

## COMMENTS TO THE COMMISSION ON SCHOOL FUNDING

*September 25, 2020*

The Nevada State Education Association has been the voice of Nevada educators for over 100 years. NSEA remains concerned about possible implementation of the new funding plan and is profoundly disappointed in the recommendations of this Commission. NSEA has consistently expressed our concern about the well-being of Zoom and Victory Schools, the specter of years-long budget freezes in most school districts, a multi-million dollar giveaway to charter schools, anti-worker end fund balance provisions, and the broken process that has relegated educator voice.

Perhaps most concerning is the ongoing funding crisis in Nevada schools. We all know Nevada ranks near the bottom of states in per-pupil funding. Since March, the COVID-19 global pandemic has ravaged Nevada leading to \$156 million in painful education cuts this summer. This included elimination of \$70M appropriated for student weights related to SB178. With the possible loss of revenue from the extension of the modified business tax and no additional federal relief for states in sight, the education budget is in a world of hurt. The cold, hard truth is any funding model will fail without new and additional revenue. This is exponentially the case now with the economic and budget impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.

### OPTIMAL FUNDING

Today begins the Funding Commission's discussion regarding "optimal funding". NSEA was a vocal and active participant in the development of SB178 during the 79th Legislative Session in 2017 and participated on the Funding Study Work Group during the interim. The Funding Study Work Group worked with Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA) who completed the Nevada School Finance Study in 2018. This study updated a 2012 study by the American Institute of Research (AIR) which focused on the resources needed for at-risk, English learners, and students with disabilities. The APA study took two adequacy approaches, one evidence-based and the other based on professional judgement. During the process of analyzing weights, it was agreed that an assessment of adequate base funding needed to be completed first. The result of this work led to a strong consensus of education stakeholder groups both in terms of student weights and the need to phase in significant funding increases to achieve "full adequacy" in base funding. The rough estimate at the time was Nevada was underfunding public education by about \$1B per year. While numbers from the 2018 Nevada School Finance Study should be updated, more discussion about "optimal funding" is not necessary.

### NEW REVENUE

However, more discussion and action are needed to secure the resources to reach "full adequacy". In recent years, NSEA has been organizing in coalition with Fund Our Future and the Progressive Revenue Coalition for new revenues for Nevada. During this summer's special sessions, NSEA was one of the loudest and consistent voices fighting for revenue. On the first day of the 31<sup>st</sup> Special Session, hundreds of educators donned red face coverings and lined the street from the legislature to the Capitol, chanting, "Be Brave. Be Bold. New revenue's the way to go!" Together with the Progressive Revenue Coalition, NSEA was successful at lobbying for the passage of AJR1, an increase to the mining tax that would generate nearly half a billion new dollars for the state. We know this is only the beginning. NSEA invites the Commission on School Funding and other education stakeholders to join with us in taking bold action to deliver the resources needed by students across the entire state of Nevada.