

# **Nevada Education: Laying the Groundwork**

ISBN # 1-886306-14-1

prepared for the  
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## Executive Summary

Education is Nevada's greatest budget priority, comprising nearly 55% of the state's budget. Even though Nevada leads the nation in terms of percentage of money spent on education, results on standardized tests remain near the national average. Such a performance record would put any investor in the private sector out of business. This study outlines three major problem areas - the economics, politics, and accountability of education in Nevada. The author recommends reforms that would improve the level of education in Nevada.

### Economics of Education

- Nevada's per pupil spending ranks 32nd in the nation, while teachers' salaries are ranked 11th. As a result, a significantly higher proportion of per pupil spending goes to teachers' salaries than in other states, but student achievement is not proportionally high. Educators salaries in Nevada are in no way tied to student success, but rather tenure and licensure practices. Longevity does not necessarily translate into superior performance and should be eliminated as a criteria for salary increases. Instead teachers should be evaluated based on student performance, thus encouraging a sharpened focus on academic excellence.
- Teachers' unions hold monopoly power over Nevada education. Union agendas are in natural contradiction to educational and parental agendas. Salary negotiation and collective bargaining greatly impact a districts' budgeting process and allocation of resources. Since the policies negotiated by the unions are personnel policies they are **public policies** and the unions ought to be subject to the same requirements as private sector unions under the National Labor Relations Act. Applying these requirements to the various teachers' unions under state bargaining statutes would allow public participation in the negotiation process and turn over more power to those paying the bills - the taxpayers.
- Limited budgets necessitate prioritization in the areas of instruction and operations. For example, mastery of reading in the early grades provides economic rewards in the later grades. Less remediation translates to less funding required.
- Privatization and choice should be further explored. The "contracting out" of services and competitive bidding should be employed to conserve tax dollars. Such programs lift the fiduciary burdens off of the school system. The teacher union control over licensure excludes qualified teachers from the classroom.

## **Politics of Education**

- The Educational system is often a victim of political wrangling and of special interests (teacher's unions) putting their own agendas over what may be best for the children.
- Nevada is the only state to mandate class-size reduction in primary grades. Union arguments sound good: They claim that lowering student/teacher ratios translate into higher achievement. Reality contradicts this hypothesis. Achievements remain stagnant.
- Union PAC funds at present are collected by the school district - an obvious ethical and legal violation of public moneys. In addition, unions have a reverse check-off system for PAC contributions by union members - a practice presently illegal at the Federal level. Taxpayer moneys are also misused by giving teachers days off with pay to conduct union activities.
- There are several legislative options to solving the union monopoly over public education: Teachers should be allowed to leave the union at any time without penalty; nepotism between union and elected officials should be disallowed, and tenure laws should be eliminated.

## **Accountability in Education**

- Bond money expenditures are frequently used for contingencies such as cost overruns or extras not identified for the public. Likewise grants received need to be itemized by distribution categories.
- The protection of the academic core is vital if we are to improve education. Classroom disruptions, non-essentials classes, length of school day and inaccurate assessment of student achievement accumulatively affect the caliber of Nevada education.
- Research at conducted at the University system should meaningfully contribute to improving education. Any failure of Nevada's education research to connect with local education practitioners is problematic since many of Nevada teachers and administrators are trained in our own state funded institutions (18.6 percent of the state education budget).

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# Nevada Education: Laying the Groundwork

## INTRODUCTION

Nevada leads the nation in the percentage of state budget that is devoted to K-12 education-36.2%.<sup>1</sup> Adding the university system's 18.3%, brings to nearly 55% of the state budget going to education. Yet, there is a continual clamor for more money.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Nevada's performance on standardized academic tests remains near the national average. For the amount of money invested, that return is mediocre. Any financial investment performing this poorly would be under serious scrutiny. This paper views Nevada's education challenge in greater depth, offering insights and possible solutions to those challenges.

Failure to educate students is impacting Nevada negatively. This will continue to be the case unless we seize the opportunity to make significant and meaningful, albeit difficult, changes. To address reform in Nevada's K-12 education, three areas must be considered: The economics of education, the politics of education, and the accountability of education. This paper explores these three areas in terms of their problems and offers recommendations for improvement over the status quo.

## ECONOMICS OF EDUCATION

### PROBLEMS

It is becoming more and more clear how the educational system effects the economics not only of the state, but also of the nation. Students whom the system are failing become the drop-outs of tomorrow. And given that such a large proportion of Nevada's state budget is spent on teacher's salaries, it behooves the Legislature to ensure that the taxpayers are receiving the maximum positive result for their investment.

In order to understand the economic impact of the educational system, the following will be discussed:

1. The fiscal impact of dropouts.
2. The evaluation of where the educational budget is being spent.
3. The role of the teacher's unions in influencing the economics of education.

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<sup>1</sup> Education Vital Statistics, December 1994 Supplement to The American School Board Journal, National School Boards Association, Alexandria, Virginia.

<sup>2</sup> Nevada Department of Education.

## *Fiscal Impact of Dropouts*

Never has it been more clear that the failure to educate our youth has tremendous fiscal impact on state finances, and is draining our national economy in the long term. Dropouts impact the economy in terms of lost earnings and foregone taxes and cost more in their utilization of welfare programs such as food stamps, Medicaid, housing subsidies, etc.

In his lifetime, a male high school dropout will earn \$260,000 less than a high school graduate. Dropouts frequently end up on welfare rolls and in our prisons (85% of all juvenile offenders are illiterate). They have an unemployment rate double that of the national average. A recent study in a Pennsylvania school district extrapolated the cost of 100 dropouts per year over four years. The loss of district revenue (at a conservative \$2,000 per student per year) was \$2 million. For the taxpayers, the cost, combining lost tax revenue and increased aid programs, plus crime totaled \$4,282,700 for those 100 dropouts.<sup>3</sup>

## *Per Pupil Expenditures*

As the Nevada Legislature considers funding for the State's K-12 education, it is important to evaluate educational productivity. For example, has learning (output) per unit of resource (input) risen or fallen? Also, how does our per pupil expenditure relate to such things as teachers' salaries or graduation rates? Patrick Keleher, Jr., President of TEACH America reports: "Study after study reveals no casual relationship, no direct correlation between money and academic achievement."<sup>4</sup>

In the recent report, *The Instruction Gap*,<sup>5</sup> it is clear that per pupil spending has increased while pupil performance has remained relatively static, hovering at the national average. Also noted in the study is a disparity between per pupil spending and teachers' salaries. According to statistics, Nevada's per pupil spending ranks 32nd nationally, while teachers' salaries are ranked 23rd by the National Education Association (NEA).<sup>6</sup> This latter ranking is deceptive since it does not include retirement which is fully funded by the school districts in Nevada. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) includes retirement in their ranking of teachers' salaries which boosts Nevada up to 11th in the country. So while we are 32nd in per pupil expenditure, we are 11th in rank for teachers' salaries. Therefore, a significantly greater proportion of per pupil spending goes to teachers' salaries than other states, but student achievement is not proportionally high.<sup>7</sup>

## *Salaries*

Education is labor intensive. Because salaries consume 87-90 percent of a school district's budget, little is left for discretionary spending. Fixed expenses (electricity, fuel, water) can run anywhere from 8-10 percent or more. This leaves a very minute percentage of the education budget for materials, programs, or training. Salaries and staffing, therefore, must be the focus of any economic restructuring.

