

2020 SPECIAL SESSION



EDUCATION IS ESSENTIAL

FUND HEALTHY SCHOOLS

ABOUT NSEA

The Nevada State Education Association has enjoyed a long and rich tradition as a respected voice for education in our state. NSEA serves as representative to teachers and other licensed staff and education support professional (ESPs) across the state. The primary mission of NSEA is to advocate for and empower members by providing a united, political and professional voice to ensure the right to quality public education. Educating children is what we know, what we do, and what matters most to us. Our organization is extremely active in promoting opportunities for professional awareness, growth, and empowerment. NSEA is a leader not only in the political arena but in the professional development area as well. We take pride in serving as a well-balanced, democratic organization which attempts to serve the best interests of our members while meeting the needs of the students we teach and the communities we serve.

NSEA'S CORE VALUES

Member Driven

We believe in a member driven organization, created and democratically governed by members. As stewards of the organization, members determine the legislative agenda, provide financial oversight, and craft the guiding principles of the organization.

Justice

We believe in the protection of member rights. We believe that the collective bargaining process is essential for the fair and just treatment of members.

Equality

We believe public education is the basis for a strong and healthy society which results from quality schools, quality educators, quality students, and quality communities.



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EDUCATION IS ESSENTIAL, SCHOOLS AND COVID-19

In the history of NSEA, there have been few more challenging times than the one we find ourselves in right now, with the global COVID-19 pandemic. Starting on March 16, 2020, our members who are classroom teachers quickly transitioned, engaging their students in distance learning, while food service workers went to the front lines, providing meals to families in our districts.

There are many lessons to glean from the last few months of last school year, but the top takeaway is distance education is no replacement for in-person, classroom learning. In April, the National Education Association conducted a nationwide survey of parents and educators. The good news is, as NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia said, “Never have our nation’s educators been more appreciated and seen—even as they work with students from a distance.” The survey found 88% of parents approve of how their children’s teachers were handling the coronavirus pandemic. They also overwhelmingly approve of education support professionals – a higher rating than they gave the CDC, their governor, and their mayor or local government. At the same time, parents were struggling with coronavirus pandemic. 81% expressed serious concerns with keeping their children’s education on track, the second highest concern after getting sick.

We also know the COVID-19 crisis has increased education inequity. Educators’ top concerns during distance learning were providing the same level of education for all students, the complexity of teaching students with disabilities, and absenteeism among students. Educators who work in schools with higher percentages of students receiving free and reduced lunch reported lower class attendance and felt distance learning was less effective for their students. A plurality of educators said they had a bigger workload than they did before coronavirus, with a pronounced increase for special education teachers.

This is why NSEA has engaged at the state and local levels in the work of reopening our schools, so students and educators can be at school in the safest and most responsible way. NSEA believes the framework developed by the Nevada Department of Education presents strong guidance to school districts. However, NSEA has also actively expressed our concerns that districts may not implement important recommendations in the framework, including health screenings, social distancing in classrooms and transportation, and accommodation for vulnerable or sick educators, due to a lack of funding.

NSEA is also concerned that policy on student assessments, teacher evaluations, and school star ratings will compromise the recommendations in the framework and a safe operation of schools. These mechanisms have failed to foster the improvements in either achievement, or student engagement they were intended to deliver. With a continued reliance on these old schemes, students and educators will have counter-incentives to come to school when sick; to teach to tests instead of teaching and reinforcing health and safety; and to maximize numbers and time in classrooms, even when that may be outside of the guidelines.

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

- Adequate resources to school district to follow state’s framework to safely reopen and operate schools during COVID-19.
- Providing adequate accommodation for educators most at-risk to COVID-19.
- Suspension of elaborate sorting and rating mechanisms, including state assessments, use of SLG’s in teacher evaluations, and school star ratings during the COVID-19 public health emergency.



