

## **PUBLIC COMMENT TO INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

May 22, 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 last month of an NSEA member working in food service in Clark County who passed away after contracting COVID-19.

There are already many lessons to glean from the last two months, but the top takeaway is distance education is no replacement for in-person, classroom learning. Over the past month, 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 are 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 are struggling with coronavirus pandemic. 81% express serious concerns with keeping their children’s education on track, the second highest concern after getting sick.

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 crisis is increasing education inequity. Educators’ top concerns are 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 percent of students receiving free and reduced lunch report lower class attendance and feel distance learning is less effective for their students. A plurality of educators say they now have a bigger workload than they did before coronavirus, with a pronounced increase for special education teachers. And educators with kids at home are struggling with the daunting task of balancing their distance teaching responsibilities with their role as parents whose children are at home.

NSEA has lauded the bold action by Governor Sisolak to protect the health and safety of every Nevadan. At the same time, we are concerned the economic impact will be devastating and long-lasting. NSEA has already engaged the Department of Education and Interim Finance Committee to advocate for strong public schools as a major focus of getting Nevada back on its feet. We are hopeful our students and educators will be able to return to our neighborhood schools to start the next school year and will work to make sure our schools are safe, supportive, and equitable. However, these efforts would be jeopardized by draconian budget cuts, including layoffs and corresponding increases in class sizes, fewer supportive services and equity programs, and less individualized and differentiated instruction. The return to school will be critical not just for students, but also for hundreds of thousands of Nevada families going back to work and restarting their lives. We ask that decision-makers prioritize and work to protect the institutions and services that are the most important to everyday Nevadans. Thank you.