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<sup>3</sup> Margaret Byrnes, Robert A Connely, and Lawrence W. Byrnes, *The Quality Teacher*, Connesky and Association, Bunnell, Florida, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick J. Keleher, Jr., *Illinois Education Mandate: Return On Investment*, Prairie Institute For Economic Growth and Freedom, Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>5</sup> Judy Cresanta, *The Instruction Gap: A Ten Year Study of Education Spending in Nevada*, Nevada Policy Research Institute, Reno, Nevada 1994.

<sup>6</sup> National Education Association, "Estimates of School Statistics" 1993-94.

<sup>7</sup> *States in Profile*, 1993 State Policy Reference Book, U.S. Data on Demand and State Policy Research Inc.

Currently, most educators' salaries are in no way tied to student success. Rather, salary increases are based on longevity and on additional course work after licensure. However, three states, Tennessee, Arizona and Utah, provide financial incentives to schools that tie pay to performance. Cincinnati is the first school district in the country to follow suit with administrative pay. In these states, no longer will longevity and additional course work be the criteria for pay increases.

However, in Nevada such a mechanism for quality control has been eliminated. By statute, a teacher or administrator can only be evaluated as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. As a result, there can be great discrepancies in performance and commitment between teachers. As one teacher put it, "Most everyone within the school community knows who is pulling their weight and who is not, even if it's not a matter of record." The fact that competence and incompetence are not recorded, analyzed, and dealt with, diminishes rather than assures fair treatment. It also demoralizes those who pick up the slack from year to year. And ultimately it negatively impacts the educational experience of Nevada's children.

### *The Role of Teachers' Unions in The Economics of Education*

Nationwide, teachers' unions have had a tremendous impact on the educational system, more often to the benefit of the union, itself, rather than the students it supposedly serves. The unions influence the educational system in a variety of ways, among them the salary negotiation process. This, in turn, greatly affects the economics of education.

### *Negotiations or Collective Bargaining*

Teacher unions exist to control wages and other term and conditions of employment. Union leadership that does not produce, does not stay in office. Annual negotiations require the union to bring something "new" to their membership. Consequently, negotiated agreements have been characterized by school districts relinquishing more and more power and money to the teachers. This has prompted some school district negotiators to characterize the bargaining process as simply "damage control" or, "don't give everything away at once."

Education unions have tried to stifle producer competition by:

1. Requiring all teachers to be certified.
2. Limiting school board authority to contract out instructional and non-instructional services.
3. Collective bargaining contracts which require school boards to employ personnel at negotiated wage rates.
4. All-out opposition to any legislation such as vouchers or charter schools which might break their monopoly grip on education.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Myron Lieberman, "Teacher Unions: Is The End Near?", *Network News and Views*, January, 1995.



### *Sound Budgeting Hampered by Negotiations*

The final pupil count day in Nevada is the last day of the first month of school. Not until then is everyone positive what the current year's budget will be even though the fiscal year begins July 1. This augmented budget generally signals the time when negotiations get serious. Nevada's teachers' groups generally stall negotiations until they know what the total budget will be. Their attitude is "get all you can."

### *Ending Fund Balance*

Frequently the teachers' union looks to the uncommitted ending fund balance for money to fund pay raises. This is not sound fiscal policy. Responsible financial management dictates that any business have at least one month's operating expenses on hand as a contingency against emergency situations. However, school districts are not able to set aside a full eight percent of their budgets. Yet, each district does need a contingency fund with which to operate. And frequently teachers' unions consider the uncommitted ending fund balance fair game in salary negotiations.

As a result of negotiations, Washoe County had an ending fund balance of \$15,000 in 1991, or .01 percent of the year's revenue, a minute amount given a budget of hundreds of millions of dollars. In 1992-93, Clark County had a negative ending fund balance of \$1,953,856 and in 1993-94 it was \$4,620,500, or only .8 percent of the total revenue. School districts generally rely on bond sales to finance capital improvements. Financial analysts take the ending fund balance into consideration when rating the bonds for sale.

### *No Incentive to Settle*

Negotiated pay raises are retroactive and are seldom settled before the school year begins. Consequently, there is no incentive to speed up the negotiation process. The unions, therefore, can effectively hold school boards hostage. This process can drag on for months or, in some cases, into the next contract year. Time limits for bargaining would help this protracted exercise.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to "fix" the educational system in Nevada, or to maximize the positive results of education compared to the money spent, the following recommendations will be considered:

1. Salary solutions
2. Collective bargaining
3. Prioritization of goals and resources.
4. The use of vouchers.
5. Privatization of different parts of the education system.

## *Tying Salaries to Student Success*

Longevity does not necessarily translate into superior teacher performance and should be eliminated as a criteria for salary increases. Evaluations should allow the designation of "superior" to recognize those teachers and administrators who strive beyond "satisfactory" in their job performance. The private sector has no qualms about rewarding their best employees in this way, and appropriate compensation would encourage educators to pursue excellence.

School leaders should be held responsible for producing learning gains as corporate leaders are for generating profits. Site administrators should be compared against their school's previous performance in a variety of areas, including dropouts, test scores, and violent incidents. Central office administrators could be evaluated on job performance. While no one would be docked salary, some might have their pay frozen until performance dictates otherwise. Performance based superintendent contracts could sharpen a district's academic focus and improve its credibility.

David Hornbeck, former Maryland Superintendent of Schools and Philadelphia's new superintendent, made headlines when he requested a contract that links his pay to the performance of the 214,000 students in the district. "Trying hard is not good enough either for us who work in the school district, or ultimately for the students," Hornbeck stated. "At the end of each day, we can claim success only if students are successful in knowing and are able to do what they must to function effectively as good citizens and productive workers. We have failed if that does not occur." His contract calls for a bonus or penalty based upon the attainment of specific performance objectives that he and the Board mutually agree upon each year.<sup>9</sup>

In 1994, the Douglas County School District, south of Denver, Colorado, approved a performance-based framework that has been approved by the teachers' union. The goal is to improve instruction and thus student learning. The plan has three categories: outstanding, proficient, and unsatisfactory.<sup>10</sup>

The purpose of the education system is to educate children. To ignore success or failure in education diminishes its importance. If we tie compensation to criteria outside that purpose (longevity or credit accumulation), we eliminate the need to satisfactorily accomplish it.

## *Flexibility in Salaries*

Currently, the educational system in Nevada provides a very circumscribed salary schedule for teachers, largely due to union negotiations. The result has been that gifted teachers, or people with special skills and abilities are not rewarded in kind. Consequently, all too often, truly exceptional people are not going into education, or are leaving in order to pursue a more lucrative career in the private sector. Too many good people, especially in the mathematics and science fields, have been lost because of this. Moreover, at present nationally, only people graduating in

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<sup>9</sup> Bill Graves, "Superintendent Contracts Link Incentives to Student Performance," *The School administrator*, February, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Scott Armstrong, "The Colorado Test of Merit pay for Teachers Eyed in the U.S.," *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 30, 1994.

the bottom 20 percent of their class in U.S. high schools who take the college entrance exam are going into education as a career.<sup>11</sup>

Union-rigid salary systems are ensuring that our schools are all too rarely able to attract truly gifted and exceptional people. Perhaps this is one reason our test scores are hovering around average. School districts in Connecticut have managed to free themselves from such union-induced rigidity and have been able to attract exceptional individuals to their schools by compensating them appropriately. Connecticut's test scores are currently well above average, when compared to the rest of the country.