COVID-19 AND SCHOOL FUNDING, TWO CRISES COLLIDE

At the end of the 2019-20 fiscal year, the Governor and lawmakers had to close an \$812 Million budget shortfall as the result of the decrease in revenues from the COVID-19 pandemic. Included in that budget shortfall was a \$265 million shortfall in local revenue to the Distributive School Account (DSA). While the FY21 impact has yet to be determined, projections by Applied Analysis and others have estimated the shortfall at around \$1 billion. The budget impact of COVID-19 is likely to last for years, impacting budget deliberations for next biennium. As such, Nevada is facing the most severe budget crisis in its history.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Nevada's neighborhood public schools were already chronically under-funded with the most crowded classrooms in the country. As we reopen our schools, districts will have new expenses to implement state recommended health and safety guidelines. Per the American Association of School Superintendents, a school district with just 3659 students will incur an additional cost of \$1,778,139. That number does not include major costs such as purchasing new school buses, physical modification to school building, or the cost of hiring new staff to significantly lower class size. We know the additional cost to safely reopen Nevada's larger school districts will be substantial. As such, cuts to public education will compromise the ability to safely reopen, jeopardizing the safety of our kids, educators, and community.

Public education is the great equalizer, and Nevada made significant efforts in recent years to increase education equity. Unfortunately, the move to distance learning heightened inequities, especially for students with individual education plans, English learners, and at-risk students. There is no replacing in-person/one-on-one teacher-student instruction, especially with shortcomings of distance learning in reaching all students. Nevada needs to keep focused on improving education equity, which means continued investment in special education and models that work for English learners and at-risk students, like Zoom and Victory schools. Meanwhile, during a pandemic that has resulted in such disruption, successful reopening of our public schools must include meeting the social and emotional needs of our students and educators.

The State's approach to revenue in the past was never sufficient, and it certainly will not be moving forward in a post-COVID-19 world. Further defunding public education without a plan for new revenue is not an acceptable answer. As such, the Nevada State Education Association is calling on any budget balancing plan, for this biennium or next, to include at least a dollar of new revenue for any dollar cut from public education, a shared sacrifice.

The current economic crisis has already impacted nine-month, ten-month, and eleven-month education employees not eligible to receive unemployment benefits during the summer months. Under normal circumstances, most ESPs have summer employment opportunities. This is especially important for those who make less than a living wage during their working months. Unfortunately, with the COVID-19 pandemic, job opportunities are severely limited.

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

- At least one dollar of new state revenue for every dollar cut from public education.
- Access to unemployment benefits for 9 to 11-month education support professionals.
- A renewed focus on the social and emotional needs of our students and educators.
- Maintenance of Nevada's successful education equity programs, including Zoom and Victory Schools.



SCHOOL FINANCE, THE CONTINUING CRISIS

Before COVID-19, education funding across the nation was already in crisis. From West Virginia to Oklahoma, Kentucky to Arizona, teachers and other educators took to the streets and their state houses to demand better pay and school funding under the banner RED FOR ED. During the last legislative session in February and again in May, hundreds of educators from across Nevada rallied in Carson City to draw attention to chronic underfunding of public education. Despite many efforts to address underfunding, Nevada continued to rank near the bottom of states in most metrics. In the 2020 Quality Counts report from Education Week, Nevada ranked 47th in School Finance and 50th in their overall “Chance for Success” index.

NSEA has been the loudest voice in Carson City for increased school funding over the last several legislative sessions. While some legislators worked to find the resources necessary to fund a modest educator raise this past year, others worked behind closed doors and without stakeholder input to design a new funding plan riddled with major problems. SB543 was passed in the final moments of the legislative session over NSEA's serious objections. NSEA has consistently outlined our serious policy concerns, including no new revenue for schools, a budget “freeze and squeeze” of most Nevada school districts, watering down of Zoom and Victory Schools, a multi-million-dollar charter school giveaway, anti-union end fund balance provisions, exclusion of educator voice on the Commission on School Funding, and a fundamentally flawed legislative process.

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

- New, progressive revenue for schools.
- Stopping implementation of the new funding plan until after the COVID-19 economic crisis.
- Ensuring any new funding plan moving forward addresses concerns of educators and community stakeholders.