

EDUCATION IS ESSENTIAL

June 16, 2020

As Nevada struggles to responsibly reopen, it is important to remember ***education is essential!***

This is why we've actively engaged at the state and local levels in the work of safely reopening our schools. NSEA believes the framework developed by the Nevada Department of Education presents strong guidance to school districts. However, we are extremely concerned 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.

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. As schools reopen, Nevada needs to keep focused on improving education equity, which means continued investment in models proven to work for English learners and at-risk students, like Zoom and Victory schools.

As you will hear today from ACS Ventures, both Zoom and Victory Schools have been successful at boosting student achievement. The strength of these models grows from their investment in communities that are the most impacted by poverty and institutional racism. Victory Schools are necessarily located in the poorest communities in Nevada. While talk of "student-centered" funding may be catchy, community investment that transforms school climate and culture is what is necessary to make transformational change. During a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, these models are even more critical. As Zoom and Victory Schools are threatened by budget cuts and SB543, decision-makers should take every action to preserve and protect them.

Thank you.