As the cliché says, "You get what you pay for." Mediocre salaries will attract mediocre teachers. The end result will be test scores that never get much above the national average.

### *Collective Bargaining: A Political Process*

Dr. Myron Lieberman of Claremont Institute points out that collective bargaining is political action in the public sector. The union objective is to persuade public officials to adopt policies supportive of union interests.<sup>12,13</sup> Essentially, it involves the negotiations of public policies with one interest group (teachers, administrators, police, or classified staff) in a process from which other parties (parents and taxpayers) are excluded.

Because the policies negotiated are personnel policies, they are public, not private policies. Therefore, applying the same requirements of private sector unions under the National Labor Relations Act to the various school employee unions under state bargaining statutes would allow public participation in the negotiation process. This would also return more control and power to the people paying the bills - the taxpayers.

Public scrutiny at the bargaining process might also make the process more efficient. As suggested by Peter Brimelow and Leslie Spencer in the most recent *Forbes* article on the NEA,<sup>14</sup> it may well be a violation of the Federal Equal Protection Act to allow public sector unions to bargain policy with government. Concerned groups, students, parents and taxpayers are totally excluded from the process when the union bargains with the local school board. Even though the negotiations are for hard earned tax dollars, the man on the street has no voice.

### *Prioritization of Goals and Resources*

The limited education dollar demands prioritization in areas of instruction and operations areas. As public schools are increasingly called on to solve society's ills, more social programs are added. Resources (staff, money, and materials) for academics are necessarily reduced. Often programs are added as new needs are identified without looking at their impact on the total education picture. This lack of prioritizing and planning drains the general fund, leaving little in excess for other areas.

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<sup>11</sup> Angela Dale, "How Teachers Miseducate our Educators," *Report Card*, September/October, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Myron Lieberman, "Teacher Unions: Is the End Near?," *Network News and Views*, January, 1995

<sup>13</sup> Myron Lieberman, Ph.D., Education Briefing, Golden State Center for Policy Studies, December 15, 1994.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Brimelow and Leslie Spencer, "Comeuppance," *Forbes Magazine*, February 13, 1995.

For example, school boards are reluctant to firmly commit dollars to much needed maintenance work because the general fund is the primary source of negotiated pay raises. Other than the most essential repairs, maintenance is increasingly funded with "leftover money" which doesn't exist. Consequently, the majority of school districts are unable to keep up with their maintenance obligations. Washoe County is facing \$12,000,000 in roof repairs alone over the next 5 years, in addition to the current \$7,865,000 maintenance deficit. More and more, districts are looking to bond moneys to supplement the general fund revenues that cover maintenance.

Categorical funds like those for special education are protected from consideration in salary negotiations. Similar categorical protection for budget allocations for maintenance, technology and other specific needs would help districts plan more effectively and require negotiations to be more realistic.

It is possible to perform a cost analysis of the education programs by identifying the skill or topic taught, how much class time it takes for general mastery and attaching a dollar figure for completion. This matrix establishes what goals can be reasonably accomplished in a six hour school day or the 1080 hours of a school year with a finite budget.

This would make it apparent whether a school district has the time and or resources to accomplish a given task. When the money or time runs out and there are still programs or objectives to be included, adjusting the priorities or changing the curricula become necessary.

**NOTE: SEE APPENDIX A FOR AN EXAMPLE OF A PRIORITIZATION MATRIX**

### *Mastery of Reading is Cost Effective*

Consider the mastery of reading to be the preeminent task of the primary grades. Approximately half of America's school children leave third grade unable to read. Yet studies reveal that every five or six-year-old of normal intelligence can learn to read within one year. Money could be saved if the job of literacy was accomplished in the primary grades. Dollars spent on remediation at all other grade levels could be reinvested in other areas of education. Resources should be allocated that should do just that.

Reading scores seem to indicate that the Whole Language approach to reading needs to be re-evaluated. The Whole Language approach was originally developed to help hearing-impaired students learn to read. It was not intended for non-hearing impaired students.<sup>15</sup> And test scores indicate that there has been no improvement in reading scores over scores before this approach was adopted.

There are reading programs now used in school districts that guarantee results: Action Reading and The Literacy Connection are two examples. Action Reading even offers a money back guarantee, typically unheard of among curriculum providers. In truth, it doesn't matter what program is used, as long as it gets results. A fourth grade non-reader

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<sup>15</sup> Carol Innerst, The Washington Times, "U.S. Pupils Continue Slide in Reading," April 28, 1995.

will be given material he cannot possibly learn. Illiteracy in fourth grade can doom one to a miserable school experience, causing the student to fall farther and farther behind. It is not surprising that drop-outs are created in elementary school. Why should they continue if they aren't learning anything?<sup>16</sup>

### *Vouchers*

Vouchers in education are little more than a GI Bill for children. The United States is the only western nation that does not provide state aid to private schools whether they are religiously affiliated or not. Our country values freedom, yet denies parents, especially poor families, the opportunity to select the best school for their children.

In the Netherlands, funding is provided for the more than two-thirds of all Dutch students who attend private schools, 60 percent of which are religious in foundation. Denmark provides 72 percent of the average public school per pupil cost for each student enrolled in private school. Australia also enjoys a publicly funded school choice system. Sweden's 1992 Government Bill on Freedom of Choice and Independent Schools proclaims, "the right and opportunity to choose a school and education for one's children is important in a free society ... the goal is to achieve the greatest possible freedom for children and parents to choose their school."<sup>17</sup>

### *Voucher Initiatives*

Eighteen states and Puerto Rico have voucher initiatives pending. Recent defeats at the polls in Arizona and California have not stopped the wave of popular support for vouchers. Vouchers have received endorsements from the Republican Congress and former Secretaries of Education William Bennett and Lamar Alexander. Vouchers are seen as a way to increase schools' accountability and productivity using real market incentives. Fears about dismantling public schools are groundless. The GI Bill served its users well and did not negatively impact state run institutions of higher education, but challenged them to be more accessible and responsive to market demands. The same benefit could apply to vouchers in K-12 education.

### *Privatization*

Privatization has been used effectively in various aspects of public service, from garbage collection to maintenance of public buildings. School districts, because of union opposition, have been reluctant to explore privatization. District employees even have reservations about open bidding against the private sector. Clark and Washoe counties have elaborate food service, maintenance, and transportation systems all of which are managed and operated by the school districts. Generally, the budgets are based on need (use it or lose it) not an approach with incentives to save money.

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<sup>16</sup> Pournelle, Jerry E. and Roberta J., "Technology For the Little Red School House, *The World*, May 30, 1994.

<sup>17</sup> "Where and When Parents Can Choose Without Financial Penalty," *The Blum Center's Educational Freedom Report*, June 17 1994.

