



Tough lessons

There was a fundamental disconnect

between the large “Fund Our Schools Now” rally in Las Vegas last month and the reality of the “no new taxes” mantra trumpeted by Governor Steve Sisolak before the legislative session even began, thereby guaranteeing education funding would be insufficient. As the Clark County School District worried the money for teacher salary increases was not materializing as promised, parents and teachers rallied to “remind” legislators of their responsibility to adequately pay teachers and reduce class sizes.

According to the National Education Association Rankings and Statistics, Nevada currently is 51st in the nation in teacher-student ratios, having increased average class size to 25.67 students per classroom in 2016. Nevada is 48th in per-pupil funding, allocating just \$8,965 for each student. The Association ranks teacher pay as 18th overall, with an average salary for teachers of \$57,376.

Assemblymember Brittney Miller, a teacher from Las Vegas, introduced a bill to

require class size reductions to maximum student-teacher ratios sanctioned by the state by the 2028-2029 school year. Knowing opponents would immediately attack the bill as too costly and too difficult since school space is perpetually short due to Nevada’s continued population growth, she told the Assembly Education Committee, “If we don’t enact bold legislation, where will we be in 10 years? How large will our class sizes be? What will your student performance and school environments be like? How many teachers will be left?” Indeed.

Miller’s proposal was heavily amended before being passed unanimously by the Assembly, reduced to requiring that schools post their teacher-pupil ratios by classroom somewhere on the internet.

Meanwhile, education advocates expressed concern about the promised new funding distribution formula, a high priority for Sisolak and legislative leadership, although it had yet to be introduced as of last Thursday, day 95 of the 120-day session. The existing formula has been in

place since 1967 and is considered far too complicated and discriminatory against schools with large populations of children who need extra services, especially in Clark County. The issue has been studied for decades, including a study funded by the legislature just last summer which recommended a new formula be more responsive to student need, be more transparent and flexible and use a cost-based funding model to be more equitable.

A select group of business executives in Las Vegas got a sneak preview of the bill’s components at private meetings last week, while legislators and the public waited impatiently for the bill. Clearly there won’t be sufficient time for review and comment by those most affected by the changes before the end of the session on June 3, a huge disservice to students and their families.

The Economic Forum granted legislators about \$43 million more to spend over the next biennium, but that will largely be consumed by inflation and mandatory services to meet population growth.

Legislators will face difficult decisions about how to cover the cost of the promised teacher raises, and there’s little hope for easing the pain of “loser” schools should the new funding formula simply reallocate scant resources in the already too-small funding pie.

Miller received accolades for her hard work on the issue of class size reduction from her Education Committee colleagues as they voted to gut her bill, and she responded by reaffirming her commitment to “fighting the fight of class sizes in Nevada,” assuring students, teachers and staff that “we hear them and this conversation will continue.”

But we’re in 51st place. Perhaps we need less conversation and more concerted action from the Governor and Democratic leadership, such as an acknowledgment that it’s going to take significantly more money to build more classrooms, hire more teachers and pay them adequately. How about a solid plan with a realistic timeframe instead? □



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