



# 2009 Legislative Priorities and Program

# **2008 Legislative Priorities**

## **FUNDING**

Nevada once again has lingered at the bottom of the list in per-pupil expenditures across the United States. The legislature has not provided our schools with the necessary resources for our students to achieve high standards in the classroom. Classrooms are overcrowded, classrooms lack supplies, our schools lag behind in technology and transportation needs and this continues to determinate Nevada's education environment.

Moreover, Nevada's revenues are falling short. Governor Gibbon's has announced across the board cuts to all state budgets—including the education budget. These cuts will further reduce Nevada's already deflated per-pupil expenditure. NSEA believes our children deserve a public education system that is adequately funded.

The State of Nevada has a vast interest in a well prepared, well educated work force and a failure to adequately fund public education will ultimately reduce the standard of living for all Nevadans. The failure of the federal government to fully fund all federal mandates exacerbates the problem. This includes those mandates created by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—currently referred to as No Child Left Behind—and the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act.

Therefore, NSEA believes:

- The Nevada Legislature must take a hard look at finding more resources to fund increased salaries, retirement, and other monetary benefits for education staff. This will enable Nevada to remain competitive with other states in drawing in the best personnel, businesses, and communities.
- The issue of overcrowding our classrooms must be addressed. Funds must be allocated to ease this burden so our educators can spend the proper amount of time each student deserves.
- The Nevada Legislature and the Governor must continue to improve Nevada's revenue structure to provide necessary and stable sources of funding for the support of Nevada's public schools beginning in 2008.
- Finally, the Nevada Legislature must fund performance audits on our school districts to ensure they are using tax dollar money effectively and with as little waste as possible.

# **2008 Legislative Program**

## **QUALITY EDUCATION AND TEACHING**

NSEA believes attracting and retaining qualified teachers in every classroom and for every subject is critical for all Nevadans. High, meaningful standards for licensure must be maintained – not lowered or relaxed as a way to address the teacher shortage. Nevada’s school districts must do more to recruit and retain the most qualified teachers. NSEA is aware of many critical personnel shortage areas other than math, science, special education or English as a second language and believes these employees should receive the same retirement incentives as those in identified areas. Programs for beginning teachers must continue to be funded to ensure that new teachers will be effective in the classroom. Evaluations of all personnel must be conducted according to law and with the goal of improving performance. Salary levels and benefits are not competitive with other states, and salaries for other professions continue to outpace educators’ salaries.

To address these concerns, the NSEA supports:

- funding for increased salaries, retirement, and other monetary benefits for licensed personnel and education support professionals;
- enhancing compensation to reward skills, knowledge, and responsibilities of licensed personnel and education support professionals;
- funding for health insurance benefits for active and retired education personnel;
- funding to allow for more time for professional development without reducing meaningful time with students;
- equal instruction time for both year-round and nine-month schools before a standardized test is administered;
- improved test schedules to allow for maximum instruction time;
- a reduction in paperwork, red tape and procedural formalities;
- increased autonomy for individual school districts and schools;
- staff positions at the Department of Education to support the numerous functions of public education;
- enhanced compensation program criteria that are clearly stated and subject to objective measurement;
- enhanced compensation programs that relate to a school district’s educational objectives;
- enhanced compensation programs that do not prevent increases in the basic compensation for all education employees; and
- enhanced compensation programs that do not diminish the professional status of those education employees who do not receive the additional compensation or in any way suggest that such education employees are not qualified for the positions they hold.

## ENHANCED LEARNING

NSEA believes much more can be done to contribute to productive learning environments for all of Nevada's students. Our members want to be able to perform their jobs under optimum circumstances, which means K-12 classroom overcrowding must be addressed. Many of Nevada's schools have suffered due to the tremendous growth in our state and from a lack of funding. Our legislature must have the foresight to plan for the continued growth and to ease the burden of overcrowded classrooms.

Our schools face other issues that need to be addressed as well. Educators are asked to do more to address the achievement gaps that exist for minority students. While the current focus is on new academic standards, educating the whole child is also our responsibility. Students who are English Language Learners (ELL) are a particular challenge and can be successful if they have access to programs that help accommodate them within our culture and our schools. Physical education, art, and music, as well as the support provided by librarians, counselors, nurses, speech pathologists, career and technical educators, and other public education professionals play an important part in achieving that end.