In the transportation department of one school district, a suggestion was made to reward perfect, accident free attendance of the entire shift with a personal leave day for everyone. In this instance, the average total of on-the-job injuries resulted in four days lost per quarter per employee. A personal leave day granted for perfect attendance would reduce absenteeism and its costs by 75 percent. But the idea was rejected. In this instance, the status quo is the more expensive way to operate. Although the transportation department rejected this idea, such suggestions are welcome in the private sector.

Professional tutoring services such as the Sylvan Learning Center may do a better job in remediation than is currently done with in-house programs. Some private enterprises focus strictly on helping at-risk or disadvantaged students. Even if results cost the same in budget outlay, savings will be realized in reduced capital outlay for equipment, software and building space. Such district savings could then be applied to other areas of learning.

The unions are strongly opposed to allowing contracting out or free market competition. In fact, this year they filed a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission against "Hooked On Phonics" charging unfair competition due to their money-back guarantee.

## POLITICS OF EDUCATION

### PROBLEMS

The educational system, unfortunately, is often a victim of political wrangling and of special interests putting their agenda over what is best for children. This cannot be ignored when attempting to make the educational system more effective. Of greatest concern in the political arena is the role unions have played.

#### *Teacher Unions*

In the politics of education, one of the most frustrating aspects of school reform has been the recalcitrance of the teachers' union. Indeed, *Forbes* magazine has had two cover articles on the National Education Association (NEA)<sup>18</sup> and more than one researcher has identified it as the major obstacle to change, be it vouchers, merit pay, site-based management, or accountability issues such as certification or testing. Funding has been a major issue, with the teacher's union demanding more money for education which ultimately translates to higher teacher salaries. In Nevada, class size has dropped dramatically from 20.2 pupils per teacher in 1987-88 to 18.7 currently by legislative mandate. We are the only state to mandate class size reduction in the primary grades.

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Brimelow, "Comeuppance: How the National Education Association Corrupts Our Public Schools," *Forbes*, October 1994.  
Peter Brimelow, "The National Extortion Association," *Forbes*, June 7, 1993.

Why? The unions have successfully persuaded legislators and the governor that this will provide better student achievement when studies prove just the opposite. The union's advocacy of this position has nothing to do with children and more to do with inflating their ranks with more members.

Nevada ranks 32nd in public school costs per pupil. Yet in the area of teacher salaries, Nevada ranks 11th, primarily because of the effectiveness of union negotiators. Clearly, our major investment is teaching staff. While many districts are increasing class size, laying off staff and cutting programs to balance their budgets, Nevada's education budget continues to grow. Still, we are 20th nationally in our high school dropout rate,<sup>19</sup> 30th in our SAT scores.<sup>20</sup>

### *Political Action Committee Funds*

Certainly, in Nevada politics, the Nevada State Education Association wields significant power, primarily by bankrolling their endorsed candidates. In the 1992 election they were able to seat 41 out of 45 NSEA endorsed candidates in the state legislature. In Washoe County, they typically provide funding to their school board candidates which enables them to outspend their opponents two to one. While no one wants to deny the free exercise of political activism to any citizen, there are things that need to be done in the interest of fairness and legality to curtail some of the distinct advantages the teachers' union has over the average taxpaying citizen.

At present union PAC funds are collected by the school district. Teachers' union dues are collected by payroll deductions by the school district. The districts, in turn, write a single monthly check to the local union. In Washoe County, WCTA collects around \$91,000 per month in dues - approximately \$40.00 per month per teacher member. Unless a teacher at the beginning of the school year requests otherwise, a portion of the dues automatically goes for political action. This is known as a reverse check-off system and has been declared illegal by the Federal Elections Commission for national unions to practice. But at the local level unions skirt this prohibition. Action must still be initiated by the union member to prevent this deduction. The school district is not allowed to collect political contributions of any other nature. The practice of having elected officials collect PAC funds is clearly illegal and must be addressed.

In addition, many union members are given time off with pay to conduct union business. This is often practiced on or surrounding election day to allow the teachers to walk precincts, man phone banks or just simply to vote.

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<sup>19</sup> Margaret Byrnes, Lawrence Byrnes and Robert A. Connesky, The Quality Teacher, Brenell, Florida, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. #6, States in Profile.

## *Union Dues*

Teachers should have the opportunity to leave the union at anytime without financial penalty. Currently, a teacher may leave the union at anytime, but unless the union and the school board are notified by a certain date (Sept. 15 is the deadline in Washoe County), that teacher remains liable for the full amount of union dues. Should a teacher be terminated or leave the district for other reasons, the balance of the dues will be deducted from the final salary check. This amounts to maintaining an agency shop in a right to work state, a clear violation of the Right to Work laws of Nevada.

## *Nepotism*

Nepotism is another issue that negatively impacts Nevada's education reform movement and calls into question school board decisions. Locally elected school boards are to provide a system of checks and balances to the professionals who run the school district operations. Private sector restrictions prohibit union encroachment on management, but they do not apply to Nevada's school boards. Relatives of teachers, administrators and union officials can sit on school boards and vote on salary increases, benefit packages and labor relations, regardless of conflict of interest.

Nationally, some states (Iowa, Idaho, Kentucky, Pennsylvania) and individual school districts have invoked laws and policies prohibiting nepotism. The Kentucky legislature passed a law as part of their education reform package that prohibits school board members from being related to school district employees, including father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, son or daughter, aunt, uncle, son-in-law and daughter-in-law. Kentucky law also prohibits school district employees from taking part in political campaign activities for school board. Nor can candidates solicit or accept any political contribution or service of any employee of the school district. Currently, in Washoe County alone, five of the seven board members are related to district employees.<sup>21</sup>

Such conflicts of interest cloud the negotiation process and cast considerable doubt on the objectivity of the decisions made. A clear law prohibiting such practices would go a long way in returning school boards to the community at large free from the control of education special interests.

## *Licensure*

The very thing licensure was ostensibly meant to protect - quality of education - is often undermined by the unions once a teacher is licensed. A case in point is the recent example of 14 teachers in Las Vegas who were unable to pass the basic competency tests. Rather than suspending these people, the union negotiated for them so that they could continue teaching Las Vegas school children while taking further course work. However,

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<sup>21</sup> 1990 Education Reform Act, H.B. 940, KRS 157-161 amended, 1990.



it is clear that all too often, rather than protecting Nevada's quality of education, the unions and the licensure process instead protect teachers who may not have the skills and abilities to provide a high quality of education to Nevada's school children.

In the private sector employees are expected to continuously provide their highest level of performance. In the educational system, tenure protects teachers even if they provide sub-standard levels of education for their students, or even if they are sometimes outright incompetent. Tenure allows teachers who are mediocre or are burned out to provide a bare minimum for their students and still maintain their jobs.

To effectively meet the needs of children in the classroom, the requirement for certified teachers in the classroom must be assessed. Professionals in the fields of business, technology, sciences can bring invaluable "real life" input to our students. They should not be hampered by the requirements that certification entails. As other states have done, Nevada needs to allow greater flexibility in licensure policies and loosen the constraints that prohibit professionals in our communities from teaching in the classroom. The monopoly union-approved certified teachers have on the education job market may prevent schools from hiring the best professional for a classroom position.

### *Class Size Reduction*

The concept of class-size reduction must be reevaluated. Its avowed purpose is better education for our primary grade children with more individualized instruction and attention.

