

# reporter

## *NPRI Education Roundtables*

by Robert Schmidt, Ph.D. and John Ziebell

### Executive Summary

When substandard performance by Nevada schools is discussed, state educators almost invariably blame it on less than optimal funding. This rhetoric is not surprising; nationally, the education sector's pleas for additional funding are so frequent that it might seem money is the only cure for instructional woes. But while increased spending can clearly have a positive impact on educational quality, the question remains: Can money alone cure the problems that plague Nevada's educational institutions?

The Nevada Policy Research Institute (NPRI), following the 2004 release of two studies—*Wasting Time and Money: Why so Many Nevada Students are Not Ready for College*, and *Nevada Public School Performance: Parents and Employers Give a Failing Grade*—organized a series of roundtable discussions to explore the topic of educational reform. Sessions were held in northern and southern Nevada and participants included over 50 recognized leaders of the state's business, education and legislative communities.

Two polar perspectives were offered as a basis for discussion. First was the NSEA-supported ballot initiative to amend the Nevada constitution to fund schools at a yet-undefined "national average." Offered as counterpoint was the proposition that the most pressing needs of Nevada's K-12 and higher education systems are for organizational reforms, rather than additional taxpayer funds.

The goal of the roundtables was not any single immediate solution to problems within Nevada's educational system, but rather, discussions that could lay the foundation for

future cooperation. Most public-sector educators continued to believe that added funding would provide the greatest increase in educational success, while several legislators and private sector representatives suggested that added spending will provide little benefit if organizational and leadership improvements are not made within Nevada's educational system.

Significant points of discussion included:

- ◆ How business people see Nevada schools
- ◆ How well Nevada's students do at all levels
- ◆ "National Average" funding
- ◆ The public's unmet need for fiscal accountability throughout Nevada's education system
- ◆ Chronic failure of top-down leadership systems for both in K-12 and UCCSN
- ◆ Issues of school district size in Clark and Washoe counties
- ◆ How exceptionally low tuition generates low standards at Nevada's flagship universities
- ◆ Lack of parental choice within the K-12 system
- ◆ Teacher performance pay, training and qualifications
- ◆ Top-heavy administrative spending in the university system

A non-attribution policy allowed roundtable participants to speak candidly. The dialogues were engaging and wide-ranging, and most participants found the sessions informative and worthwhile. Perhaps the greatest measure of the roundtables' success is the increasing momentum for genuine educational reform sensed by Nevada legislators, business leaders and the academic community.

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## **Nevada Policy Research Institute**

**The Nevada Policy Research Institute** is an independent research and educational organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for all residents of the Silver State through sound free-market solutions to state and local policy questions. The Institute assists policy makers, scholars, business people, the media and the public by providing non-partisan analysis of Nevada issues and by broadening the debate on questions that for many years have been dominated by the belief government intervention should be the automatic solution.

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**NPRI**  
**Education Roundtables**

*Spring and Summer, 2004*

**Conducted**  
**by**  
**Robert Schmidt, J.D., Ph.D.**

**Discussion Minutes**  
**by**  
**John Ziebell**

The tables and graphics that follow are elements from Dr. Schmidt's presentation, included to help provide context for the remarks of roundtable participants.

### **EDUCATIONAL CRISIS**

**Most Nevadans believe that the State is experiencing an educational crisis in K-12 & higher education in funding and performance.**

# INTRODUCTION

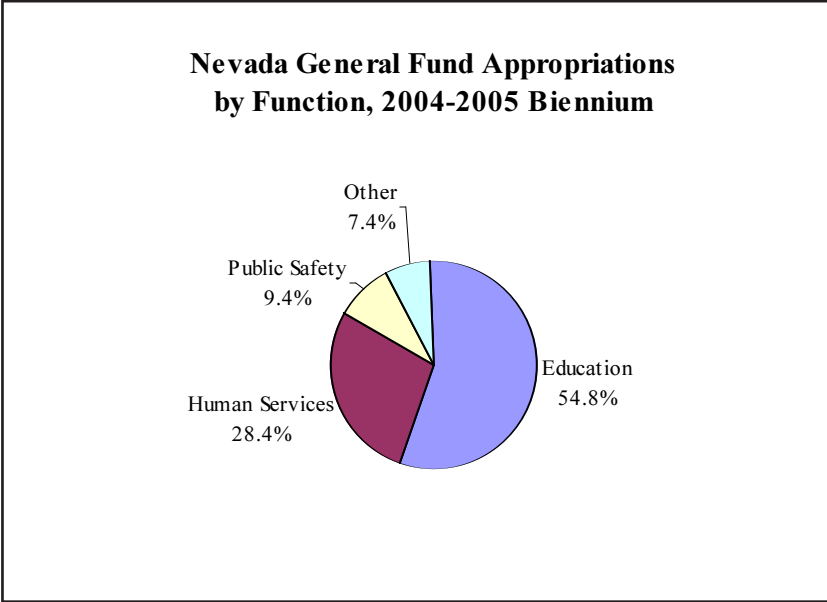
The Education Reform roundtable sessions began with the premise that Nevada is currently experiencing a crisis in funding and performance in both K-12 and higher education. A recent ballot initiative proposed by members of the education community asks Nevada voters to support a constitutional amendment that would raise the state's per-pupil educational funding to "the national average." While it is the implied premise of these educators that higher per-pupil spending will adequately address this crisis, others feel that additional funding alone may not be enough to resolve the state's problems. The intent of these roundtables has been to generate a series of productive discussions based on the idea that important alternatives to the "national average" funding position are available and should be considered.

Roundtable planning envisioned a dialogue that would focus on the funding problems that face Nevada's education system, both K-12 and higher education, and range from reviewing recent studies on education in Nevada to critically examining

the alternatives offered by contrasting views of proposed solutions.

Please note that the opinions expressed here are those of the authors of the proposals under discussion and the roundtable participants. Statements in this document do not necessarily represent the views of any other person or organization, including the Nevada Policy Research Institute (NPRI) and its members. Additionally, participants were assured that there would be no direct attribution of quotes in the roundtable documentation, which allowed for a more candid forum.

The genesis of the educational roundtables were two significant studies recently published



under the sponsorship of NPRI: *Wasting Time and Money: Why So Many Nevada Students Are Not Ready for College*, and *Nevada Public School Performance: Parents and Employers Give a Failing Grade*. Executive summaries of the two studies are appended to this document and both studies are also available in their entirety on the NPRI website.

The proposal—and ballot initiative—prof-

fered by Nevada educators asks state voters and taxpayers to support a request to increase educational funding to what they assert is the national average level—in Nevada’s case, an increase that is currently estimated at \$1701 per pupil. The contrasting viewpoint set out in the roundtable discussions focused on solving systemic problems before asking additional funding to solve the educational crisis in Nevada.

## **TWO CONTRASTING VIEWS**

### ***Nevada State Education Association Files Ballot Initiative***

“We feel confident that Nevada voters will enthusiastically help us qualify and pass this petition,” said NSEA President Terry Hickman. “Given the overwhelming support we have seen for increased funding for education and the fact that, under this proposal, we have eight years to reach merely average funding levels, we expect this petition will be very popular. I respectfully ask any opponents of this proposal, ‘If not by 2012, when? If not this way, how?’”

NSEA Executive Director Ken Lange added, “We expect that voters will use this petition to send a message to our elected officials about their concern for our education system. The time to reach adequate levels of funding for K-12 education is overdue. If we don’t address this issue now we may never be able to.”

Source: NSEA Website April 2004

### ***The Problems in Nevada’s Education System Result From:***

- ◆ Lack of choice
- ◆ Large K-12 school districts
- ◆ Oversized schools
- ◆ A higher education structure that encourages waste of taxpayer monies.

Nevada’s problems in education can only be solved with major structural reforms, not more taxpayer dollars. More funds will not solve the problems.

## DISCUSSION

**T**he purpose of the education reform roundtables sponsored by NPRI, as stated, was not to propose a specific solution to problems with Nevada's educational system, but to generate a discussion that would touch on the merits of differing perspectives. Although the dialogue was not expected to result in consensus, organizers did feel that the roundtables could help delineate central issues and allow the participants to discover some common ground that might inform further cooperation.

The starting point for the roundtable discussions was the Nevada constitutional amendment proposed by the Nevada State Education Association (NSEA) that would require the state legislature to raise K-12 funding to a vaguely-defined 'national average' at an estimated cost of \$780 million by 2012. A counter-proposal offered for discussion at the roundtable sessions embraced a radically opposed perspective, arguing that the most important failures of education in Nevada can and should be addressed with little or no additional taxpayer spending.

The roundtable dialogues were engaging, and while often spirited, never hostile. The majority of those in attendance participated in the manner that was envisioned for the project, and willingly contributed to wide-ranging discussions on a variety of education-related topics; very few were committed to repeatedly addressing specific or singular issues. While the scope of the sessions was indeed broad, the essence of the analysis can be summed up in

one question: What prospect is there that increased funding would solve the educational problems faced by Nevada?

### **K-12 Performance**

**A**t the first northern Nevada session, a prominent local businessman related an anecdote about a frequently-missed question on the basic skills test his company gives to all new hires. The problematic question: What is ten percent of 100?

"I can't recruit people to high paying jobs because they don't want to put their kids in our schools," another participant said. "Fair or not, that's the perception that people in the business community have of our state education system."

