

NSEA SUPPORTS AB304

Date: April 9, 2019
To: Assembly Committee on Education
Re: Support – AB304

The Nevada State Education Association represents teachers and education support professionals across the state. We believe every Nevada student deserves a high-quality public education.

NSEA supports AB304 to establish student ratios for teachers, counselors, and librarians and sets a timeline to meet these ratios. NSEA also supports the conceptual amendment to add social workers, allow licensed employees to negotiate student-teacher ratios along with an accountability mechanism through collective bargaining, and waive SLO/SLG requirements in classrooms with 5 or more students over the established ratios.

Common sense tells us—and research confirms it—that the number of students in a class makes a real difference for students and teachers alike. The issue of large class sizes remains one of the most frustrating issues for Nevada educators, students, parents, and school communities. For the second year in a row, Nevada has the largest student-to-teacher ratio in the country. While rapid growth fueled the problem in previous decades, the lack of sufficient funding for school districts is the main reason Nevada ranks dead last in the country.

Meanwhile, we know smaller class size has real benefits. For students, smaller class size can help close the racial achievement gap, lead to earlier identification of learning disabilities, improve high school graduation rates, improve student behavior, and allow for more engagement in lessons. For educators, smaller class size improves educator morale as it allows for more individual and differentiated instruction, less time on paperwork, and stronger classroom management as teachers become more aware of individual students' strengths or weaknesses.

Reasonable caseloads for other licensed education professionals are significant in helping students succeed. With a state average ratio of 485:1 (from 2015-2016 American School Counselors Association) as opposed to the recommended 250:1, counselors are overworked and too many students go without needed services. Social workers and librarians face similar issues.

Adding class size as a topic for collective bargaining will give educators the ability to address one of the most serious working condition issues they face. Given that there is a nexus between school funding, educator compensation, and class size, this is smart public policy. Meanwhile, as the use of student data in teacher evaluation continues to be debated, this amendment acknowledges the very real impact large class size has on student achievement.