### *No Data To Support Class-Size Reduction*

Nevada seems locked into a preoccupation with low class size in spite of *no demonstrable data* that it has made any difference in the learning process of our primary students. One would expect our reading test scores to soar in the third grade after two years of small class size. Such is not the case. Scores remain about the same as they were before class size reduction. There is also no measurable carry-over to the upper grades. Certainly, teacher job satisfaction has increased with fewer students. Parents may falsely believe their child is getting more attention and hence a better education.

### *Need To Tailor Program To Local Site*

Class size reduction as a program to enhance learning focuses on the teacher not the student. Nevada needs to expand its teaching/learning options and allow schools to tailor their staffing to the needs of their students without the constraint of an arbitrary staffing formula. Interactive computer technology can enable students to benefit from the finest

teachers regardless of their locale in our state or nation. Twenty-first century education requires a different educational paradigm than the traditional teacher/student formula.<sup>22</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The educational system must be allowed to operate free from the political push and pull that is currently so negatively impacting the schools. In order to facilitate this, the following solutions will be presented:

1. Licensure solutions
2. Class-size solutions
3. Site-based decision-making
4. Charter schools

### *Licensure solutions*

Currently, licensure acts as a gatekeeper, often keeping good people out of the profession. To effectively meet the needs of children in the classroom, the requirement for certified teachers in the classroom must be assessed. Professionals in the fields of business, technology, sciences, etc. can bring invaluable "real life" input to our students. They should not be hampered by the requirements that certification entails. As other states have done, Nevada needs to allow greater flexibility in licensure policies and loosen the constraints that prohibit professionals in our communities from teaching in the classroom. The monopoly on the education job market held by union-approved certified teachers may prevent schools from hiring the best professionals for classroom positions.

Furthermore, tenure itself must be reevaluated. Certainly, people need a sense that their jobs are secure. But this cannot come at the expense of the quality of education provided. Perhaps merit pay would provide the incentive to continue pursuing excellence rather than succumbing to complacency and mediocrity.

### *Class Size Solutions*

Solving class size problems can be accomplished in ways other than hiring more certified teachers. Each district, and consequently each school site, is the best judge of how to utilize financial resources to meet the goals of class-size reduction. Other configurations may be equally successful or even superior given the same resources. Classroom aides, teacher's assistants and foster grandparents can be used instead of two teachers in a teamed classroom. One teacher, utilizing computer technology may be able to give more comprehensive individualized instruction to a larger number of students with equivalent or superior outcomes as a single instructor with fifteen students not utilizing appropriate technology.

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<sup>22</sup> Amendment to the Class Size Reduction Act, Proposed by Daniel Leck, Carson City School District Board Member.

Resources spent in additional training or professional development in successful reading strategies may also meet the educational objectives of class-size reduction in the primary grades.

If simply more attention is a critical factor, non-certified individuals could be hired at far less than the current teacher pay scale.

### *Site Based Decision Making*

In the last biennium, SB91 calling for site-based decision making was adopted. To date, less than 10 percent of the schools in Nevada have true site-based decision-making. The lag in implementation has been caused by the restrictions in the Nevada system. Currently, site-based decisions are subordinate to contractual and negotiated agreements with the teacher's unions. Although site-based councils (also known as shared governance) can make decisions, they lack control over the money which is used to implement those decisions thus rendering their "management" moot.

Shifts in the management paradigm are meaningless unless the approach to improving schools is guided by clearly defined instructional goals and includes changing instruction and curriculum. Researchers from the School Based Management Project at the University of Southern California found scant evidence that schools get better just because decisions are made by those closer to the classroom.

Important considerations in the evaluation of performance under site-based decision making are:

1. Makeup of the site council
2. Responsibilities given to the council
3. Changes made in the way the school functions
4. Measurable improvements which have occurred in student performance and parent involvement

As mentioned earlier, decentralization of the budget is the key to reform using the site-based model. Kentucky's Education Reform Act (KERA) and the Chicago School Reform Act share reforms that are grounded in state legislation that obliges school districts to delegate budgetary authority to school sites. If schools cannot make significant monetary decisions, the potential for reform is only superficial.

When school communities have control over staffing and curriculum, they can significantly transform their schools as exemplified by Foshay Middle School in South Central Los Angeles. At Foshay, after a site council was formed, test scores rose by 15 points in reading and 10 points in math in two years. Attendance went up to 96 percent each day and the dropout rate lowered to 4 percent, even with a 40 percent transient rate. Hiring the principal was viewed as the single most important decision.

Control of the site council is also a critical issue. In most Nevada schools with site-based councils, the teachers union members have the majority of the votes and can effectively veto any change they don't like.<sup>23</sup> It is important to evaluate the current status of site-based decision making at the local level. Has it made a difference or are we just putting more window dressing on Nevada's education reform? Perhaps clearer expectations and discretionary power are needed.

### *Charter Schools*

Continuing the theme of utilizing innovation and rethinking education tradition, charter schools must be addressed. As we strive to open up options for our students, we embrace the understanding that *public education is based on who is served, not who is providing the service*. Charter schools are the ideal mechanism to allow the public schools to be competitive in the educational marketplace. They can be a vehicle to reach those "at risk" students who are not succeeding in traditional public schools.

With proper legislative guidelines, responsibly written, charter schools can both energize and fuel innovation while assuring that the education mission is achieved. Charter schools are controlled and monitored by compliance reports, financial audits, non-discrimination requirements, and testing. State and district oversight of curriculum, personnel, or administration are then limited to health and safety issues and civil rights.

The Morrison Institute for Public Policy, School of Public Affairs, at Arizona State University has synthesized from those active in the charter school movement nine elements they feel are essential for strong and successful charter schools.

The belief is that charter schools will have the best chance to develop improved learning environments and positively impact the overall system if these minimum elements are in place:

1. At least one other public authority besides the local school board is able to sponsor a charter school (e.g., county board, state board, university).
2. A variety of public or private individuals/groups are allowed to organize, seek sponsorship, and operate a charter school.
3. Charter schools become distinct legal entities: they do not remain a part of a school district under the control of the district board and district-negotiated employee agreements.
4. Charter schools as public entities embrace common school ideals. They are: non-sectarian in programs and operations, tuition-free, non-selective in admissions, non-discriminatory in practices and accountable to a public body.

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<sup>23</sup> Stephanie Chavez, "Making the Grade," *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1994.

5. Each charter school is held accountable for its performance, both by parents and by its sponsoring public authority. Failure of a charter school to meet the provisions of its contract results in closure.
6. In return for stricter accountability, charter schools are automatically exempt from all state and local laws and regulations (i.e., super waiver) except those related to: health and safety; nondiscrimination and civil rights; fiscal and outcome accountability; those agreed to within their charters.
7. A charter school is a school of choice for students, parents, and teachers -- no one is forced to be there.
8. Each charter school automatically receives the full operating funds associated with its student enrollment (i.e., fiscal autonomy).
9. Within a charter school, teachers have the option to work as employees or they may become more of an owner and/or subcontractor. If previously employed in a district, they retain certain "leave" protections (e.g., seniority, retirement benefits) should they choose to return within a designated time frame."