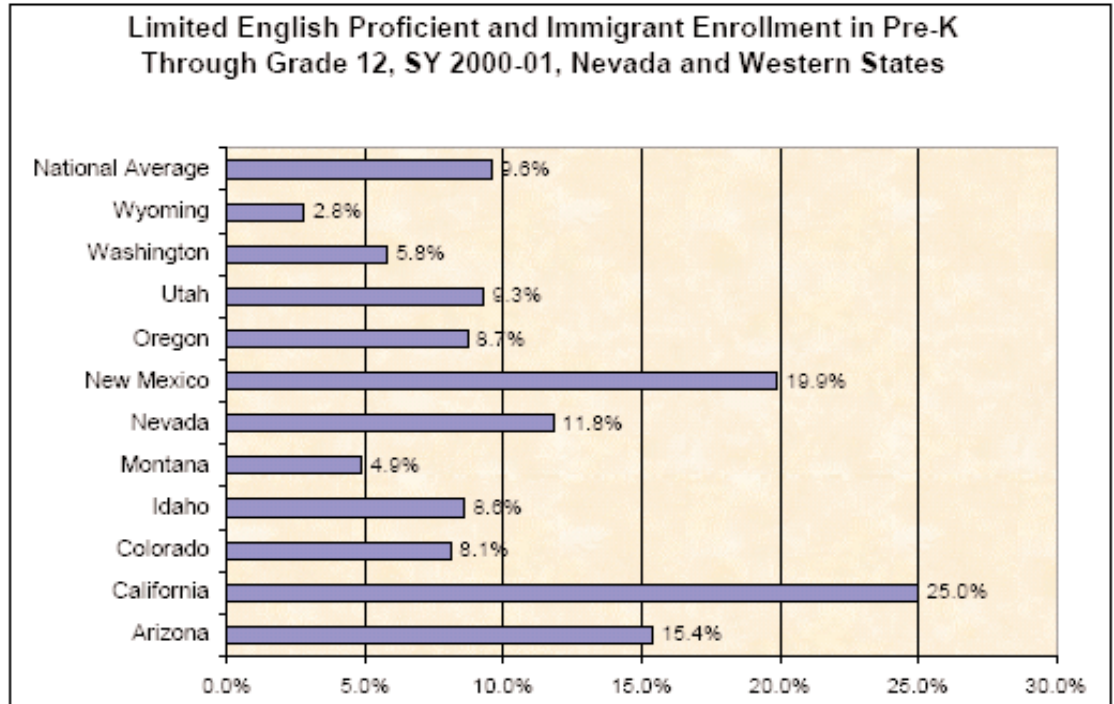
One of the difficulties with examining educational issues is that so many people are unclear as to why we are experiencing performance problems with K-12 students. There is no doubt that we have a problem in Nevada; the question is why.

"We're not teaching a basic level of knowledge," one participant said, echoing a perception shared by most members of the business community. "Fifty years ago an unskilled worker did not need basic math or communication skills, but that is not true anymore. These days, almost any entry level position requires literacy not only in math and English, but in computer skills."

Some of the performance problems arise from an educational philosophy that lacks forward thinking, according to one roundtable par-

**There is no doubt that we have a problem in Nevada; the question is why.**

**“Many students simply do not know why they are there—they don’t understand that they are being prepared for life.”**



Source: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. Survey of the States' Limited English Proficient Students and Available Programs and Services 2000-2001, October 2002.

participant: “We need to motivate teachers to talk to their students about school. Many students simply do not know why they are there—they don’t understand that they are being prepared for life.”

“Here in southern Nevada, the goal of most students is to graduate from high school,” another said. “But remember, we call that ‘commencement’ for a reason—you’re beginning the rest of your life. Our students should be looking farther ahead than high school graduation. Kids in other states certainly are.”

Other critiques of Nevada schools focused on practical application, or perhaps a lack thereof, and were expressed more succinctly: “What do we want our kids to know? When do we want them to know it? And how do we assess them to be sure that they know it?” Time and time again, comments returned to a focus on the fundamental skills in which too many of Nevada’s students demonstrate a lack of proficiency: math, reading and writing.

Educators are admirably willing to admit—and dismiss—gross failures that were conceived and implemented in the past, such as ‘whole language’ learning or the decision to quit teaching multiplication tables in the lower

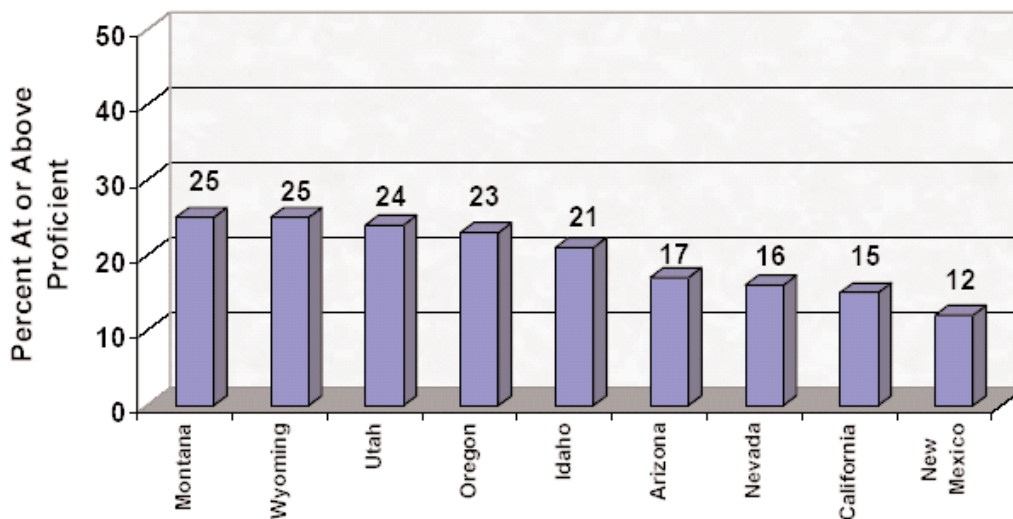
grades. But the teaching arm of the K-12 sector seems particularly willing to blame external forces for the inadequacies that currently exist within the system. According to educators, the factors most responsible for the poor performance of Nevada schools are the increasing number of non-native English speaking students who lack basic language skills, disruptive students in the classrooms, and a lack of parent involvement.

The statistics available regarding students who are not native speakers of English are quite contradictory. One recent study puts Nevada’s population of non-native speakers who lack a proficiency in the language as slightly less than 12 percent, about two points above the national average. CCSD administrators who attended the roundtable sessions argued that the real figure is 20 percent in southern Nevada, and on the rise. At this point, there is no way to determine which side has the more credible numbers, though it seems unlikely that we face the same problems in this area that Arizona or southern California do.

Another issue raised by educators was that of inappropriate students in the K-12 classrooms, including both disruptive students and



NAEP Scores for Western States  
4th Grade Mathematics - 2000



‘mainstreamed’ students with documented discipline problems. This was a position that, perhaps justifiably, received limited empathy from community members, many of whom are parents, who seemed unimpressed by educators’ explanations of why discipline problems can’t simply be remedied by implementing zero-tolerance policies in Nevada public schools.

“I don’t think we have a teacher problem, I think we have a parent problem,” one private-sector representative said. “We have parents who don’t care, and teachers who aren’t allowed to discipline students, and that means they are also losing the kids who really want to learn.”

Educators seemed to agree that, overall, the greatest resistance to increased educational rigor and higher standards of assessment comes from parents. Parents, on the other hand, argue that they reasonably expect higher levels of performance from Nevada schools. A vision of the role of parents in the state’s educational structure was one of the most contentious points that came under discussion, and the commentary was quite predictable at its extremes: Parents feel that their children are losing out because teachers are uninvolved and overworked; teachers believe parents are constantly seeking special treatment for kids who

just don’t perform up to par and aren’t taught anything at home. This issue provoked passionate debate, but ultimately proved unproductive as a point of discussion.

The question of remediation has more ramifications when discussing the UCCSN system, but problems exist at the K-12 level as well. “The gaps in knowledge of the kids transferring into this system are incomprehensible,” one teacher argued. “There are some who have never had any science classes. And to compound the problem, their parents still somehow believe the children are *smart*.”

“It’s a disservice to everyone,” another participant said. “We can’t blame the kids because they haven’t been given the right opportunities.”

Another favored tenet invoked by educators to explain poor performance was classroom overcrowding. Regardless of recent studies which show that class size has a much lower impact on performance than teacher quality, per-student space considerations or overall school size, the general public clearly accepts the idea that higher numbers of students in a classroom correlates directly to lower levels of overall performance; the claim has been part of the educator’s mantra for so long, it seems, that it is given instant credibility

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**Spending to meet figures based on a national norm becomes problematic in Nevada, where educational capital spending and debt servicing costs run far above both national and regional averages.**

whenever it is publicly asserted.

Educators also noted the effect that class size has on the amount of time teachers can spend on each course, arguing that as long as the current teaching loads are in place, it is simply impossible to provide any additional reading, grading or evaluation for the five to six classes taught every day.

Finally, in all the sessions, there was a strong conversational thread that critiqued Nevada's educational system for failing to give the best students full opportunities. Participants within and outside the system, from K-12 through UCCSN, seemed to share the perception that more effort is expended on funneling marginal students through the educational hierarchy than on rewarding, advancing or promoting scholastic achievement.

### **The 'National Average' Position**

**I**n examining the proposal to fund Nevada schools at the national average, the first item that proves to be factually unanchored is the central term itself. Which average, among a number of competing statistical figures, should we fund to?

"One of the problems with even discussing the national average position is that it is not really defined very well," an elected official stated. "We're not sure what 'national average' means, specifically, so we will have to define it legislatively, and that will require some kind of consensus."

The language of the proposed amendment is less than clear, demanding that "the annual per-pupil expenditure of Nevada equals or

exceeds the national average." One roundtable participant noted that on a per capita basis, according to National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) figures, Nevada arguably is at the national average in terms of funding; Nevada is currently ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> by the NEA (a ranking that does not include some benefit spending) and 24<sup>th</sup> by the NCES. In dollars, according to figures from the Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau, per-pupil spending in Nevada is currently only \$78 below the NCES national average.

Spending to meet figures based on a national norm becomes problematic in Nevada, where educational capital spending and debt servicing costs run far above both national and regional averages. And addressing the uncertainties in the proposed amendment requires more than clarification of terms. There is also the question of the legislative responsibility of elected officials, who are obligated to balance a general approval for educational spending against the other needs and realities of Nevada's current fiscal situation. At the legislative level, these apparently easy solutions seem to lose their appeal once they come up against the tough business of apportioning funds.

The roundtable discussions were intended to test the assertion that the single most important action that can be taken to improve education in Nevada is attaining the vaguely-stated 'national average' funding levels. The greatest concern that should be raised by the proposed national average amendment, some argued, would be this: If the NSEA-sponsored amendment passes, potentially adding a combined

### **How Much Will NSEA K-12 Proposal Cost Nevada Taxpayers?**

- ◆ Estimates are an additional \$1,701 per K-12 pupil.
- ◆ 2001-02 K-12 enrollment was 356,814.
- ◆ Estimated K-12 enrollment in 2012 is 458,000.
- ◆ Additional annual cost in 2012 will be \$780 million.

