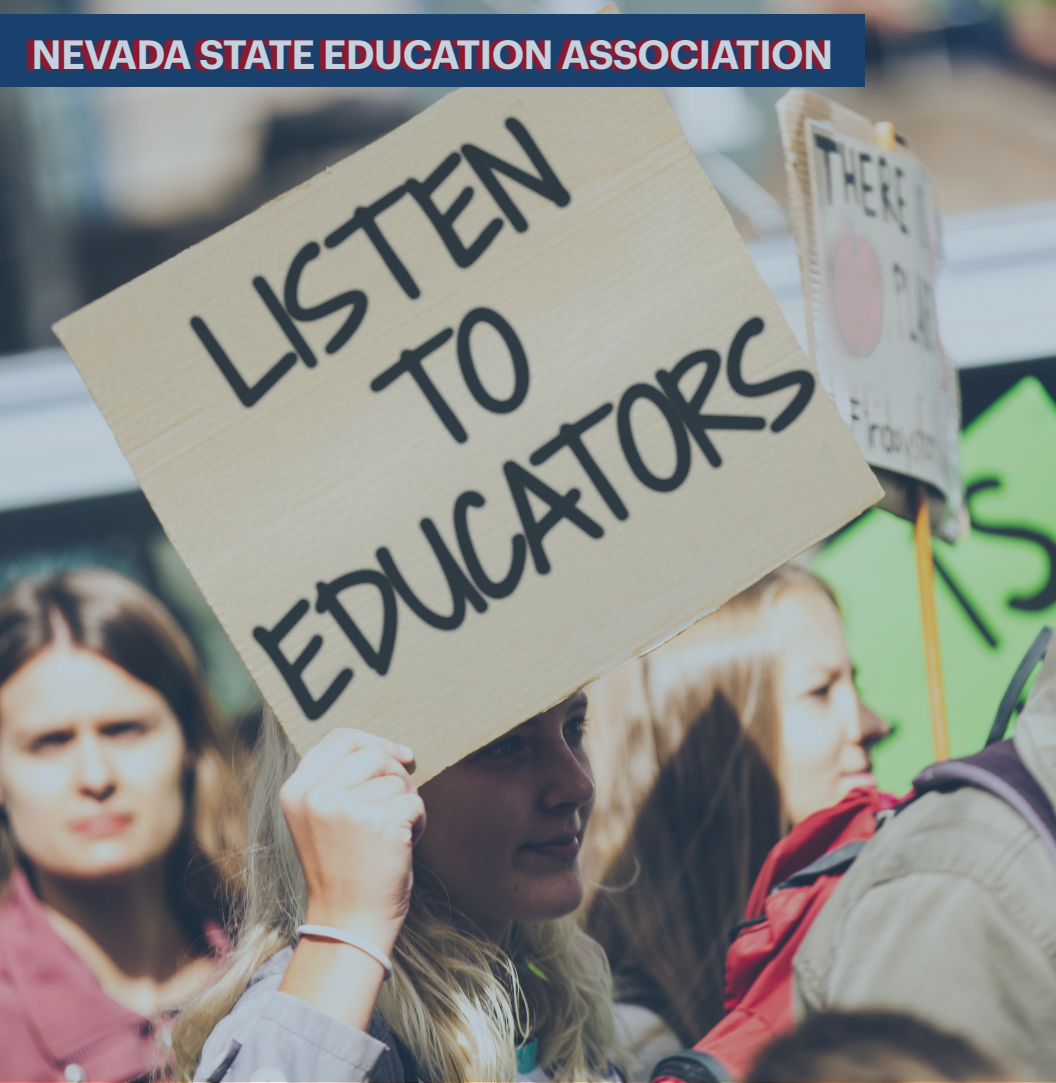


NEVADA STATE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION



LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES 2020-2021

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NSEA is prepared to provide background information and research on a variety of issues affecting education in Nevada. If you are a member of the media, please contact our Communications Director Alexander Marks at the phone and/or email listed above.

About Nevada State Education Association (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 education resources, and quality communities.

EDUCATION IS ESSENTIAL, SCHOOLS AND THE COVID-19 CRISIS

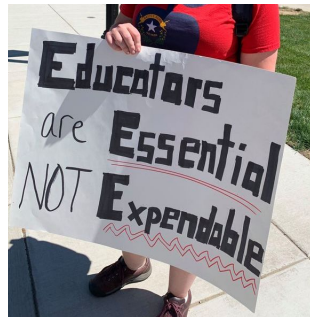
In the history of NSEA, there have been few more challenging times than the one we find ourselves in right now, with the global COVID-19 pandemic. Starting on March 16, 2020, our members who are classroom teachers quickly transitioned, engaging their students in distance learning, while food service 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 federal, state, and district mandated assessments, use of SLO/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 under-funding, 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, most consistent 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.

