

PUBLIC COMMENT TO NEVADA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

April 30, 2020

The Nevada State Education Association has been the voice of Nevada educators for over 100 years. In our history, there have been few more challenging times than the one we find ourselves in right now, with the global COVID-19 pandemic. Governor Sisolak issued an executive order closing all Nevada schools on March 16th and extended school closures through the end of the school year. In this time, our members have quickly responded, with classroom teachers now engaging their students in distance learning and food service workers on the front lines, providing meals to families in our districts. This transition has been a difficult one. We learned earlier this month of an NSEA member working in food service in Clark County who passed away after contracting COVID-19.

In addition to school closures, the Governor introduced a COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Initiative that closed all non-essential businesses and services and postponed or canceled all large gatherings. While this bold action was the right call to protect the health and safety of every Nevadan, we are afraid the economic impacts of this crisis will be devastating and long-lasting. On April 7th, Governor Sisolak asked all state agencies to review their budgets and make recommendations for general fund reductions of 4% in the current fiscal year and between 6-14% in FY21. As you know, the operation of Nevada schools also depends on revenues from Local School Support Tax (LSST) as well as the Public Schools Operating Property Tax. We assume LSST revenues will be devastated in the current quarter and will likely be depressed well into FY21. With the likelihood we are entering a recession, property taxes could take another long-term hit.

Over the past 8 months, NSEA has been engaging the Commission on School Funding regarding our concerns about the implementation of the new school funding plan in SB543. We have echoed a number of these concerns here at the Board of Education. While NSEA believes the school funding plan should be updated to reflect the changing needs of Nevada, it would be completely irresponsible to implement this radical shift during these already turbulent times. While NSEA'S previous concerns with the new funding plan remain, the new economic realities not only undermine school funding generally but also the work of the Funding Commission specifically. The main charge of the Funding Commission is to model the new funding plan, running it alongside the Nevada Plan in the current fiscal year and to make recommendations based on these numbers. This pandemic has made that task impossible, or at the very least, impracticable. Data from this fiscal year likely will need to be discarded, as Nevada's economy hit a wall toward the end of the third quarter. Even after stay at home orders are lifted, we know that the economy will take time to return to anything that resembles normal.

Given this crisis, we were disappointed the April Funding Commission meeting seemed like business as usual. The impact of the current crisis on Nevada schools eclipses anything else that has happened in recent memory. Instead of discussing the impact of this economic uncertainty and upheaval, the Commission was mired in details like administrative caps, small school adjustments, and regional cost differences. While these items had greater significance a couple of months ago, everything has changed. The text of SB543 may not explicitly state the Commission can stop its work, but the language most certainly allows for such a recommendation. The original purpose of Section 11 has been frustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic and it would be impracticable and irresponsible to continue the work as if things have not changed. No matter the recommendations that will be made, the Section's original intent cannot be accomplished because of Nevada's economic uncertainty. The only recommendation that makes sense is one to delay the radical implementation in uncertain times. Thank you.