### *Charter Schools: Serving Different Student Populations*

States like Virginia provide working models of already existing Charter schools. They make certain suggestions similar to those stated above. The Governor's Commission on Champion Schools in Virginia recommends that charter school sponsorship be open to parents, business and community members, as well as teachers or administrators already in the system. Charter schools should receive the same per pupil funding as provided in their school district. Schools should be allowed to set their admissions criteria, reflective of the school's mission or area of concentration (i.e., requiring auditions for fine arts school).

While schools could not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, nationality, or religion, they could choose to restrict admittance to one sex. In this day of concern for educational bias against female students, a girls' charter school could be considered appropriate if not vital. In order to be truly free to create a "new school" Charters should be granted a super-waiver from state and local laws and regulations regarding certification of teachers, school day, school year, teacher pay and curriculum.<sup>24</sup>

### *Charter Schools: A Growing Movement*

Since Minnesota passed the first Charter school legislation in 1991, 12 states have followed, including California, Massachusetts, Colorado, Arizona and Michigan. In Maryland, a limited version that allows teachers to start a school-within-a-school is being utilized.

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Baker, "For Virginia Education, A Minnesota Model," *The Washington Post*, December 5, 1994.

According to some teachers, the value of junking the endless paperwork and circumventing bureaucratic red-tape is inestimable. Because authority for decision making resides within the school, decisions can be made immediately or as necessary. Thus changes can be implemented without delay.

Active interest from parents, students and staff is probably the most promising feature of Charter schools. Success becomes everyone's responsibility and charter schools find in this shared mission the responsiveness and flexibility missing in many of today's schools.

## ACCOUNTABILITY IN EDUCATION

Educational accountability has been the focus of a great deal of controversy. Should educators be accountable to administrators, teachers and elected officials, or to the taxpaying public? Taxpayers, parents, and students want to know what they are getting in return for higher costs. The district report cards that were instituted last legislative session have helped hold public schools accountable, but more can and should be done to help parents assess what their children are receiving in the classroom.

### PROBLEMS

Problems of accountability are evident in different ways in the schools and most particularly affect the following:

1. The way money is spent.
2. The academic core curriculum.
3. The assessment of student achievement
4. The assignment of grades.

### *Money*

Accountability in the expenditure of bond and grant moneys is important. Grant expenditures are generally very specific, but seldom is that fact communicated to the public. In school report cards some districts indicate grant money is received, but expenditure is not broken down by distribution, i.e., administration, staff and materials. Bond money expenditure is also very frequently used for contingencies such as cost overruns or extras not originally identified for the public in the bond election. Public involvement in the prioritization and disposition of interest money, or of any money, is important.

### *Protect the Academic Core*

When asked about what can be done to improve the teaching situation, both teachers and administrators frequently respond with "stop the academic schedule disruptions during the class day." The protection of the academic core is vital if we are to improve education today.

Elementary school is probably affected the most by non-academic programs. Given a six-hour day with time out for lunch and recess, what remains is less than five hours of instructional time. Students are then pulled out for Band, G.T., resource or special education programs, ESL, etc. Programs frequently enter the classroom such as: *CAPP*, *DARE*, *sex-ed* (in some counties), *Here's Looking at You 2000*, *Tribes*, *Wings*, and the list goes on.

### *Interruptions Decrease Student Instruction Time*

Research has demonstrated that it takes students five to seven minutes to re-focus on learning after being distracted. With five or six or more disruptions during the day, students lose additional education time. When students are pulled out of the regular class, regardless of the reason, taxpayers continue to pay for the class that the student is not attending. Meanwhile, as students come and go on different schedules, the teacher needs to stay apprised of who has had what input in order to ensure that each student has received the same level of instruction. There are teachers who, discouraged by the system, declare that they only have their entire class for a period of 45 minutes of uninterrupted time each day for quality instruction. In fact, an audit of the instruction time in our elementary classrooms would find most schools out of compliance with the 300 minutes of instruction time required in grades 3-6 or the 240 minutes required in grades 1 and 2.

### *Other Countries Spend More Time On Core Subjects*

Students in other developed countries receive far more schooling in core subjects than do American students. They achieve this by a longer school day, a longer school year, and fewer non-core subjects and activities. Since the longer school day or school year are high cost items, the most reasonable way to increase core academic exposure would be to maximize learning during the school time provided. This can only be accomplished by protecting the academic core studies from interruptions. Scheduling non-academic programs such as sex-ed, counseling, and safety (fire, railroad, electrical, etc.) either at the beginning or end of the school day would help in this effort. Holding some programs after school when possible would also help.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Oliver Brown, "Time, Learning and Taxpayer Money," *Network News and Views*, February 1995.

### *Extending Time On Task Needed*

Former Secretaries of Education William Bennett and Lamar Alexander have called for a return to the academic mission of public schools. For example, research on reading shows a strong relationship between time spent reading and reading achievement in classrooms. How can children spend time reading when they are constantly interrupted? Increasing the quality of the core instructional time by just 10% is the equivalent of adding 18 days on to the school year.

### *Affective Vs. Academic Programs*

If parents were aware of how much time is spent pursuing things other than the basics, they would probably demand change. As it is, few parents are aware of the amount and nature of non-academic programs used with their children. Parents should be apprised of specifically which programs are used, program objectives and how much of their child's class time is spent on such pursuits. Only then, can they make informed choices at the schools level and make appropriate requests at the district level.<sup>26</sup>

### *Accurate Assessment of Student Achievement*

#### *National Assessment of Education Progress tests*

The fact that Nevada has failed to participate in NAEP (the National Assessment of Education Progress) raises issues of accountability. The test results can be reported either in relation to national averages (norm referenced) or in relation to standards set by the independent governing board (akin to criterion referencing). Either tool is superior to the norm referencing done by the CTBS (Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills) based on a sampling of students - not a true national norm.

Currently we take comfort that Nevada's school districts are at or above the national average based on the norms set by McGraw-Hill. But there are virtually no school districts below the national average on the CTBS. What does that tell us about the validity of the reference tool?

### *The Lake Wobegon Syndrome*

Indeed, as Chester Finn, Jr. states, we are drowning in Lake Wobegon--where all the children are above average. He reported Dr. John J. Carnell's historical 1987 survey which revealed that no state is below average at the elementary level on any of the six major nationally normed, commercially available tests. He also discovered that 90% of local school districts claimed score averages that exceeded the national average and more than 70% of the students tested were told that they are performing above the national average. These findings were replicated by the U.S. Education Department.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Programs such as: *Tribes, Wings, Pumsey, Here's Looking At You 2000.*

<sup>27</sup> Chester Finn, Jr., "Drowning In Lake Wobegone," *Education Week*, June 15, 1994.



### *Accurate Benchmarks Lacking*

While other states have tried to remedy this problem, Nevada has simply switched from one commercial test (the SAT) to another (the CTBS). We would be best served by using the NAEP testing to give us national, accurate benchmarks. When states are ranked by NAEP, Nevada is absent, so a true assessment of where our state stands is impossible. This is unfortunate since so many of our education related decisions appear to be driven by our national rankings, i.e., teachers salary, per pupil spending, etc. Such information would be immensely helpful to our governor, legislators and the interested public, to track our state reform efforts in a meaningful context.