To address these concerns, **NSEA supports:**

- class size reduction for all grades;
- an extensive testing audit to ensure our schools are not wasting valuable time prepping for a test which is robbing them of valuable learning time;
- lower class sizes for special education student and English language learners;
- smaller case loads for speech therapists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists;
- lower student/counselor ratios as well as lower student/nurse ratios;
- funding for the appropriate numbers of technology personnel to implement and support technology plans;
- the establishment of programs to address the achievement gaps for minority students;
- expansion of English Language Learner programs in Nevada's schools;
- funding for school modernization efforts in Nevada's school buildings;
- funding programs for educational training and/or testing of paraprofessionals to satisfy the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act;
- physical education, art, music, and other elective subjects for all students;
- adequate materials and appropriately-licensed staff for school libraries;
- adequate funding to maintain facilities and equipment;
- full-day Kindergarten programs in all Nevada's public schools;
- adequate funding for student transportation;
- early childhood education programs;
- enhanced funding to support a safe school and work site environment;
- enhanced support for suicide prevention programs;
- appropriate professional development for all teachers and education support professionals; and
- equal emphasis for all subject areas.

## **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND PUBLIC SUPPORT**

NSEA believes strong parental support helps students be more successful. Many parents may want to do more to support their children but find the demands of earning a living and, in some cases, dealing with language differences can stifle parental involvement. Many of Nevada's schools have programs in place to provide outreach to parents and the community, but we could provide more.

To address these concerns, NSEA supports:

- funding for outreach programs for homeless students and families;
- funding to expand Family Resource Centers throughout Nevada;
- funding to expand English Language Learner programs for parents; and
- financial incentives for businesses that support employee participation in school governance and other school activities.

## **HIGH STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ALL STUDENTS**

NSEA believes high academic standards are an important element of student achievement. We realize students master skills at different rates and may need extra help to reach new standards. Nevada's educators have long been committed to helping all students reach their full potential. However, we can only be held accountable for that which we have control. Teaching and learning happen best when the total school environment is safe and orderly. Students must take responsibility for attendance and their participation in class to enhance the learning process.

To address these concerns, **NSEA supports:**

- proper enforcement and adequate funding for alternative settings for disruptive pupils;
- removal of disruptive pupils from student transportation;
- fully-funded inter-session and after school activities;
- remediation and reinforcement for students who do not master standards;
- full enforcement of discipline and truancy laws with administrators being held accountable for this;
- student testing that provides meaningful and timely information about individual student development and academic growth as it relates to state standards;
- programs for peer mediation and mentoring; and
- making sure every school offers a safe environment for all children.

## **NSEA AND MEMBER PROTECTION**

NSEA is committed to the protection of its members. We believe public education is the foundation of a democracy and the cornerstone of a civil and free society. Yet, there are those who would dismantle it in favor of ill-conceived free market schemes. Many of those same people disparage public education employees and would seek to deprive them of employment

rights or second-guess their professional judgment. NSEA will continue to advance and defend the rights of its members.

To that end, **NSEA opposes:**

- legislation which would weaken the collective bargaining rights of education employees;
- any compensation plan based on favoritism, subjective evaluation, or other arbitrary standards;
- any compensation plan based solely on student achievement;
- any attempt to interfere with political action or member representation in the form of “paycheck protection”;
- any change in state law or educational regulation that would replace the teacher’s classroom folder/grade book as the official attendance record of his or her students;
- privatization of services already provided for by the members of the recognized bargaining agent;
- schools which operate “for profit”;
- any legislation which would divert public money to private schools or instruction;
- any restriction of an instructor’s authority and right to develop lesson plans and methods of instruction appropriate to his or her assignment;
- any impediment to the exercise of professional judgment in helping students;
- any legislation that would have a cost impact on staff training, qualifications, or working conditions that is not also fully funded;
- indefinite suspension for education support professionals without monetary compensation;
- any legislation that would change PERS from a defined benefit program to a defined contribution program;
- any attempt to restrict the ability of public employees to hold elected office; and
- not fully disclosing information to incoming education personal regarding unfair social security offsets such as the Government Pension Offset and Windfall Elimination Provision.

### **COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY**

Nevada has recognized the right of public employees to collectively bargain with their employer. It is through these negotiations that school districts and local affiliates can best address concerns and exercise their judgment about employment and educational issues affecting them. NSEA believes careful consideration of each issue must be made to determine an appropriate legislative solution that facilitates and empowers local decision-making through the bargaining process.

To address this concern, **NSEA supports:**

- an expanded scope of mandatory bargaining to include class size, student discipline, work load, curriculum development, structure of the work day, assignment and promotion of personnel, site budget allocations, mentoring, and enhanced compensation for recruitment and retention;

- enhanced compensation programs that do not directly or indirectly limit the number of education employees who are eligible for the additional compensation and allows all licensed personnel and education support professionals equal opportunity to receive compensation; and
- enhanced compensation programs accomplished through the collective bargaining process or, in non-bargaining jurisdictions, it should be incorporated into legislation, employer policy, and/or other sources that establish the terms and conditions.