



# perspectives

Summer 2017

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An official publication of the Nevada State Education Association

## 79th Legislative Session: A Session of Accomplishment



*NSEA members, leaders and staff meet with Sen. Joyce Woodhouse (center)*

## **NSEA 79th Legislative Session Champions of Public Education Spotlight**

# 79th Legislative Session

## Champions of Public Education

NSEA's success this legislative session wouldn't have been possible without real Champions of Public Education in the legislature. Following is a list of those champions and their contributions.

### **Legislative Democrats—Champions**

No other issue defined the 79<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session like that of ESA private school vouchers. Before the session started, Republican legislators talked about vouchers as their top legislative priority for the session. Governor Brian Sandoval supported their cause, publicly committing to the program during his State of the State address and including a \$60 million general fund appropriation for the program. Early in the session, Senator Michael Roberson secured a commitment from his entire Senate Republican caucus to vote against any budget that did not include ESA vouchers, and the Assembly Republican Caucus followed suit weeks later. Just about every political pundit thought that a deal on vouchers was inevitable. However, the pundits underestimated the resolve of the Democratic caucuses to defend the institution of public education. They also underestimated NSEA, its coalition partners, and NSEA's connection to the legislators in the majority.

### **Speaker Jason Frierson—Champion**

While Speaker Frierson was publicly more measured in his approach to vouchers and the legislative session in general, behind the scenes he masterfully managed his caucus to hold the line against public money for private schools and to produce real results for public education. Frierson sponsored SB320 and navigated the threat of veto to finally get student test scores out of teacher evaluations. Frierson also sponsored AB434, providing \$2.5 million for new and veteran teachers to teach at Title I and underperforming schools.

### **Majority Leader Teresa Benitez-Thompson—Champion**

Assembly Majority Leader Teresa Benitez-Thompson was an influential internal organizer around many NSEA priority issues. Most notably, Benitez-Thompson was point on internal discussion around ESA private school vouchers. She also sponsored AB127, which addressed school safety issues, including emergency drills and building safety. Additionally, Benitez-Thompson was a key figure in getting SB550 amended to address the budget shortfall at the Washoe County School District.

### **Assemblymember Maggie Carlton—Champion**

Assemblymember Maggie Carlton chaired the powerful Assembly Committee on Ways and Means, where she wielded an effective gavel that helped block any public money for private schools. Chair Carlton also used her committee position to halt the expansion to the Achievement School District and press for an amendment

to SB300 (Peer Assistance and Review) to expand the program statewide, so all districts could receive funding for this innovative program. Carlton sponsored AB1, requiring the payment of undergraduate fees of a child of an educator who is killed in the performance of his or her duties, such as Michael Landsberry, the Sparks Middle School teacher killed in 2013.

### **Assemblymember Tyrone Thompson—Champion**

The Assembly Education Chair Tyrone Thompson was the measure of consistent education advocacy throughout the legislative session. In addition to his smooth facilitation, Thompson sponsored AB447 to extend the successful Victory Schools Program into the next biennium and also was engaged in the development of the weighted funding formula.

## Sometimes it seemed like all good things in the legislature started with Joyce Woodhouse

### **Assemblymember Olivia Diaz—Champion**

Teacher and NSEA member Olivia Diaz further strengthened her relationship with NSEA this legislative session, bringing years of experience as a legislator and educator to bear on the legislative session. Diaz had her hand in many of the significant education proposals, including the development of the weighted funding formula, as well as working on the orphan issue as it relates to state pension retirement recipients (PEB). She also kept regular communication with the NSEA ground team.

### **Assemblymember Ozzie Fumo—Champion**

While only in his first year in the legislature and without an extensive background in public education, Assemblymember Ozzie Fumo proved to be one of the most accessible and engaged legislators with NSEA during the session. Fumo carried two bills on behalf of NSEA, and when discussions on vouchers occurred behind closed doors, Fumo was the first to reach out to NSEA for guidance. Fumo even asked to be on the Education Committee so he could support us on key votes.