### *Grades*

Grades have long been the measure by which parents assess whether or not their child is doing well in school. However, the shocking reality is that an "A" student at one school may be a "C" student at another. The results of such grade inflation were tragically illustrated in a recent Letter to the Editor in the *Reno Gazette-Journal*.<sup>28</sup> A woman wrote to protest the fact that her student had maintained a "B" average in a Washoe County high school and yet was unable to pass the Nevada High School proficiency exam.

Most colleges and universities still rely more on grades for entrance as opposed to test scores. Often the unwittingly deceived "A" student finds himself ill-prepared for college. Currently, there is no absolute standard by which students are judged. Frequently, at-risk schools do not cover the same amount of subject matter as other schools. When test time comes, at-risk students fail to perform well because they haven't been taught all of the material covered on the test.

To get a clearer picture of a child's performance, grades need to be based on some reliable state or nationally based standard. It would be helpful to have grade-point averages published along with test score averages to see if grade inflation is at work. At the secondary level, it would be helpful to see how the grades are broken down by subject.

Reporting how many A's, B's, C's, etc. for each subject and comparing them with the test scores in the same academic area would help determine if the grades are valid. Parents, teachers, and universities need accurate, not inflated evaluations of their students.

## SOLUTIONS

There are a number of possible solutions to making the educational system more accountable to taxpayers and to Nevada's students. The following possibilities will be considered:

1. The National Assessment of Education Progress tests.
2. Solutions to increase academic time.
3. Getting a clearer picture of grades.
4. The role of Nevada universities.

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<sup>28</sup> "Letters to the Editor," *Reno-Gazett Journal*, January 10, 1995.

### *National Assessment of Education Progress*

Nevada could benefit from participation in the National Assessment of Education Progress. NAEP is the best source of reliable student achievement data at national and state levels. It is the nearest approximation of an "independent audit" of educational progress we have. The NAEP tests 4th, 8th, and 12th graders. Its secure exam cannot be "taught to."

The test results can be reported either in relation to national averages (norm referenced) or in relation to standards set by the independent governing board. Either NAEP tool is superior to the norm referencing done by the CTBS tests which are currently used in Nevada schools.

### *Increasing Academic Time*

Increasing the quality of the core instructional time by just 10% is the equivalent of adding 18 days to the school year. To encourage focus on the core portion of the school day, some states have enacted laws requiring specific time commitment to core subjects: reading, writing, math, science, history, etc. Schools should report on core time spent on non-academic subjects and the number of interruptions, pull-outs and push-ins impacting the different grade levels.

Parents should be allowed to have their children opt out of affective, non-academic programs.

### *University Assistance Needed*

Research in the university system should meaningfully contribute to improving education. Any failure of Nevada's education research to connect with local education practitioners is problematic since many of Nevada's teachers and administrators are trained in our own state funded institutions. We need to know what works for our students. The diverse needs of our student populations in rural, suburban and urban settings demand attention, and should be effectively addressed by university research.

Nevada's higher education system consumes 18.6% of the entire state budget. Since both universities have colleges of education, it is appropriate to expect our state to have some real educational solutions. Education deans should be held responsible for research and development to help Nevada's students today. For example, the whole language approach to reading was originally advocated by UNR's Department of Education. Yet after its use, test scores in Washoe County still hover around the national average. This shift in instructional approach has not yielded significant improvement in student reading skills. Washoe County has two professional development schools established in conjunction with UNR. What have they accomplished? There needs to be evaluative research that demonstrates their efficacy and contribution to improvement in our classrooms.

### *Research Needs to Have Practical Application*

Active practitioners in elementary and secondary education constitute virtually none of the university faculty who train aspiring teachers and conduct education research. Our colleges of education should provide research applicable to professional practice. Research studies should be evaluated, in large part, by how effectively they enhance the education of Nevada's students. Such projects could be key in helping determine the most effective use of limited tax dollars to fund education. The universities' mission statements should provide the most for the education dollar. Education research projects that cannot be justified toward direct benefits to education in Nevada today should be redirected. Schools that are funded by taxpayers should benefit them and what better way than to improve the education of their children.

### *Parental Involvement*

Our universities might also assume some of the responsibility for parent involvement in education. This can be done by providing materials and learning experiences for parents in tutoring their children and also to continue their own economic and personal growth. The higher education community can do much to teach their students in the fields of business, public service, media and how to encourage and facilitate life-long learning for their future employees, clients, etc. The higher education community can do much to work with business, the media, and social service agencies to create constructive learning environments for children, families and teachers. This can only happen if they are held accountable by those who hold the purse strings and demand action.<sup>29</sup>

The public radio and television stations operated by the universities could provide programming targeted at parents to help them become more effectively involved in their children's education. The university could help private media sources with programming and supplemental materials to accomplish the same end.

## CONCLUSION

Accountability means those involved in the education mission must give an accounting of their success or failure to achieve the expected outcomes. If public dissatisfaction exists, several questions must be asked. Has the educational mission changed? Are sufficient resources allocated and are they used wisely? Are the customers different? Do we need to do things differently? These questions need answers from everyone involved in the education of our children. It may be that the answers will require

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<sup>29</sup> Joe B. Wyatt, "Out of Touch With the Classroom," *The Washington Post*, April 3, 1994.

a shift in thinking to new ways of doing things, new expectations and new areas of responsibility.

All stake holders in Nevada's future: policy makers, businessmen, educators, media, and parents should consider these recommendations. Some solutions offered are relatively simple to implement. Others require considerable change from all sectors of the education field. We cannot wait to act. Each child graduating from our current system is handicapped by what we aren't doing or what we're doing poorly. Our children are our future, however trite the statement, it is true. They are counting on us and we can do no less than to strive to improve their educational opportunities and hope for the future.

**NOTE: SEE APPENDIX B FOR AN EXAMPLE OF AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO A STATEWIDE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM.**

## APPENDIX A

### **Prioritization Matrix**

A matrix to facilitate prioritization might be constructed considering the following:

1. *The topic or skill described in detail.* ("Reading" is not adequate. It might say "reading detailed instructions and following them" which is a different skill than "reading for the central idea or theme.") The list needs to include all extra programs such as DARE, fire prevention programs, sex education, substance abuse, etc.
2. *The estimated cost of the program* to accomplish mastery of the skill.
3. *The estimated classroom time to cover the topic to mastery by the majority of the students.* This might include estimates for attaining mastery by a target percentage of the students.
4. *The estimated portion of the school population involved in the activity or needing the skill.* The matrix will include high school level athletics and other extracurricular activities which take school time or money. Those not having 100% of the population involved must be considered.
5. *Skills needed prior to attempting this skill and the future skills that will require this knowledge.* As education is a series of building blocks, each block's part in the structure should be clear. All this assumes we are willing to insure mastery of a skill before moving forward with the next needed skill. This matrix creates a road map so students may understand the need for each subject and its relationship to their education and career goals.