*NPRI Education Forum April 2004*

## Where Will the Additional Money Come From??

- ◆ State budget faces competing priorities, including public safety for homeland security and social services for growing senior population.
- ◆ At current rates of growth, schools and Medicaid would “crowd out” all other state spending in coming years.
- ◆ At the local level, significant increases in sales and property taxes and development fees would be necessary to meet the NSEA proposal.

*NPRI Education Forum April 2004*

\$1 billion in tax-based funding to the CCSD and UCCSN systems budgets by 2012, who is going to pay for it?

### Funding Education in Nevada

**D**espite all the uncertainties in the proposed constitutional amendment requiring Nevada to fund education “at the national level,” proponents have acquired enough signatures to put the initiative on the state’s November election ballot. And while the bill’s backers are studiously ignoring the implicit threat of additional tax levies that such funding would generate, the question has not been total-

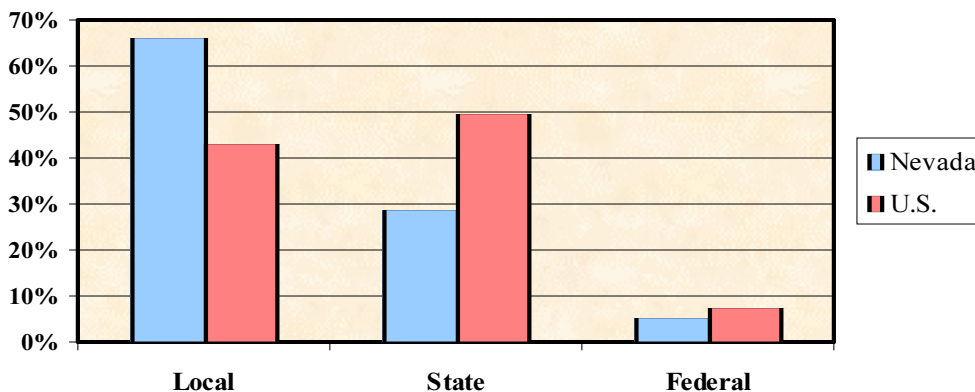
ly overlooked by the voting public. The Nevada AFL-CIO recently came out against the proposal, stating that tax increases to fund the amendment would unfairly burden the state’s working families. Another point that arose in the discussions was that, where educational funding is concerned, taxpayers believe that their money is being used to solve a situation most feel they did not create.

“Nobody wants their tax dollars to be used to treat a preexisting condition,” one participant said.

“And how do we know what to fix?” another added. “Should the money go to

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**Sources of K-12 Revenue for Nevada and U.S., 2003**



*Source: National Education Association*

## National K-12 Funding Comparison

- ♦ Administration expenses are 15% higher than the national and regional averages
- ♦ Instruction costs are slightly lower than national and regional norms
- ♦ The state of Nevada has significantly more construction costs
- ♦ Educational reform should recognize:
  - ♦ Capital outlays are 60% higher than national average and 35% higher than regional average
  - ♦ Interest expense is 250% of national average and nearly 300% higher than regional average

*NPRI Education Forum April 2004*

**"Constituents certainly can't want us to keep giving away money to education without evaluating performance. It just does not make sense...."**

improving performance? Standards? Who chooses—the school districts?"

Additionally, legislators are faced with a field of conflicting measures that would stall additional taxation and spending.

"We need to understand each other's roles," an elected official said. "The legislature doesn't mind giving you the money, but only if we understand what we are getting in return—there's nobody in the Nevada teachers associations who will help us understand their goals, their ambitions, or what their partnerships will achieve. We need to have some sort of plan explained to us, and we need to hear some ideas about potential outcomes. Remember, we have to base our funding decisions on whether we're doing the right thing—not just for the schools, but for the State of Nevada."

"It frustrates me when all these discussions turn to asking for money," another participant said. "We should decide what we need, then figure out how much it will cost us."

"Everybody asks us for more money," one state legislator explained, "and we ask them all the same question: what do the taxpayers get? Our constituents certainly can't want us to keep giving away money to education without evaluating performance. It just does not make sense to keep going the way we are with businesses telling us that our students need to be retrained

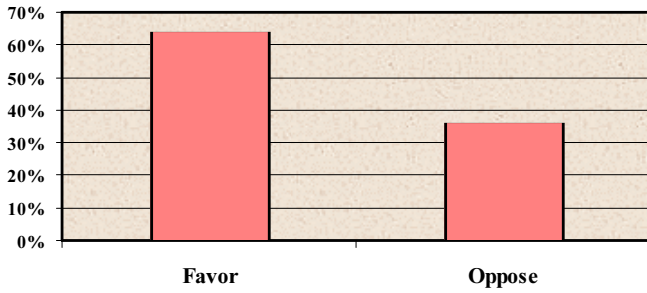
in basic skills. That should be a message to teachers. I have a hard time believing they can honestly say that we should give them more money without making any changes."

Simply hinting at the notorious lack of accountability on the part of the Nevada K-12 system allowed educators to raise what is perhaps the most persuasive, though unsupported, argument for proponents of increased K-12 funding: while giving the school districts more money may not immediately make things measurably better, giving the districts less money is sure to make things measurably worse.

"We go from legislative session to legislative session and I feel like a panhandler begging for money, because the things we've actually done to correct our problems never reaches the media," a top-level school district official said.

One exclusive problem faced by Nevada school districts is extraordinarily high construction costs per student. Nevada faces the same spending issues that plague other districts, such as the disproportionate amount of funds allotted to special education. But the state is also challenged by a unique problem that stems from the inordinate amount of construction spending needed to keep pace with Nevada growth. When construction spending is added to the

### Support for State Funding of Education at National Level



Source: Nevada State Education Association

to make. Where will this money come from? Should developable land fund growth-related education? To what degree? Should commercial projects share the burden with residential development? These are questions that we must plan on addressing in the very near future.

One idea proposed by an elected official was the possible restructuring of the assignment of money generated by BLM land sales in Clark County. Under the Southern Nevada Public Land

**“We regularly spend construction funds on things that other districts use their operating budgets for,” one elected official said.**

Management Act, schools get a very limited percentage of the funds, and in the current political climate, a persuasive argument might be made that the monies would be better spent on education than on the purchase of environmentally sensitive land in other areas of the state. Of course, renegotiating an agreement that involves a number of powerful parties, including the federal land agencies and environmental lobbies, would not be free of problems.

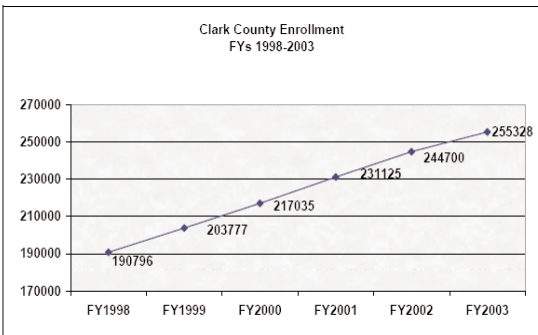
annual per-pupil funding figures, Nevada already allocates more tax dollars than would be needed to meet any reasonably-derived national average—which is perhaps why the NSEA and its local affiliates supporting the proposed constitutional amendment invariably separate construction costs out from total spending in their funding analysis.

Much of the construction is funded on property tax-based bonds that are due to expire over the next few years. “We regularly spend construction funds on things that other districts use their operating budgets for,” one elected official said. “If those bonds aren’t renewed, that will be a big problem.”

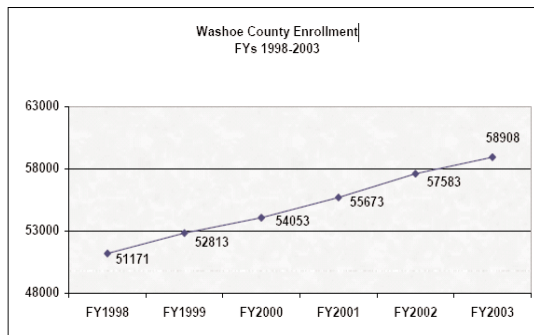
The construction required to keep Nevada school districts in step with growth, most especially in Clark County, means Nevada has to service a debt level that is far above both national and regional averages. And since growth has not slowed measurably, we must consider the fact that we will need more money for the increasing capital expenditures we need

In almost every discussion that touched on money, Nevada K-12 representatives fell back upon their favorite rhetorical illustration of inadequate funding—the claim that their greatest roadblock to better-educated students is a deficiency in the quality and quantity of classroom materials, most specifically books. While the groups overall agreed that books were important, the school districts failed to receive wholly sympathetic responses on this issue.

“I’ve taught 22 years, mostly reading, and have never had a book for every child,” one



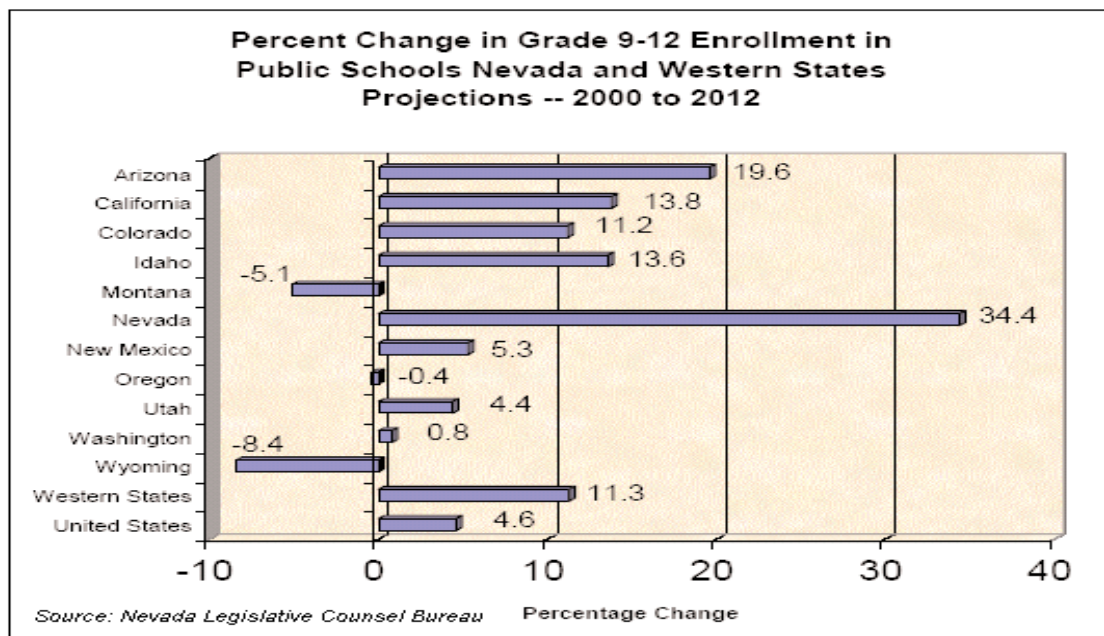
Source: Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau



Source: Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau



“Sometimes, crisis is good. We had to cut \$98 million from our budget, and the one thing that does is make you quit trying to ride dead horses.”



educator asserted. “We should not be held accountable for not teaching reading when we do not even have a reading book for every child,” another teacher said. “I can’t send kids home with homework if they don’t have books to take with them.”

