
PUBLIC COMMENT TO INTERIM FINANCE COMMITTEE

October 22, 2020

The Nevada State Education Association has been the voice of Nevada educators for over 100 years. We are concerned about the roll-out of statewide educator COVID-19 testing through the Task Force Initiative for Educators' Safety and Screening and the Teachers Health Trust, affiliated with the Clark County Education Association.

NSEA appreciates the importance of returning to school as soon as we are safely able to do so, and COVID screening should be a part of that. Of course, the rate of community transmission of COVID-19 is the main determining factor in whether it is safe to return to in-person education, and we are all concerned about the current spike in COVID-19 cases in the state.

During the presentation of this item at your September 3rd meeting, it was stated that there was broad stakeholder support for the program. Unfortunately, this was not the case. NSEA represents a majority of educators across the state, those eligible for this program, and we were not involved. At recent meetings of the Clark County School District Board of Trustees, there does not yet seem to be buy-in from the largest school district in the state. Now with the current spike in COVID-19 cases, it is not clear if CCSD will choose to participate in this program at all before funds expire on December 30th. Thus far, the roll out of the TIES program has been riddled with problems.

Meanwhile, in Washoe County, educators have been able to get tested through their provider Renown. While testing has been available, the overriding problem in Washoe was the decision to resume full in-person learning in elementary and a hybrid model in the later grades while community transmission of COVID was still very high. This decision went against guidance issued by the CDC, the State Department of Education, and even the Washoe County Health District. Now at this morning's state COVID Task Force Meeting, the Health District is reporting the highest number of cases they've seen over the past week have been associated with K-12 students and school district staff. This is exactly what NSEA, WEA, and educators across the state have been warning about. We fear that any effort to reopen school buildings with high community transmission rates, will only lead to the same, devastating result.

At your September meeting, the members of this Committee had many questions and wisely approved only half the requested funds. Given this situation, we would recommend the Interim Finance Committee call a hearing with the Nevada Department of Education to review the status of Task Force Initiative for Educators' Safety and Screening as soon as possible.

Thank you.