*NSEA members meet with Senate Majority Leader Aaron Ford.*

### **Assemblymember Brittney Miller—Champion**

Another teacher and NSEA member, Assemblymember Brittney Miller was a staunch advocate for students and the public education system throughout the session. Miller brought a fearless sense of urgency to the Assembly Democratic Caucus that helped fortify opposition to anti-public education proposals. Miller also sponsored AB320 (requiring the Board of Education to make recommendations for teacher–student ratios in each grade level).

### **Senator Joyce Woodhouse—Champion**

Sometimes it seemed like all good things in the legislature started with Joyce Woodhouse. Senator Woodhouse chaired the powerful Senate Finance Committee, and while gentler with the gavel than her counterpart in the Assembly, Woodhouse used her position to launch an incredible number of pro-public education proposals. On behalf of NSEA, Woodhouse sponsored and passed two pieces of legislation, SB303 (requiring an audit and streamlining of state student assessments) and SB386 (strengthening and expanding the progressive student discipline system). Woodhouse also orchestrated the passage of SB552 to address health care costs for hundreds of retired educators and was the primary sponsor of SB200 (computer education), SB241 (STEM/STEAM program), and SB548 (establishing the Nevada Institute on Teaching and Educator Preparation).

### **Senator Mo Denis—Champion**

Senator Mo Denis chaired the Senate Education Committee, where he used his position to advance some of the most important education legislation of the session. At the top of this list was the passage of SB178, beginning a responsible implementation of the weighted funding formula to make sure additional resources get to English Language Learners and at-risk students who need the most help. Denis also sponsored SB390 to extend the wildly successful Zoom school program for the next biennium as well as SB300 (the Peer Assistance and Review Program). While the senator's efforts to address the problems with the Achievement School District fell short, with his early morning and late-session work group meetings, he certainly can't be faulted for lack of effort.

### **Senator Nicole Cannizzaro—Champion**

While new, Senator Nicole Cannizzaro didn't serve on the Education or Finance committees, she did find herself appointed to an informal, bipartisan work group on private

school vouchers. Under significant pressure to craft a deal on vouchers, Cannizzaro stood strong in her defense of public education. Media reports of the work group credit Cannizzaro with scuttling a possible deal that would have included ESA vouchers. Cannizzaro also sponsored SB420, which requires school boards to adopt policies relating to right of expression for student journalists and outlining protections for educators advising student publications.

### **Senator Aaron Ford—Champion**

There is no denying the grace with which Senator Aaron Ford navigated the 79<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session, and he orchestrated the highlight of the session, as Democratic senators deftly killed ESA vouchers on the Senate floor. Ford had one of the loudest voices against vouchers, calling them “the wrong priority for Nevada's kids” even before the session started. While unable to overcome Governor vetoes, Ford led the legislative effort to improve worker standards with proposals to raise the minimum wage and enact paid sick days for Nevada workers.

### **Senator Julia Ratti—Honorable Mention**

While first-year Senator Julia Ratti did not serve on Finance or Education committees, as chair of the Revenue and Economic Development committee, she was a consistent advocate for innovative ideas on increasing the funds for the state budget and school districts. In addition to SB508 (the marijuana tax), Ratti also sponsored SJR14, a resolution to change the constitution as it relates to the cost of real estate depreciation and the impact of this depreciation on the county economy.

### **Governor Brian Sandoval—Honorable Mention**

It's not easy to be a Republican during the 79<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session and make NSEA's Champions of Public Education list, but Governor Brian Sandoval did just that with an honorable mention. Despite lining up with his Republican colleagues during most of the session on issues like private school vouchers and collective bargaining, Sandoval showed his leadership and independence at the end of the session by refusing to kowtow to Senator Michael Roberson's threats to shut down the Nevada government over the issue of ESA vouchers. Meanwhile, Sandoval built on his legacy of financial support for public education with significant and targeted investments in public education that made the start of responsible implementation of the weighted funding formula possible. ●●