“In the last ten years we’ve doubled the money going to the schools,” an elected official responded. “I honestly can’t accept the idea that we can’t teach students simply because they don’t have books to take home.”

“Somebody in the school districts must make those decisions,” a representative of the business community said. “Somebody chooses the priorities. Is the district telling us that everything else they fund is more important than textbooks?”

Another participant added that some texts change very little over time, and the school systems should be able to build up a sufficient number of texts for math, science, and English classes; just because textbook publishers put out new editions every few years should not necessarily commit the districts to replace texts that have not changed in terms of content.

A Nevada elected official said that when legislation has been introduced to ‘fence off,’ or dedicate, K-12 funding specifically for textbooks, to ensure that book money is allocated for classroom use free from competition from other funding demands within specific districts,

those proposed bills have then been surreptitiously and anonymously amended in Assembly committees to remove the provision for future years. This recurring “problem,” some suspect, is kept in place because of its utility for educational lobbyists.

Finally, one K-12 administrator admitted that there are times when the state’s failure to provide unlimited funds for the demands of K-12 education do provide, if not solutions to problems, at least some specific focus:

“Sometimes, crisis is good. We had to cut \$98 million from our budget, and the one thing that does is make you quit trying to ride dead horses. That’s the time we take a good look at ourselves, and if a program doesn’t work, we get rid of it.”

## Teacher Salaries

One of the greatest difficulties in discussing educational funding is that people are never clearly shown exactly how, where and to whom so much of the state’s tax revenues are allocated. Still, whether right or wrong, definite opinions about the allocation of those funds do exist.

“I don’t think there’s anybody in this room who does not believe that the job of the teacher is one of the most noble professions out there,” a local businessman said. “Unfortunately, the perception in the community is that teachers

## Teachers' Salaries

- ♦ New teachers' salaries in Nevada are higher than those of most Nevada and U.S. college graduates with liberal arts bachelor degrees
- ♦ According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, average hourly pay of teachers exceeds that of architects, registered nurses, mechanical and civil engineers and many other science majors.

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[R]ecent statistics do show that the starting pay for Nevada teachers is above the national average for liberal arts graduates of four-year universities.

are once again asking for more money for themselves.”

A Nevada educator countered that statement by arguing that beginning salaries for teachers in the state are embarrassingly low.

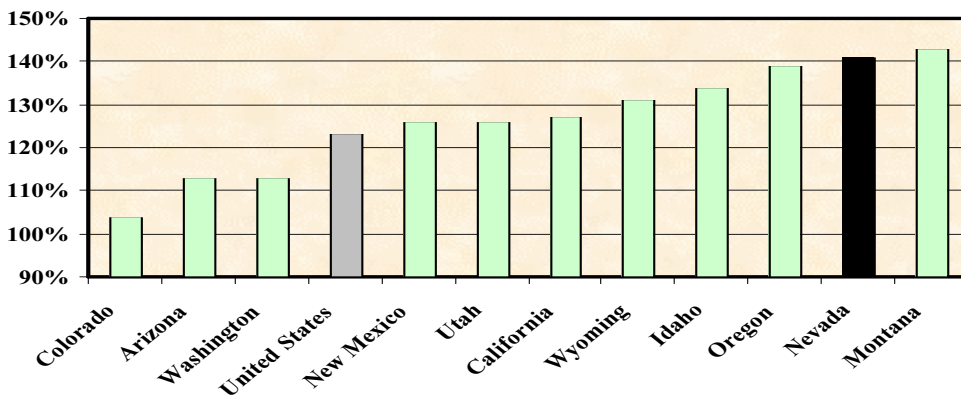
“We have teachers who qualify for earned income tax credits for the working poor, and teachers with children who qualify for the free lunch program.” To that a business executive responded that such is normally the case for many starting positions in his and other industries.

While these facts may be true, recent statistics do show that the starting pay for Nevada teachers is above the national average for liberal arts graduates of four-year universities. And despite their efforts, teacher representatives are themselves partly to blame for negative perceptions existing in the larger community. Teacher

pay is endlessly discussed in public forums, unlike private sector salaries. Teachers themselves generate much of the discussion, through their various policy organs. Also, the funds used to pay teachers come from taxpayer dollars, which makes educators a frequent target for vocal lobbies that feel they are not receiving appropriate returns from the tax expenditures—from concerned parents condemning the poor quality of their kids' education to seniors who feel unfairly burdened with an increasing financial responsibility they feel should belong to parents.

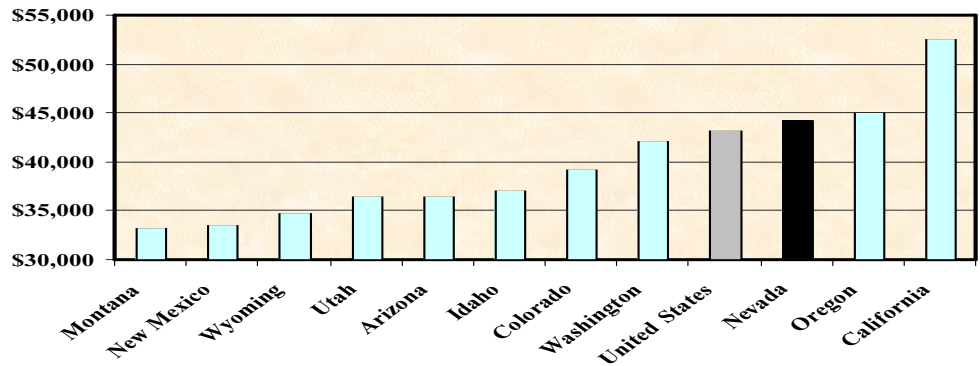
Another point raised in the discussions was that teacher salaries, and sometimes seniority, are based in large part on the number of graduate credits that educators continue to earn at UNLV and UNR—most in the field of education, rather than in specific subject areas like

**WESTERN STATE COMPARISON: RATIO OF AVERAGE SALARY OF TEACHERS IN 2000-2001 COMPARED TO ANNUAL EARNINGS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, 2000**



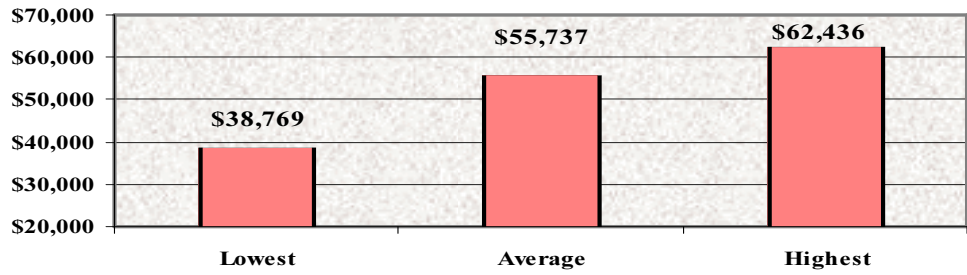
*Source: Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau*

**WESTERN STATE COMPARISON:  
AVERAGE SALARY OF TEACHERS IN 2000-2001**



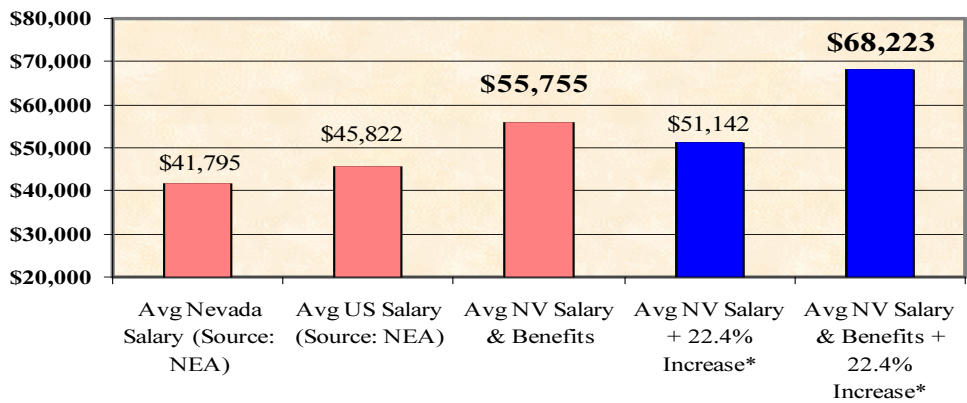
Source: Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau

**Clark County School District,  
Teacher Pay Plus Benefits, 2003-04**



Sources: NEA and Clark County School District

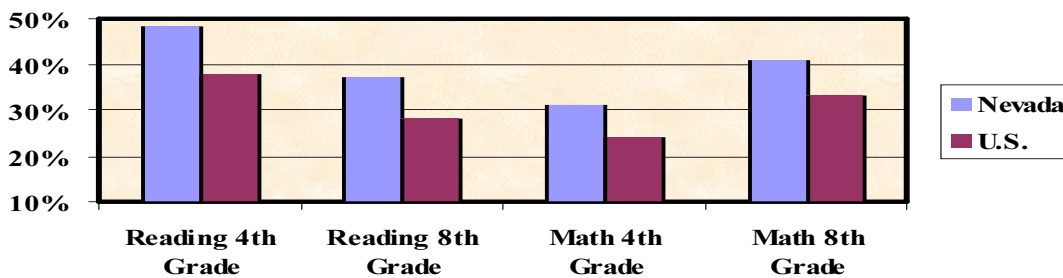
**Nevada K-12 Teacher Salary Comparisons,  
2002-03 School Year**



\* Based on funding increase of \$1,300 per student for current expenditures.



## Percentage of Students Below Basic Level, Nevada and U.S., 2003



Source: NAEP State Reports

math, English or the sciences.