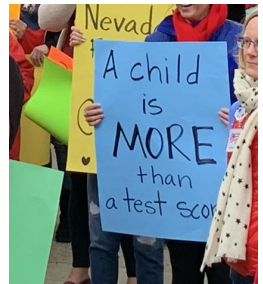
To address these concerns, **NSEA SUPPORTS:**

- 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.

MORE LEARNING, LESS TESTING

A top concern of classroom educators has been too many standardized tests shifting the focus in the classroom away from student learning toward a culture of high-stakes testing. NSEA has been actively working to reduce the burden of standardized testing, helping pass a bill to require an audit of student testing during the 2017 session. However, during the last interim and the early parts of the 2019 session, the former administration at NDE delayed and scuttled our efforts to reduce and streamline the amount of time and resources spent on testing. While small changes have been made over the last several years, the current crisis calls for a more substantive overhaul of state testing requirements.

Last session NSEA won a hard-fought victory to lower the use of student data in teacher evaluations from 40% to 15%. We launched an aggressive member campaign that resulted in over 1200 emails to legislators calling for the use of student data to be lowered. This led to the amendment of the Nevada Educator Performance Framework (NEPF), so teacher evaluations are based more on instructional practice, leadership, and professional responsibilities. However, there are still significant concerns about the validity of teacher evaluations generally. When asked for a summation of his May 2020 report by the Teachers and Leaders Council, Dr. Brad Mariano from the UNLV College of Education stated, “the NEPF is not currently valid.”



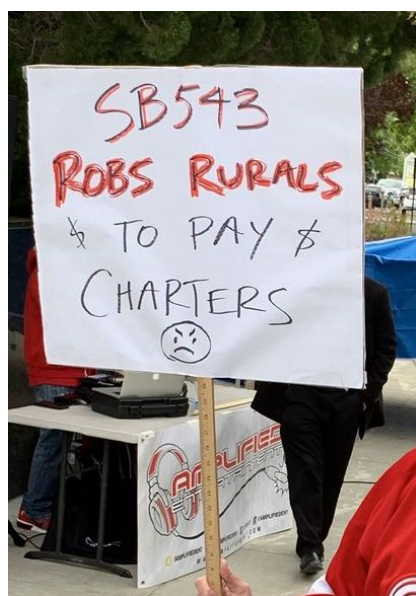
Given these developments, **NSEA SUPPORTS:**

- Streamlining Nevada’s assessment systems, eliminating inherently disengaging assessments such as the Smarter Balanced assessment (SBAC)
- Ensuring the Nevada Educator Performance Framework is a valid measure of instructional practice, leadership, and professional responsibilities.
- Reliance on the professional teachers in the classroom to assess students and to design and deliver instruction.

PUBLIC EDUCATION, THE GREAT EQUALIZER

Charter schools were initially promoted by educators who sought to innovate within the local public school system to better meet the needs of their students. Over the last 22 years, charter schools have grown dramatically to include large numbers of charters that are privately managed, largely unaccountable, and not transparent as to their operations or performance. Many charter schools have devolved far from the original concept as small incubators of education innovation.

The explosive growth of charters has been driven by deliberate, billionaire-backed efforts to ensure that charters are exempt from the basic safeguards and standards that apply to public schools. This growth has undermined local public schools and communities, without producing any overall increase in student learning and growth. It is important to note, that most recent studies have shown that public schools outperform charter schools when accounting for student demographics, and public schools educate every student, including English learners, students in poverty, and students with individualized education plans.



While charters are prohibited from discriminating, they serve far fewer students in poverty, English language learners, and students with disabilities. Recent discussions at the State Public Charter School Authority about diversifying charter school student populations are a response to the public attention on this injustice. However, use of weighted lotteries or similar mechanisms won't address the structural inequity that is built into the system of charter schools and their relationship to neighborhood public schools.

