Association and their partner "Achieve" They pushed the "one size fits all" model common core standards. Yeah, all students are expected to go to college. Which means all students must take a college prep curriculum to graduate high school. These clowns couldn't see the folly coming down the pike with that. While state and central office personnel immediately followed the governors' leads, school based educators knew this was a bad joke that would hurt students.

Students were placed in classes in which they did not possess the background to succeed as a matter of policy. Students, ready or not, were forced into algebra classes which created a Lose–Lose–Lose–Lose scenario. Clearly, unprepared and special education students pushed into algebra were not getting their needs met, marginal/regular students who needed extra attention were not getting the help they needed and our brightest college bound students were getting a watered down class while their teachers were dealing with the issues and classes of over 40 students where reaching success became more about manipulating grades and graduation rates than achievement. Imagine, a system designed where everyone loses. Well, don't imagine, we have one.

Adding to those losses, many of these students would have been much better served by being exposed to different trades that would have set them down a career path with a good paying skill.

It used to be that a student who completed second year algebra would have a very good foundation in math. Now-a-days, I'm not so sure those students know algebra begins with the letter "a".

If school based educators were truly involved in these decisions, we wouldn't be facing the failure rates, the No-F policies and inflated graduation rates, stagnant test scores and our students graduating without saleable skills. My simple point, don't blame your school based personnel for these issues – blame our national, state, instant community experts, and central office personnel that always seem to place their own well-being above the needs of the students.

Teachers must strike, not just for money issues, but to restore common sense back into our schools. 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, and looking at what is in the best interest of each student before just placing them in an Alg I, Geo, Alg II one size fits all college curriculum is what we'd want for our own children. Setting students up to fail as a matter of policy by poor placement conditions is just unacceptable

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.

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