“Why should teacher salaries be based on the number of graduate credits they earn at UNLV?” one southern Nevada participant asked. “What does that have to do with how well they teach third-graders? I certainly don’t see how a Ph. D makes anyone a better kindergarten teacher.”

### Teacher Performance and Accountability

It is interesting to note that while none of the K-12 teachers present believed that they should be held accountable for the notoriously poor performance scores of Nevada students, all agreed that they believe an amended con-

cept of merit pay—specifically, additional salary incentives for teachers that would be based on any positive improvements in student performance—would be eminently fair.

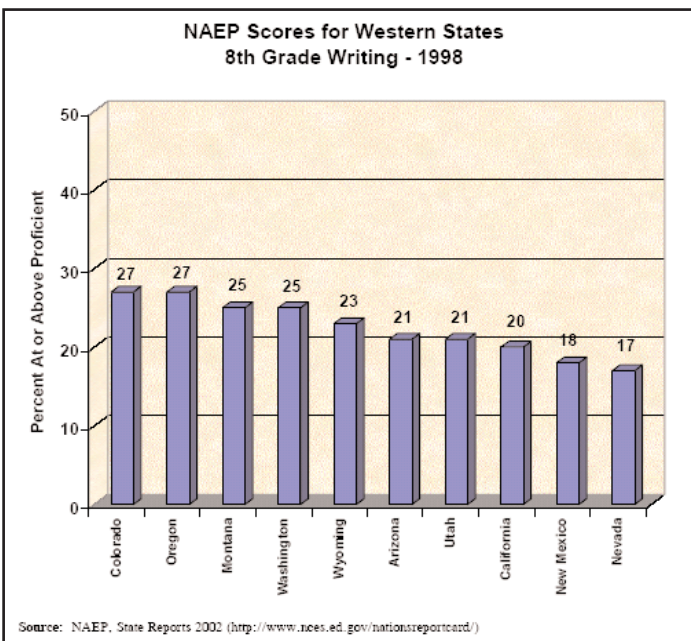
“I don’t want my salary based upon the test scores of my students,” one teacher stated bluntly, and other educators throughout the sessions echoed that sentiment.

Nevada educators admit that they would like to see pay for performance in select instances, but the equation is fairly one-sided: “We’re looking at performance-based pay for some things—for people who do more than the job requires, like getting a national certification or a master’s degree,” a K-12 representative said. “But I do not want my pay based on testing. We have no control over where the kids come to us from. There are always students who can’t read and write, and even excellent students can do poorly if the test is unimportant to them.”

While one teacher stated that pay for performance is problematic because the school districts, unlike many businesses, deal in children—“We don’t produce widgets”—another participant argued that the school districts should indeed be viewed in a businesslike manner: “The state’s K-12 system should produce properly educated students, and the product we’re getting is not what we want.”

“It’s unfair, but the system

“The state’s K-12 system should produce properly educated students, and the product we’re getting is not what we want.”



Source: NAEP, State Reports 2002 (<http://www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>)

“Of course, we should evaluate whether our teachers can actually teach or not,” an administrator admitted, “but we’re not set up to analyze that.”

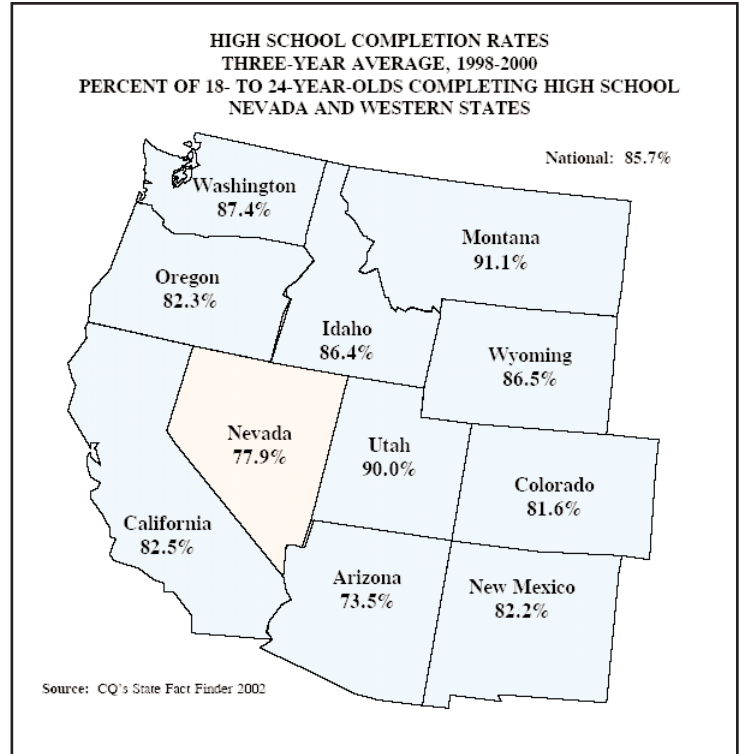
works like this: Take what you get, and live with them for 12 years. We can’t throw kids away,” the educator responded.

Another concern raised by educators is that because UNLV and UNR do not graduate enough educators to meet the needs of the two larger Nevada districts, Clark and Washoe counties are bringing in new teachers from diverse areas and backgrounds. This is not a negative situation in itself, but the districts may not be spending enough time to make their new colleagues part of a cohesive body. This might be remedied, one teacher suggested, by implementing additional training measures, such as requiring new teachers to show up at least a month ahead of time so that current educators can bring them up to speed on how things work in Nevada schools, in Nevada districts, with Nevada students. CCSD says they are doing as much as possible in that area by requiring student teaching experience and instituting a two-year probationary period, performance testing and teacher mentoring.

Still, horror stories abound, offering rhetorical ammunition to both sides of the issue—wonderful teachers forced out of jobs they love by an uncaring administration, and inept or incompetent teachers rendered untouchable by union, association and management protections.

“The difference between the business model and the educational model is that business weeds out everything that is not good—we can’t always do that,” an educator noted.

“Of course, we should evaluate whether our teachers can actually teach or not,” an administrator admitted, “but we’re not set up to analyze



that. It’s a deficiency in the system.”

Additionally, many teachers claim they are helpless to make the kind of positive changes that might help students because they are limited by the structure in which they exist. “Mainly, our actions are dictated by union contracts,” one said candidly.

Specifically, teachers and educational administrators say that the unions prevent the district from regulating teacher performance. One illustration was the onerous process required to get rid of bad teachers—sometimes, because of protection from the union, there is simply nothing that can be done about them. And the idea that the union also controls edu-

### Business Community Perspectives

- ◆ Failure of K-12 increases operating costs
- ◆ Failure of K-12 deters new businesses
- ◆ Deters investment in schools
- ◆ Undermines community pride

cation policy is also true, one participant added.

For example, the NEA spends more than \$400,000 of its budget to support political campaigns in Nevada, and the body is very vocal on whatever issues it is for or against. Teachers claim that the organization is so powerful that it is impossible for individual educators to take a stand against it, even when they think the NEA's policies are misguided.

"There are issues here that are beyond reform, and those issues are most often all political," one participant said.

"I'm tired of hearing about the unions running the world," another private-sector representative said with equal candor. And while that sentiment seemed to be well received by the roundtable as a whole, it unfortunately failed to offer a solution to the problem.

Many participants wondered whether some of the problems we face are rooted higher up the educational chain of command. One perception that was frequently cited during the roundtable discussions was a failure of leadership at all levels of Nevada education. The teachers argue that this problem stems from a top-heavy school district administration and rivalries that are generated by political competition.

"Educational leadership has its hands tied by a lot of external forces," an educator argued. "The bureaucracy itself is the biggest problem."

"LCB, the Department of Education, the NEA, the unions, the districts—they all think they're in charge, and they're all political,"

another teacher said. "They have all carved out kingdoms, and there's no overall top-down leadership structure with the power to control them."

School administration is obviously a murky area, perhaps because causes of administrative inefficiency are themselves uncertain; there seems to be no clear line separating common bureaucratic ineptitude from a failure of leadership in the K-12 hierarchy. While one official stated all proposals to recruit educational administrators from the business sector have been soundly defeated, other participants argued that those results were probably more positive than negative.

Representatives of one educational administration argued that while there are problems within the larger districts, overall performance is actually much better than the public perceives. The inaccurate portrait of a monolithically dysfunctional K-12 system was said to result from using national testing scores as the sole criteria for measuring performance, along with unbalanced media attention that touts scandals while ignoring successes.

"We concentrate a lot of negatives, and that's all right because we discuss what needs to be changed, but our situation isn't as bad as we're sometimes told it is," a K-12 administrator noted. "There are a lot of districts out there who are a lot worse off than we are."

"The fact that we had to create a council to draft academic standards is a pretty embarrassing situation," someone mentioned.

**[T]he NEA spends more than \$400,000 of its budget to support political campaigns in Nevada, and the body is very vocal on whatever issues it is for or against.**

**Teachers claim that the organization is so powerful that it is impossible for individual educators to take a stand against it, even when they think the NEA's policies are misguided.**

**NEVADA PUBLIC SCHOOL GRADUATION/COMPLETION RATES  
SCHOOL YEAR 2000-2001**

District	Dropouts				Graduates			Completers	
	1997-98 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	1998-99 10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	1999-00 11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	2000-01 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Number	2000-01 Rate	Certificate of Attendance	Total	2000-01 Rate
NEVADA	892	1106	1496	2282	15,128	70.1	680	15,808	73.2
Carson	16	4	38	25	462	84.8	0	462	84.8
Churchill	9	9	1	20	235	85.1	2	237	85.9
Clark	686	798	1073	1801	9571	66.1	544	10,115	69.9
Douglas	16	9	11	24	420	87.0	3	423	87.6
Elko	19	26	35	22	553	82.0	19	572	84.9
Eureka	0	0	0	1	23	95.8	0	23	95.8
Humboldt	8	5	5	14	218	85.2	6	224	87.5
Lander	10	6	6	2	81	76.4	1	82	77.4
Lincoln	1	0	0	0	85	98.8	0	85	98.8
Lyon	17	17	14	9	330	83.8	7	337	85.5
Mineral	0	7	3	6	39	70.9	0	39	70.9
Nye	32	27	14	20	268	73.8	2	270	74.4
Pershing	0	0	1	1	44	93.6	1	45	95.7
Storey	1	0	2	5	27	65.9	6	33	80.5
Washoe	68	168	252	305	2614	74.9	82	2696	77.3
White Pine	9	12	25	8	107	66.5	0	107	66.5

Source: Accountability Brief, April 2002, Nevada Department of Education, Office of Finance, Accountability & Audit.