Meanwhile, virtual charter schools are some of the worst performing schools. According to a report from the Guinn Center, “Virtual charter schools around the country have faced increased public and legislative scrutiny, largely due to low academic performance, particularly when compared to other schools... In Nevada, the inconsistent (and often low) performance of virtual charter schools operating in the state has also received the attention and scrutiny of some lawmakers...” Virtual charter school underperform both brick and mortar charter schools and virtual public schools, operated by school districts.

The institution of public education that we are protecting is fundamentally about equity—giving opportunity and leveling the playing field for all students in the state. NSEA has been a strong supporter of the state’s Zoom School and Victory School programs, providing additional resources to schools in Nevada’s poorest communities, with large concentrations of English language learners and low-income and at-risk students.

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

- Continuation of the successful Zoom and Victory School models.
- A cap on charter schools for distance education at the current number of schools and slots.
- Require same standards for teachers at charter schools as traditional public schools.

HIGH QUALITY TEACHING & EDUCATION

NSEA believes attracting and retaining qualified teachers in every classroom and for every subject is critical for all Nevadans. Shortages of teachers and other educators impacted school districts across Nevada before COVID-19. While deep cuts to education may alter the employment landscape, it will only exacerbate the long-term pipeline issue and compromise working conditions for teachers and other educators.

It is also critical to provide our educators, both licensed employees and education support professionals, with appropriate professional development opportunities to gain and improve the knowledge and skills important to their positions and job performance. This has become even more important with COVID-19 and the switch to distance education last school year and a renewed emphasis on social and emotional learning.

Over the last several years, NSEA has advocated for expanded peer assistance and review across the state and has developed our professional development programming, including micro-credentialing, support for teachers getting their National Board Certification, as well as expanding training for Education Support Professionals across the state.

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

- Continuing work on the pipeline for teachers and other licensed personnel such as counselors, school nurses, speech language pathologists, school librarians, and occupational and physical therapists.
- Support for educators in high needs schools and subjects.
- Protecting resources for professional development programs.
- Development of new professional development for social and emotional learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, including professional development for Education Support Professionals.
- Addressing the need for more diversity in the education profession, so education employees reflect the student population more consistently.

MEMBER PROTECTION

We believe public education is the foundation of democracy and the cornerstone of a civil and free society. And there is no more important component to public education than the people who do the work. As the representative of teachers and other licensed educators and Education Support Professionals across the state, NSEA is committed to the well-being and protection of our members. This includes safety and rights in the workplace, our collective bargaining rights, as well as access to life's necessities like healthcare and security in retirement.



Last session, NSEA worked with other union stakeholders to strengthen collective provisions for public employees and advocated for PERS confidentiality to protect the personal information of members of NV PERS.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, educators across the state are increasingly concerned with accessing quality, affordable healthcare. This affects active educators, and especially retirees who are not eligible for Medicare or are living in areas without good health provider options. We believe that healthcare is a right, and that the state should step in to ensure that those who have served to educate our kids have access to the healthcare they need to live with dignity.

With difficult economic times and budget cuts, NSEA is concerned about education employees paid less than a living wage and the increased potential for outsourcing jobs. Education Support Professionals are a critical component of the family of educators in our schools. Students have a range of needs that must be met in order for learning to take place. Transportation professionals make sure our kids arrive safely in the morning and return home the same way. Nutrition professionals make sure no child is trying to learn on an empty stomach. Custodial and maintenance keep the learning environment clean and safe. Tech professionals do the necessary task of keeping our students online. Paraprofessionals tirelessly support students in their learning. Clerical support staff do about 30 different jobs as well as give

out smiles and Band-Aids. When trusted educators are replaced by private contractors, the overall quality and safety of our public education system is compromised.

Finally, the issue of student discipline continues to be one of the more vexing ones for all educators. During the 2017 session, NSEA worked to improve Nevada's system of progressive student discipline. Last session, this was replaced with a restorative justice model. Unfortunately, school districts were not provided with the resources necessary to successfully implement, and student and educator safety has been compromised. NSEA is proposing an educator "Bill of Rights" modeled on the Louisiana law that ensures the safety and wellbeing of educators at work.

To that end, **NSEA SUPPORTS:**

- Protecting and strengthening collective bargaining provision for educators.
- An educator "Bill of Rights" ensuring the safety, well-being, and autonomy of educators in their work.
- Defending Nevada PERS defined benefit status and ensuring retirement benefits are adjusted to reflect true cost of living increases.
- Ensuring every educator and retired educator has access to quality, affordable health care including affordable prescription coverage.
- Ensuring a living wage for all education employees and prohibiting outsourcing of public jobs.

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