



### **Education Cuts Without New Revenue: A Special Session Summary**

On July 8, 2020, the first day of Special Session, hundreds of educators kicked off the Session by donning red face coverings and lining the street from the Legislative building to the Capitol Building with a clear call to Fund Healthy Schools. Educators chanted “Be Brave. Be Bold. New Revenue’s the Way to Go!”

We began the session with a clear message of shared sacrifice: any budget-balancing plan passed by the Legislature should include at least a dollar of new revenue for any dollar cut. NSEA focused primarily on AB 3 (Budget Cuts) and AB 4 (Mining Tax Deductions).

Governor Sisolak’s budget proposal preserved per-pupil base K-12 education funding and Zoom and Victory Schools - both NSEA priorities. This means most school districts will be able to avoid educator layoffs or furloughs. Unfortunately, the proposal also included over \$156 million in very painful cuts to K-12 public education. Those budget reductions became AB3, which NSEA opposed, as it contained only cuts and no new revenue.

NSEA strongly supported AB4, which would have generated millions of dollars in new revenue for Nevada by limiting mining tax deductions. While it was not the dollar for dollar match we advocated, it was a good start. While AB4 passed the Assembly, it failed by one vote in the Senate. The bill was later amended to direct those funds to K-12 education but failed again by 1 vote in the Senate.

Despite the thousands of emails, hundreds of calls, and inspiring engagement from members across the state, after 12 days of the 31st Special Session, the Legislature adjourned sine die with \$156 million in painful budget cuts to K-12 education and not a single new dollar of revenue.



## K-12 BUDGET CUTS

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The Session began with various presentations from the Nevada Department of Education (NDE). We heard from Superintendent Jhone Ebert, as well as numerous other district superintendents who discussed the cuts proposed and projected impacts on school districts.

While the budget preserves per-pupil base K-12 education funding and Zoom and Victory Schools - both NSEA priorities - K-12 still suffered over \$156 million in painful cuts to numerous restricted programs (categoricals):

- \$18 million to class-size reduction,
- \$31 million to Read by Grade 3,
- \$70 million to weighted funding for English learners and at-risk students,
- \$4.5 million to teacher supply reimbursements,
- \$29 million to other categorical programs,
- \$8 million to school safety.

In terms of alternative cuts, NSEA made a strong push to re-direct over \$16 million for students assessments like the SBAC. This was an example of a possible cut that would have actually made policy sense, as the old accountability system of student assessments, school star ratings, and evaluations have failed to foster the improvements in achievement or student engagement they were intended to deliver. With a continued reliance on these old schemes during COVID-19, students and educators will have counterincentives 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 outside of the guidelines. Unfortunately, this proposal was not included by the Legislature in any amendment to AB3, but NSEA will continue our advocacy on this issue into the next legislative session.

In the closing days of Session, AB3 was amended to restore \$4 million in funds to K-12 financial literacy, teacher training (NITEP), We The People, Computer Science and Technology, and the Teach Nevada Scholarship. The amendment also made \$5.2 million in cuts to the Gifted and Talented program (GATE). This amendment passed both the Assembly and the Senate.

In the final hours, the Assembly and introduced a final amendment to AB3 that resulted in additional \$50 million in the state's remaining federal CARES Act dollars. NSEA continually asked the Legislature to lead with equity, and we supported allocating an additional \$50 million for students hardest to reach through distance learning-- To view a more detailed summary of the cuts from our partners at Educate Nevada Now (ENN) [click here:](#)



## \$50 MILLION IN CARES ACT DOLLARS

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The additional money in the Amendment was to be used to support “*categories of pupils who are likely to develop the largest deficits in educational attainment as a result of the loss of in person intensive instruction.*”

Despite not supporting the bill itself, NSEA supported this amendment as it is focused on equity. The money will reach students who are the hardest to reach, including English learners, low-income students, students struggling with proficiency, students in poor performing schools, and other students disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

The \$50 Million will be granted by the Nevada Department of Education and is limited to state and federal restrictions. These funds cannot be used to continue the programs that were cut in AB3 and must be used:

- to directly address necessary expenditures directly related to the COVID crisis;
- to supplement, not supplant, previously budgeted resources, meaning it cannot simply fill budget holes or continue existing programs; and
- before December 30th, meaning it's unlikely the dollars can support hiring staff.



## LOOKING FORWARD

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There have been few more challenging times than the one we find ourselves in now. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Nevada's neighborhood public schools were already chronically under-funded with the most crowded classrooms in the country.

Our task was made increasingly difficult with a Special Session that included over \$156 million in cuts, and not a single new dollar of revenue. We offered a shared sacrifice, calling on any budget-balancing plan to include at least a dollar of new revenue for any dollar cut.

Left unaddressed by the Legislature:

- No long-term progressive revenue solution to the State's revenue problem
- Access to unemployment benefits for our 9-11-month Education Support Professionals
- The ability for districts to re-open safely with millions of dollars cut from the budget
- Suspension of state assessments during the COVID-19 health emergency

We recognize raising revenue has not proven easy, but in not doing so, it will be impossible for schools to reopen following state health and safety guidelines. For example, Nevada has the largest class sizes in the country, and the cuts to class-size reduction would otherwise help schools figure out physical distancing in overcrowded classrooms. Monies cut from school equity programs will erase years of work to meet the needs of the most vulnerable students.

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. Unfortunately, we end essentially where we began: cuts to K-12 and no new revenue.

In less than 6 months, the legislature will meet again for the 81st Regular Session, and there is likely to be a second Special Session this summer. Without long term progressive revenue solutions, the State's fiscal outlook does not look promising. Educators head back to school in a few short weeks with a lot of unknowns for the school year. They will have to do with less support and resources due to the cuts made during the Special Session, and that's unfortunate.

NSEA will continue our chant: **"Be Brave. Be Bold. New Revenue's the Way to Go!"**