Numerous academic and economic data sources were cited to show that oversized school districts, as well as oversized schools, had a negative impact on student success.

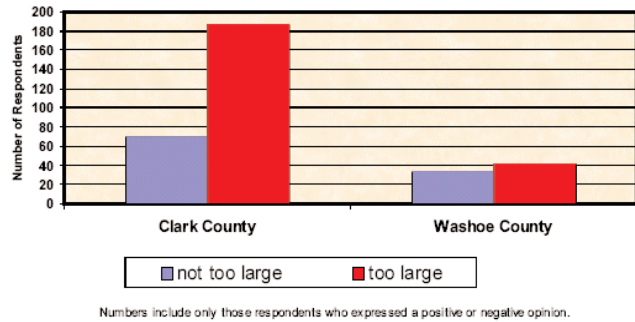
“The problems we are talking about are systemic, and they keep getting better,” another educator stated. “One significant factor is that it takes so long to notice the results of the positive changes we are making. We do have to wait for good news to trickle down, and by then it’s not news anymore.”

Additionally, some changes simply take more time to implement. “Look at ‘No Child Left Behind,’” another participant added. “We may not be able to make it work today, but ten years from now, everybody’s going to be talking about what a great idea it was.”

### Deconsolidation and Choice

In the analysis presented at the roundtable sessions, one of the greatest obstacles to creating positive performance in Nevada schools is the institutional entropy of the large districts—most specifically the Clark County School District, which the proposal described as “monolithic.” Numerous academic and economic data sources were cited to show that oversized school districts, as well as oversized schools, had a negative impact on student success. Unified districts can also grow so large they negate the economies of scale that were their original reason for being. From this perspective, the initial and most important step in any institutional progress is deconsolidation—breaking CCSD, now the nation’s 5<sup>th</sup> largest K-12 district, into anywhere from six to 15 smaller entities. As expected, the subject touched off some passionate debate in the roundtable sessions.

**Number of Parents Who Think School District is Too Large, Clark and Washoe Counties**



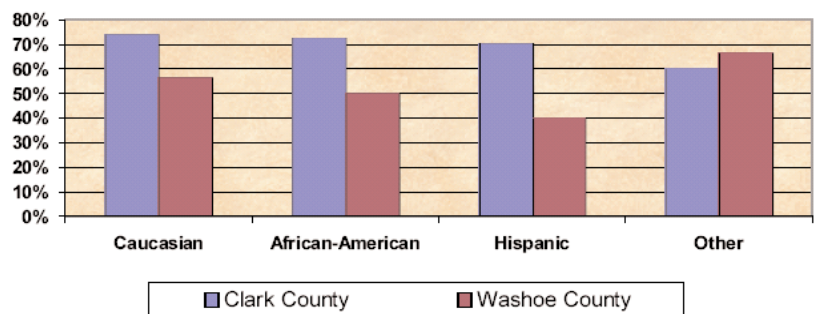
“Deconsolidation is the most oversimplified issue in the state,” one participant said simply, with no hint of irony.

“Somebody is going to have to explain to me how breaking up the school district is going to save any money,” another participant stated. “If you’ve got an overcrowded high school in Green Valley, it’s not going to be any less crowded if Green Valley is its own district. We are still going to have to build more schools.”

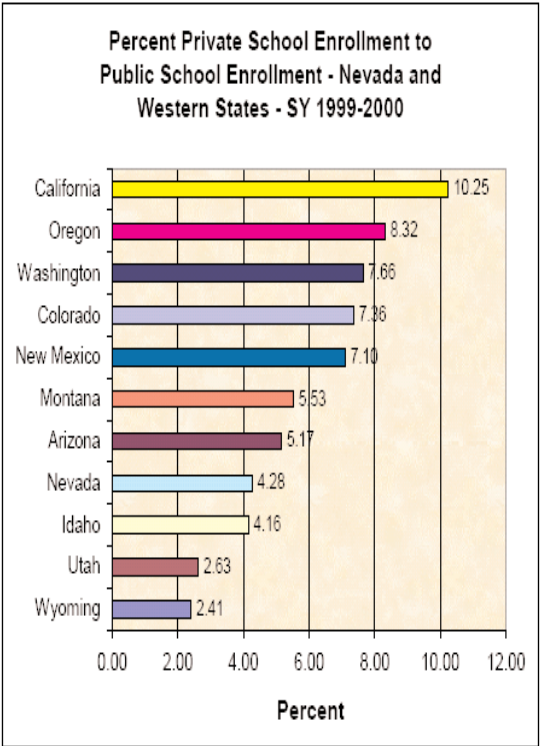
Although one recent poll shows that a majority of respondents feel that the Clark and Washoe school districts are too large, there is also an apparent perception that the idea of breaking the monoliths into smaller districts to save money is somewhat counterintuitive.

“In the long run, we can argue that better-educated students can be a financial benefit to

**Percentage of Parents who Think School District is Too Large, by Race**







Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Education State Rankings 2002-2003*.

### Empirical Evidence

- ◆ Public schools have become less effective & efficient providers of education in states that have moved from local property tax funding towards statewide funding.
- ◆ Students receive better education in areas with stronger local control. Where school districts compete more strongly with one another, student performance is better, especially per dollar spent on schooling.
- ◆ Public support for public schools is stronger where school funding and control are local. A greater share of children attend public, as opposed to private, schools in states with more local funding and local control.

Dr. Caroline Hoxby  
Harvard University

our community,” one participant said, “but in the short term view, how can we say that deconsolidation would save any money?”

“Look at Phoenix,” another said. “They’re trying to consolidate now, just to get their 16 districts to talk to each other.”

How could the administrative costs, for example, be lowered by deconsolidation? The analysis argues that economy of scale arguments can fail in many instances—that fiscal savings generally attributed to larger districts simply don’t exist once those entities outgrow themselves. Additionally, the larger Nevada K-12 districts are already running at 15 percent above the national average for administrative costs, according to census statistics. The deconsolidation of Clark and Washoe districts may require some more superintendents, but state taxpayers are already in effect funding them under existing district titles and positions.

Some participants thought other factors might complicate deconsolidation in southern Nevada. The nature of the district’s indebtedness, some participants maintained, might economically if not legally preclude deconsolidation. The complexity of having to redraft thousands of district teacher contracts might be an additional roadblock. Other trepidation stems from questions of equity rather than law or economics.

“Our biggest fear is the kind of white flight you see in Fresno,” an elected official noted.

“Whether we agree with it or not, the main argument against deconsolidation remains that Henderson and Summerlin will have beautiful new schools, and nothing will be replaced in North Las Vegas,” another participant pointed out.

A high-level K-12 administrator said that one possible solution might be, rather than deconsolidating the Clark County district, to divide it into ten regions that would operate semi-autonomously.

On the other side of the argument, administrators believe that the economy-of-scale benefits still hold true in a great many areas, especially in terms of the buying and bargaining power that a large district has. An added example of the benefits that only a large district can provide, according to one high-level southern Nevada administrator, can be seen in the fact that federal grants to the CCSD have climbed

**The larger Nevada K-12 districts are already running at 15 percent above the national average for administrative costs, according to census statistics.**

According to some representatives of the private sector, the state and the school districts often do as much as they can to hinder the development of private institutions in Nevada.

### Effects on Students' Performance

- ◆ **Consensus positive impacts:**  
Smaller school districts (non-rural)  
Smaller schools  
Quality teachers  
Family effects  
Local control
- ◆ **Mixed results:**  
Increased funding  
Class size reductions
- ◆ **Consensus negative impacts**  
Large urban school districts  
Poverty

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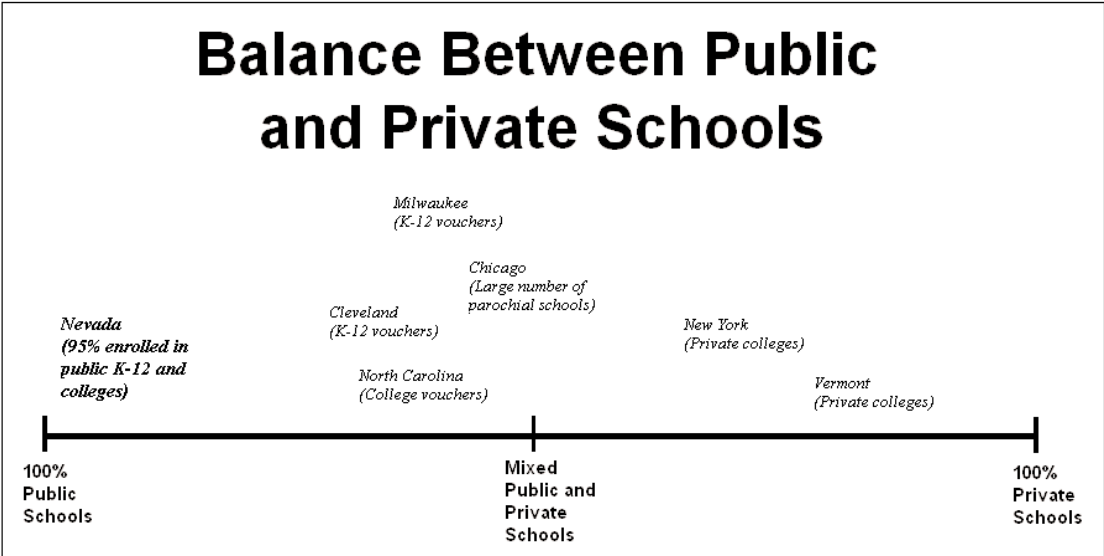
control is also a concern, especially in southern Nevada.

With the exception of a few private institutions, there is no real choice of schools within Clark County. In actuality, according to some representatives of the private sector, the state and the school districts often do as much as they can to hinder the development of private institutions in Nevada. Other than moving to another district, the only way for parents to send their children to a better, different or specific school is to apply for a variance from the school district.