Below is an abbreviated example for a primary school:

**TASK MATRIX FOR UNGRADED PRIMARY CLASS OF STUDENTS  
FOR ONE ACADEMIC YEAR**

<b>Skill/Knowledge</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Population %</b>	<b>Pre/Post Courses</b>
Know Colors	\$ 2k	40 hrs	100 %	descriptive languages
Know Shapes	\$ 4k	70 hrs	100 %	math and language
Know Letters	\$12k	120 hrs	100 %	fundamental to readings
Know Sounds of Letter	\$ 6k	200 hrs	100 %	required for speech and phonics
Know Sound of Diphthongs	\$ 3k	50 hrs	100 %	required for spelling speech and phonics
Stop, Drop & Roll	\$ 1k	12 hrs	100 %	child safety issue
Sex Education	\$12k	40 hrs	50%	fundamentals of other courses, biology
Child Abuse Education	\$10k	30 hrs	10-15%	child safety and welfare issue
Knowing Number 1-100	\$ 9k	40 hrs	100 %	all math
Know how to add whole numbers	\$ 20k	80 hrs	100 %	adding other numbers and multiplication must know numbers first
Know how to Subtract	\$40k	100 hrs	100 %	must know numbers and addition needed for division and other math

More criteria may be added. Shown above are the minimum considerations for a reasonable priority ranking. The priority ranking should involve a broad spectrum of the population: parents, teachers, community leaders and others from the community. "Community" can be statewide, county, city, or school by school (true sight based management or shared decision making of consequence). Results will vary a little, but probably less than most people think.

Once the list of skills and knowledge is identified and prioritized, time and money are allotted by item/subject until time, money, or both run out. If the community does not like the outcome of the exercise, they must re-examine the matrix. For example, they could aim at improving learning productivity, finding more money, extending the school day or year, or shifting priorities. This forces the community to share responsibility rather than imposing new requirements on the school without adjustments to the curriculum. It provides the impetus for schools to stay focused and perform agreed upon priorities. School administrators and teachers have said before that they can do the job if given reasonable parameters.

This is a win-win-win approach to the dilemmas of funding. It provides the schools with what they believe they need to get the job done. It provides the community with an opportunity to set the education agenda priorities. And finally, it provides a focused, relevant education for the next generation. There are other "wins" as well. It connects the schools to the community, reduces teacher burnout and provides the catalyst for needed

education restructuring. Educators will be challenged to improve the productivity of learning and teaching systems. The building block approach will force deficiencies to be addressed before students move on.

Of course, legislative action will be required to provide flexibility in light of the mandates placed on schools today.<sup>30</sup> Future attempts to introduce new mandates from legislative or board members will require deliberative scrutiny. Every four to six years the entire list should be reviewed again to ensure the direction and priorities.

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<sup>30</sup> Editor's note: Anything but the most global of goals could make this matrix a bureaucratic nightmare, given the number of people of differing opinions who would have to agree on necessary skills needed to achieve specific tasks. It also would have to be very expensive initially, given the amount of teacher release time needed to develop such a matrix, and then to come to agreement on it.

Furthermore, the more specific the tasks, the more potential there will be to create an educational program which will only deliver the minimum, or teach to the mean in terms of student ability. Rather than free up teachers to teach a task, such a narrowing of focus will tie the hands of good, innovative teachers, and will allow mediocre teachers to do no more than the minimum.

The education program in the state of Georgia currently operates with such a rigid outline of goals and objectives. The end result has been the aforementioned: teacher dissatisfaction because they are so tied up with curriculum that they do not have the time or freedom to go beyond that curriculum, and a narrowing of the educational experience for Georgia's students.

## APPENDIX B

### *One State's Solution Reinventing Education for an Improved Workforce*

It is clear that U.S. employers are not satisfied with the quality coming from the public school system. The motivated academically prepared children survive hiring scrutiny, but the quality of the remainder are frequently unsatisfactory to employers. In Nevada, there are shortages of qualified, skilled workers. Our society must reestablish that a purpose of education is to prepare students for the work place. Nevada needs to redirect its schools to bolster student achievement in employable skills which could universally improve parent satisfaction with K-12 product quality.

#### *Oregon Model*

One such attempt to reform education was invoked in Oregon in 1991. The legislature passed this reform with considerable pressure from employers. It has several good features that handle many of the objections in other efforts. They divide high school education into six occupational strands based on the types of jobs, aptitude and interests of students. There college track vs. job track becomes a moot issue because all six include jobs which require college degrees, two year degrees, high school degrees and even positions where dropouts can work. The students' futures are determined by their drive, motivation and aptitude. They are responsible for their ultimate status in life. The six occupational areas are:

*Arts and Communications:* including literature; the humanities; foreign languages; the arts; architecture; creative writing; film; graphic design and production; journalism; radio and television broadcasting; advertising and public relations.

*Business Management:* including economics; accounting; finance; business management; sales; marketing; entrepreneurship; hospitality & tourism.

*Health Services:* including medicine, dentistry; nursing; physical therapy and rehabilitation, nutrition and fitness.

*Human Resources:* including law and legal studies; law enforcement; education; public administration; social services and religion.

*Industry and Engineering:* including engineering; mechanics and repair; manufacturing technology; precision production and construction.

*Natural Resources:* including agriculture; earth sciences; environmental sciences; forestry; fisheries; horticulture and wildlife management.



The focused programs of study show students how academic subjects are related to life outside of school. When students see practical applications for their mathematics and chemistry lessons, they become more involved in their education.

While this is not a perfect breakdown of the jobs in our workplace, they could easily be modified. The underlying principle is correct ... public education was created to prepare students for the rest of their lives and the biggest portion of that is work. Students need exposure to occupations whether they plan to drop out of high school or go on to a Ph.D. Students who finance their own education will need interim jobs in the process. Most people eventually join the work force regardless of how long they delay it with schooling.

Oregon is no longer dealing with occupational education vs. college prep classes, but classes in different career areas. The educational needs in those career areas are not right or wrong, just different. Within those functional areas many skills and knowledge are the same, or are building blocks to the next level in that career area, whether the person graduates from high school or obtains a Ph.D.

### ***Careers Built on Learning Continuum***

Perhaps an example will help at this point. In the medical field, the understanding of biology and anatomy, the ability to read, to follow detailed instructions, and many other skills are required for all workers, from orderlies to surgeons. Paramedics, nurses, medical professors, veterinarians, dentists, and medical researchers all need a common base in the same areas. The more motivated students will go further, building on the initial knowledge to obtain more advanced positions. The skills and knowledge needed in the medical area are different than those needed in the other five areas. Students may develop great careers in any of the six areas.

This approach may mean that programs in all areas are not available in all schools. In Las Vegas or Reno, a high school might only focus on two or three career areas and do a great job on those programs. Students would have a choice of high schools to attend to get their chosen program. Each program might be its own school with its own leader or principal. Multiple "schools" within the same building have proven effective and efficient in cities employing these options. In the rural areas most schools could offer most of the programs if there is sufficient need, utilizing distance learning technologies.

This paradigm is not presented as the solution to all education problems or even as a model that Nevada must adopt. Rather it is a thought provoking way to review the high school curriculum in light of being more accountable to students and their future employers. It also resolves some funding issues. For example: The battle over funding occupational education problems is resolved; Tech Prep is not a separate program but integrated into all of the curriculum; all educational programs eventually lead to work. Different occupational fields are an acceptance of reality, not a designation of a superior or inferior course of study. The ability of the students to advance in a program to higher degrees and better jobs is clearly under the students' control.