

## COMMENTS TO THE COMMISSION ON SCHOOL FUNDING

*July 12, 2020*

The Nevada State Education Association has been the voice of Nevada educators for over 100 years.

As today's Funding Commission gets underway, legislators in Carson City are beginning Day 5 of the 2020 Special Session; continuing their deliberations on a proposal that includes \$156 million in cuts to K-12 education funding. While this budget-balancing plan preserves per-pupil, base K-12 education funding and Zoom and Victory Schools—both NSEA priorities—it includes cuts of \$18 million to class-size reduction, \$31 million to Read by Grade 3, and \$70 million to SB178 weighted funding for English learners and at-risk students.

Even though the public has been physically excluded from the legislative building due to concerns around COVID-19, NSEA felt there was too much at stake to just stay home. That is why on the Session's opening day, hundreds of educators turned out from across the state to Carson City and lined the street from the legislature to the capitol with the clear call to "Fund Healthy Schools". As the issue of safe school reopening gathers more attention, NSEA has been consistent that districts require the resources necessary to implement the state school reopening guidelines. Educators chanted, "Be Brave, Be Bold. New Revenue's the Way to Go!" We flooded legislator inboxes with thousands of emails calling on new revenue and have phoned in public comment pointing out the legislature could backfill nearly all education cuts with the elimination of mining tax deductions alone.

The severity of the situation with the state budget underscores how completely irresponsible it would be to implement the radical shift of the school funding plan during these turbulent times. The main charge of the Funding Commission is to model the new funding plan, running it alongside the Nevada Plan last fiscal year and to make recommendations based on these numbers. However, data from last fiscal year likely will need to be discarded, as Nevada's economy hit a wall toward the end of the third quarter. We have been aghast as the Funding Commission has continued as if literally nothing has changed amidst a global pandemic! Meeting after meeting, the numbers in the formula vary and fluctuate. Now we are looking at massive budget cuts in the current fiscal year and great economic uncertainty moving forward.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, you heard the call from the community not to water down the successful Zoom and Victory School model. We were heartened to find last week in Governor Sisolak's budget proposal that he agreed. While most other categorical funding was proposed for cuts, Zoom and Victory dollars were preserved. While legislators are concerned about the cuts to student weights and Read By 3, preservation of Zoom and Victory School funding has been universally embraced. In the toughest times we find out what we truly value – and it is not moving to a risky, new funding plan.

While the new funding plan was unworkable before with no new revenue, it is even more unworkable facing decreasing revenue and difficult budget cuts, including wiping out student weights. SB543 will not safely reopen schools. SB543 will not bring greater transparency. SB543 will not bring greater education equity. And SB543 is not truly centered on the student, 90% of whom attend our neighborhood public schools. NSEA invites you to table the obsolete agenda in front of you, so you can join with us to petition the legislature to stop cuts to public education. Thank you.