“We can *apply* for a variance,” one participant said, “but there are no guarantees of anything. And this is not a quick process.” And, unfortunately, the chances of a variance being allowed are very slim; variances are granted on a space-available basis, and every school in the Clark County district is over-

crowded already. from \$40 million to \$140 million in the past few years. “Size helps get these resources,” he asserted. “The feds would not even talk to us if we were a collection of smaller districts, because their number one criteria is poverty. We don’t have enough poor kids to get a lot of federal money without lobbying for it, and being the 6<sup>th</sup> largest district in the U.S. carries some real weight in this area.”

Performance and economics are not the only issues associated with large K-12 districts; Several participants discussed the concept of the so-called ‘neighborhood schools’ and the benefit that a greater number of smaller local schools can provide, such as lower construction costs, better teacher/student relationships, and less crowded schools populated by a coherent group of families who know each other socially. The concept offers the kind of detailed positive impact that bureaucracies usually fail to deliver.



One participant asserted that this is an area where we can't count on the private sector, citing as an example that state per-pupil funding is still too low for charter schools to survive. Despite being niche institutions, according to some recent studies, many charter schools are not doing any better than traditional schools. But, said one elected official, the foremost reason Nevada's charters are doing poorly is that state legislation governing them was drafted to *make* them weak.

Another suggestion was that greater investment in education might result if the state per-pupil spending allocation followed the individual student: "We need to link the money to the kid."

If state funds were assigned to individual students rather than being allocated to and distributed by the school district, parents would have additional control over which school their children attend. The result would be much

stronger incentives for schools and administrators to respond to parents' demands for quality education of their children.

"If the parents had some control over educational funds, you would have a pool of thousands of specialists doing what is best for those particular students," one participant said.

From the perspective of the state's elected officials, the question has a slightly different cast. "Here's what I ask," one legislator said. "What could the state legislature do to improve individual choice in the school districts right now?"

### Higher Education: A Strategy for Waste

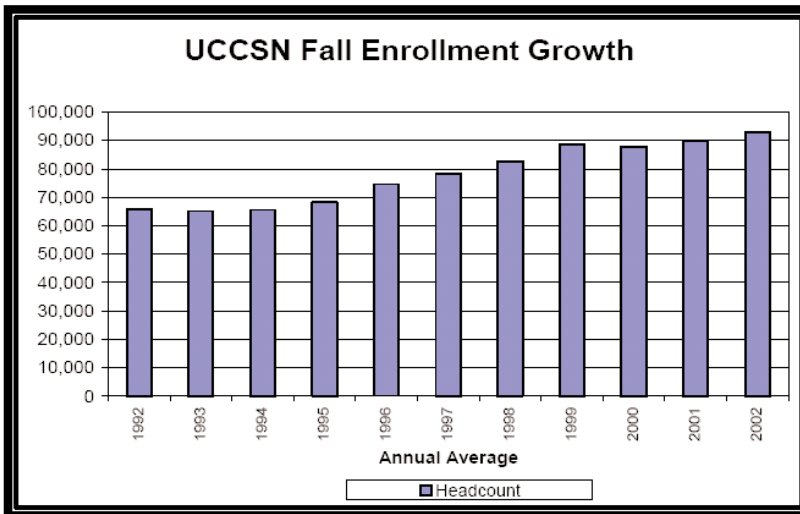
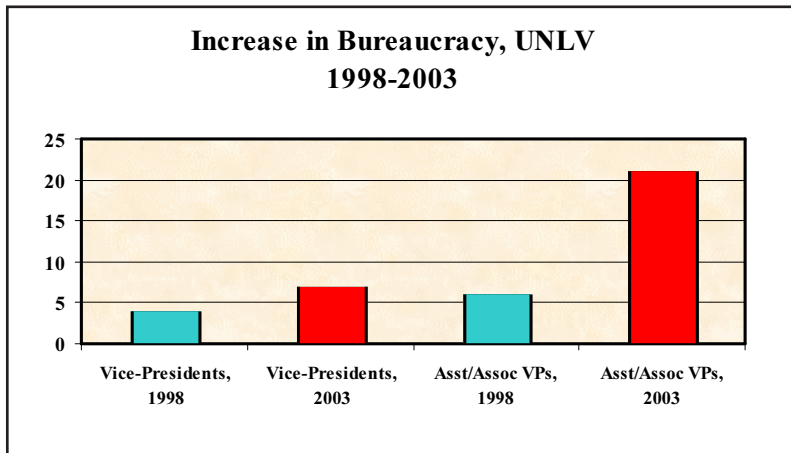
According to the business-oriented analysis presented at the roundtables, the issues Nevada needs to concentrate on, when examining the UCCSN system, are execution, innovation and perception.

In terms of execution, is the higher education system doing its job, and are taxpayers getting the best possible return on their investment? Do we have enough understandable data to tell? And who is eventually accountable for system performance?

Innovation is the watchword for true research schools. UNLV and UNR want to be recognized as research institutions, but are they actually realistically moving in that direction?

Finally, how is the state higher education system perceived by both residents and non-residents? Perceptions are important, not only for institutional morale and talent-retention, but economically, for the ability of the state to grow and develop.

The foremost reason Nevada's charters are doing poorly, said one elected official, is that state legislation governing them was drafted to *make* them weak.



**If we agree that higher education is so important, the proposal argues, shouldn't we be working harder to protect its credibility?**

**It seems that every parent wants his or her child to go to college once out of 12th grade, but many are simply not college material at that point in their lives.**

Five decades ago, when the GI Bill made higher education affordable for the middle class, 30 percent of all high school graduates continued on to attend college. Presently, somewhere in the vicinity of 70 percent of all graduates move on to higher education. With those numbers in mind, is it surprising that, on a national average, nearly one-third of all entering college students need some remedial work in math, English—or both? Colleges and universities used to weed out students who were not prepared for higher education, but today they recruit and accommodate a greater number of them. Should we continue to let some of the institutions do this? Is it fair to everyone involved?

If we agree that higher education is so important, the proposal argues, shouldn't we be working harder to protect its credibility? We decrease the value of education when we give it away; making students pay their fair share for a college education not only ensures that they are making an investment in their own educational progress, but also makes potential students prepare for college and increase their efforts while there.

It seems that every parent wants his or her child to go to college once out of 12<sup>th</sup> grade, but many are simply not college material at that point in their lives. Some might be better prepared to return as nontraditional students, and some might not benefit at all from a traditional college education. A number of high paying jobs are available, especially in Las Vegas, that do not require a college degree. Still, the common perception that prevails today is that a college degree is essential to ensure a better quality of life.

“We do a great disservice to the trades by sustaining the myth that everybody needs to go to college,” one participant commented. “We should not discourage kids from pursuing alternative possibilities by considering them failures if they don't go on to a university.”

“It's true there are jobs you

## **Subsidization of Higher Education in Nevada**

- ◆ Highest in nation at 72-76%
- ◆ National average 41% at 4-year schools
- ◆ Retention (not performance) is now driving institutions
- ◆ Single greatest wealth transfer from poor to rich in state
- ◆ Deters growth in private institutions

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can do without a college education, but the companies won't talk to you if you don't have a degree on your resume,” another roundtable participant said.

On the other hand, the root of the problem of unprepared students is perhaps a weakness in the K-12 sector. “Sure, lots of jobs don't require college,” another participant said, “but what was so frustrating for me is that my kids never even discussed it as a possibility. Going to college wasn't even a topic of discussion in the high schools they attended.”

One premise of the analysis is that the UCCSN system does a great disservice to state taxpayers by attempting to provide affordable higher education to absolutely everyone. Students are “parked” at UNLV, UNR and the state's community colleges because the cost—an average of a couple hundred dollars per month for in-state tuition and fees—is so inexpensive. While the students may have no express educational desires or even interest in

## **Proposed Growth in UCCSN Expenses by 2012**

- ◆ Increase in headcount by 30,000 students
- ◆ Increase of 20% in headcount per 1,000
- ◆ Increase cost to taxpayers - \$155 million
- ◆ New funds for capital expense at NSCH
- ◆ Substantive growth at UNLV & CCSN

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## Marginal students

- ◆ Ill-prepared students
- ◆ Non-serious & disengaged students
- ◆ Low price increases quantity demanded
- ◆ Decreases academic standing of university
- ◆ Wastes limited resources

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higher education, they (and their parents) can comfortably take advantage of the taxpayers' largesse as an alternative to electing among the other options available to most graduating high school seniors, such as finding an entry-level job or joining the military. The problem extends to graduate education as well; tuition for one full year at UNLV's Boyd School of Law, for example, costs less than a full year at Bishop Gorman High School.

The burden isn't only on taxpayer wallets. A system that accepts all applicants because its funding is based on FTE retention, then fails to monitor those who have little or no direction, creates a body of disinterested or marginal students. Their mediocre performance then contributes to the poor overall perception of Nevada colleges and universities. The ques-

tion—"How can we prevent them from being not only disinterested students but unproductive employees as well?"—generated straightforward comments that found no dissent:

"We should concentrate on higher education quality, not quantity—and we should make students start paying their way."

"UNLV created a pretty good law school in a very short time by hiring good professors and controlling admissions—why wouldn't this work for UCCSN at large?" another

participant asked.

The proffered analysis also argued that the state's Millennium Scholarship program actually transfers wealth upward from the state's working classes. Rather than being need-based, scholarship funds are awarded to children of middle-class parents who could easily shoulder the minimal financial responsibility of sending their children to a school in the UCCSN system. This would not be as much of an issue if the Millennium funds weren't disbursed to students whose high school performance is average at best; one-third of the so-called Millennium scholars are enrolled in remedial classes. It was suggested that perhaps the Millennium funds should be distributed on a need-based rationale, and the state could be more helpful to people who really need aid by not providing it to those who do not.

While one top-level UCCSN administrator described the state's system as "complex and efficient," his appraisal seemed overly generous to most of the others in attendance at the roundtable sessions.

"We just can't promote the idea of a unified education system. Whether you blame the legislature, history or the regents, the problem is that we're not a system. We do things that are terrible for our students because we're so busy fighting among ourselves, and the regents and the legislature

**A system that accepts all applicants because its funding is based on FTE retention, then fails to monitor those who have little or no direction, creates a body of disinterested or marginal students.**

## Higher Education Cost & Performance

- ◆ Opacity of financial & statistical data
- ◆ Lack of understandable data, unified mission statements & accountability
- ◆ Inconsistencies in determining FTEs
- ◆ Over-reliance on adjunct faculty
- ◆ Multiple constituencies including:
  - Students, parents, faculty, boosters, community, governments, sponsors, accreditation agencies

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“The political resistance to making any change in education is so strong that we may never gain enough momentum to change anything.”

**UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM OF NEVADA  
FALL HEADCOUNT ENROLLMENT, 1986-2003**

Year	UNLV	UNR	University Sub-total	CCSN	GBC	NSC	TMCC	WNCC	Community College Sub-total	System Total
Fall 1986	12,722	9,613	22,335	11,763	1,764	----	7,390	3,898	24,815	47,150
Fall 1987	13,757	9,947	23,704	12,677	1,973	----	7,889	3,916	26,455	50,159
Fall 1988	14,800	10,506	25,306	13,032	1,872	----	8,538	4,627	28,069	53,375
Fall 1989	16,332	10,922	27,254	14,491	2,060	----	8,675	4,901	30,127	57,381
Fall 1990	18,192	11,487	29,679	15,135	2,277	----	9,211	5,178	31,801	61,480
Fall 1991	19,504	11,714	31,218	15,551	2,481	----	9,116	4,688	31,636	63,054
Fall 1992	19,209	11,988	31,197	18,111	2,883	----	8,938	4,687	34,619	65,816
Fall 1993	19,682	12,137	31,819	17,118	2,490	----	9,041	4,656	33,305	65,124
Fall 1994	20,239	12,379	32,618	17,113	2,585	----	8,707	4,595	32,980	65,598
Fall 1995	19,769	12,047	31,816	20,741	2,805	----	8,458	4,410	36,414	68,230
Fall 1996	19,683	12,279	31,962	25,012	3,200	----	9,338	5,143	42,693	74,655
Fall 1997	20,272	12,442	32,714	26,707	3,372	----	10,051	5,563	45,693	78,407
Fall 1998	21,312	12,303	33,615	30,440	2,900	----	10,139	5,572	49,051	82,666
Fall 1999	21,853	12,532	34,385	35,297	2,822	----	10,539	5,574	54,232	88,617
Fall 2000	22,342	13,149	35,491	32,639	3,251	----	10,878	5,682	52,450	87,941
Fall 2001	23,618	14,316	37,934	33,364	2,680	----	10,445	5,657	52,146	90,080
Fall 2002	24,965	15,093	40,058	33,481	2,733	177	11,250	5,369	53,010	93,068
<b>Change, 1986 to 2002</b>										
Number	12,243	5,480	17,723	21,718	969	----	3,860	1,471	28,195	45,918
Percent	96.2%	57.0%	79.4%	184.6%	54.9%	----	52.2%	37.7%	113.6%	97.4%
<b>Change, 2001 to 2002</b>										
Number	1,347	777	2,124	117	53	----	805	-288	664	2,988
Percent	5.7%	5.4%	5.6%	0.4%	2.0%	----	7.7%	-5.1%	1.7%	3.3%

won't do what is necessary to end the infighting.”

“The political resistance to making any change in education is so strong that we may never gain enough momentum to change anything,” someone added.

The problem of perception certainly arises in any discussion of where the state's most promising scholars choose to attend college. “The UCCSN system can't compete financially with other big institutions because our legislators don't want to compete with them, and because of that, we can't retain our best students. We lose them to out-of-state colleges and universities. One recent statistic maintains that the top 40 percent of our students leave the state to attend college,” a top-level UCCSN official said, adding that he personally planned to send his grandchildren to out-of-state schools.

“UNLV has just created a new executive MBA degree, and it can't fill the program. Pepperdine

charges \$30K a year for the same degree, and the demand is so high it makes getting into the program incredibly competitive,” a southern Nevada business executive commented.

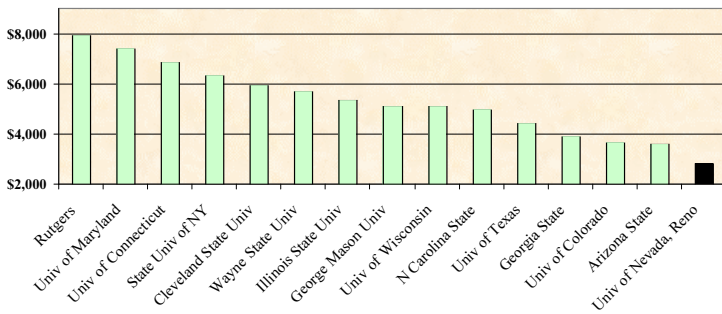
Still, another participant said, while we may not be able to compete with the Ivy League or Berkeley, we certainly should be able to compete with the University of Phoenix and online degree-granting programs, and Nevada is not even doing that successfully.

The mention of competition brought up the question of choice in higher education and some discussion of the fact that Nevada has one of the lowest percentages of private colleges and universities in the country. As was the case in the K-12 discussions, many felt that the state and the UCCSN system could be doing

<b>UNIVERSITY COMPARISON</b>	
<b>UNLV</b>	<b>UCLA</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ \$10,000 base formula</li> <li>◆ 1000 SAT</li> <li>◆ \$15-20M research</li> <li>◆ 87 Sq. Ft./FTE student</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ \$24,000 base formula</li> <li>◆ 1300+ SAT</li> <li>◆ \$240M+ research</li> <li>◆ 299 Sq. Ft./FTE student</li> </ul>

*NPRI Education Forum April 2004*

**Resident Undergraduate Tuition and Fees, 2003-2004**



Source: California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2004

programs that aren't cost effective. And this has to be monitored at the regents' level, because it's almost impossible for any college president to go after a program, no matter how nonproductive it is."

One of the chronic complaints about the K-12 school districts is their lack of leadership, someone pointed out,

which must reasonably imply that the universities are not producing qualified educational leaders who are ready to administer a diverse entity that is held to common community standards.

"What makes a good university is good professors and good students," a UNLV professor and former administrator said. "We really need to look closely at where all our instructional money is being spent. That funding should be used to pay for professors who are in the classroom talking to students, not for operating costs and administrative salaries."

In addition to raising entry-level GPA requirements, it was noted, another step in elevating the academic credibility of UNLV is to eliminate the newly implemented University College, a general degree-granting program which was admittedly designed to retain students who can't declare a major because their grade point averages are below the minimum requirements for admission to specific degree programs.

According to some roundtable participants, increasing educational funding should be the state's greatest single issue.

"Our biggest conflict here is funding and quality and our inability to reconcile them, and I sometimes worry about our commitment to education in Nevada," a recent political appointee to the UCCSN system said. "Legislators feel you can starve education into performance—the beatings will continue until morale improves—but you just can't do this, it never works."

While many may have agreed with the statement in theory, others looked at the situation in a more practical vein, as was the case in

**"I think taking a look at funding for the UCCSN system offers a real opportunity to look at what we should stop doing," one participant added. "If a program at UNLV or UNR can only graduate three students, get rid of it."**

more to promote the establishment of high-quality private schools in Nevada.

"If we worked harder at attracting private universities, we'd end up with more entities competing for limited endowments from the private sector," a UCCSN administrator said.

"The UCCSN system is too busy being all things to all people. We should actually welcome private competition—if there is a higher education niche that we're not filling, we should be glad that somebody wants to address it," a UCCSN professor replied.

One university administrator admitted that, where both innovation and perception are concerned, the state universities would much rather be seen as flagship research institutions concerned with reputation rather than retention, even though increasing FTE numbers is currently those institutions' foremost criteria. "We can't continue to grow unabated without sacrificing quality. Increasing GPA requirements for incoming students, for example, would help, but we need a clear signal. And we can't do it with limited funding. We are not serving our student body by accepting every applicant who meets minimum requirements."

"I think taking a look at funding for the UCCSN system offers a real opportunity to look at what we should *stop* doing," one participant added. "If a program at UNLV or UNR can only graduate three students, get rid of it."

This was echoed by an administrator who said, "We need a better process of determining which programs we need to keep and which we can get rid of. We will always want a philosophy program, for example, because that's part of what higher education is about. But there are other workforce-based or purely professional

**“We can’t afford the higher education system we have in terms of its present growth, and future population growth alone will make it even more unaffordable.”**

discussions of K-12 funding: “We can’t afford the higher education system we have in terms of its present growth, and future population growth alone will make it even more unaffordable.”

“This isn’t just about state funding. We need to develop more private/public partnerships. Right now, there is no mechanism for securing private funding and getting matching funds from the legislature—we need a method of getting the state to fund us in a way that avoids losing private money,” complained an avid proponent of the work done by UNLV in securing private-sector donations. It is no secret that UCCSN entities have become highly competitive in terms of adding sponsorship and private partnerships, which are particularly helpful in the areas of capital funding—money for buildings and physical plants.

“The problems that always come up with those kind of partnerships make legislators

pretty gun-shy,” an elected official countered. “Every time one of those matching fund deals has fallen through because people didn’t do their homework or the agreements break down, it’s legislators who end up taking a beating.”

### **Conclusion**

**B**y the end of the roundtables, many of the participants recognized that genuine accountability in the state’s higher education system would require simple and clear annual reporting to the public by UCCSN institutions. Those reports should spell out, at a minimum, the public monies received and what specifically was done with those monies. In addition, since non-trivial research at flagship universities yields real innovation in important fields, the reports should also specify what concrete innovations, if any had been produced by Nevada’s self-proclaimed flagship universities, UNR and UNLV.

#### **Proposal: UCCSN**

- ♦ Reduce UCCSN funds by \$100 million—Increase tuition by \$2,500 for 40,000 students
- ♦ Increase means-tested grants
- ♦ Eliminate University College at UNLV
- ♦ Restructure UCCSN into a 3-tier system, limit growth
- ♦ Increase accountability

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#### **Proposal: K-12**

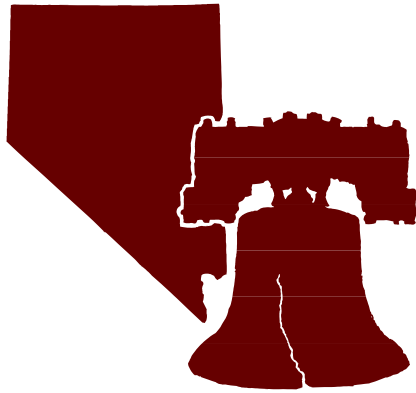
- ♦ Deconsolidate Washoe and Clark County school districts
- ♦ Increase parental, student and teacher choice
- ♦ Increase funding based on needs
- ♦ Add optional pay for performance
- ♦ Alternative funding for school construction

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