



Road to the Future
2015

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

– Lao-tzu

iNVEST is the product of the Nevada Association of School Superintendents, comprised of the superintendents of Nevada's 17 geographic school districts.

Written by superintendents and supported by school board members, iNVEST outlines the actions that must be taken to improve education in Nevada. The superintendents are united in their vision, mission and values that drive the daily work they do to ensure Nevada's students have the best opportunities possible on their journey to the future.

Vision

The vibrant future of Nevada is dependent upon all children graduating ready for college and career and prepared to be productive, responsible citizens, who are competitive in meeting the challenges of the 21st century environment.

Mission

To serve as a united voice to promote and advance public education and to advocate for improving social and academic achievement for each and every next generation learner.

Values

- *Educators are champions of public education*
- *Graduation begins in kindergarten*
- *All students*
 - *are embraced, not just those who are successful*
 - *are adaptable to learning and self-directed, self-monitoring, self-modifying, and self-managing*
 - *want to be successful and are able to meet high academic expectations when appropriate support is provided*
 - *are engaged in academic rigor, critical thinking, and core values such as integrity and striving for excellence*
- *All means all*
- *Quality education starts with highly effective teachers and administrators*
- *Resources are essential for educators to meet high expectations*
- *Grit is an essential element of success: tenacity and persistence must be developed in our students and educators*
- *Safe, optimum learning environments are essential to student achievement*
- *Business is our partner in preparing students to meet the demands of a 21st century workforce*
- *All citizens are responsible for the education of our students*



As citizens across the state conclude Nevada’s Sesquicentennial celebration, it is fitting that we reflect upon our history. Nevada’s leaders have always known education was important. In 1861, even before Nevada became a state, the Territorial Legislature provided for a “system of public school support on the territorial, county and district level.”¹ But “the educational system during the short period of Territorial rule was a poorly organized and badly supported one.”² The Nevada Constitution of 1864 made provisions for “a uniform system of common, non-sectarian, primary, grammar and high schools”³ and for financial support for public schools. In the first 100 years of our state’s history, legislators and educators worked hand in hand to tackle the issues associated with education.

By 1963, Governor Grant Sawyer spoke of the condition of education in his State of the State Address delivered to the 52nd Legislature: *“Nevada ranks 18th in the nation in average teachers’ salaries. We are 5th in the Western States. We rank 15th in the nation on pupil–teacher ratio. We are 8th in the nation for median number of school years completed by persons 25 years or older. We reputedly have the highest literacy rate in the nation. We are 4th in the nation on the basis of money spent per pupil.”*⁴

By comparison, today’s Nevada doesn’t fare so well. Many measures of student funding rank Nevada at or near the bottom, and none of them put us even close to the national average. While efforts have been made to change the trajectory of Nevada’s declining education, much is yet to be done. The authors of the first version of iNVEST outlined the answer to a single question: “What is needed to improve student achievement in Nevada?” Since iNVEST’s introduction in 2003, the question has not changed (nor have many of the answers) as we describe three basic principles and eight specific actions that the Legislature could take to improve education for Nevada’s 451,000 students:

Provide Support for Our Students

- Fund Full-day Kindergarten
- Assist Struggling Students

Provide Support for Our Educators

- Prioritize Professional Learning
- Ensure Access to Appropriate Textbooks, Materials, Assessment and Technology

Make a Financial Commitment to K-12 Education

- Fund the Base
- Revise the Funding Formula
- Establish a Rainy Day Fund
- Address Capital Improvement Needs



PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR OUR STUDENTS

For "Next Generation Learners"

FUND FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Graduation begins in kindergarten.

High school graduation is the widely held indicator for student success, and the first step toward the “*walk across the stage*” truly begins in early childhood. Effective early childhood education is an essential stepping-stone in preparing students for success later in life. The tipping of the K-12 trajectory must start in the earliest grades so that the work of the climb to graduation is spread out over the years of school. Today’s kindergarten students are expected to emerge with basic literacy skills and the essential building blocks for math numeracy.

To be competitive, all kindergarten students in Nevada must be provided the opportunity to attend full-day programs. It is inherently unfair to provide full-day instruction for some students, half-day instruction for others, and expect some parents to pay for full-day programs. With higher standards and higher expectations, it is essential that our youngest students have access to the full curriculum and be provided the time necessary to do so. The Legislature began this mission in earnest with the funding provided by the 2005 Session. Additional progress was made in 2007 and again in 2013. It is time to finish what was started 10 years ago and make full-day kindergarten a reality in all of Nevada’s public schools.

Statewide, more than 50% of our kindergarten students are enrolled in full-day programs. Approximately 10% of our full-day K students are in tuition-based programs. This is an indication that parents feel an all-day program is so important that they are willing to pay for the experience. Students in half-day programs have as little as two hours and twenty minutes per day to master skills and knowledge that previously were outcomes of the first grade curriculum. When students fall behind in their first experience at school, it is likely they will remain behind for the rest of their educational careers and are at risk of not graduating.

LONG-TERM GOAL:

Fund all kindergarten students at the full 1.0 weight as a part of the regular Distributive School Account Budget.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATION:

Provide categorical support, including additional facilities, to complete the roll out of full-day kindergarten for the remaining students over the next two years.



ASSIST STRUGGLING STUDENTS

We embrace all students, not just those that are successful.

With higher expectations for all students, literacy skills have never been more important. It is reasonable to expect all students to read at grade level by the third grade. Early identification of struggling readers is essential so students can receive individualized attention and additional instruction to catch up. Resources for early identification and intervention will help us ensure that third grade students are proficient not just in reading, but in other core areas as well.

The 2013 State Legislature provided funding for ZOOM schools, tailored to meet the needs of English Language Learners (ELL). The reading skills centers—integral to the ZOOM school model—are proving to be significant in identifying students who are struggling with language acquisition and bringing them to grade level. Many students, not just those who are learning English, experience the challenges of language acquisition. Early interventions for all students who are falling behind can get a child back on track and ensure that all third grade students master essential reading skills.

The essential components of the ZOOM school model are:

- Access to preschool
- Full-day kindergarten with class sizes of 21:1
- Reading skills center
- Extended-year learning

The ZOOM school model must be expanded. By using the criteria of (1) schools whose student populations are comprised of 35% or more English Language Learners and (2) are designated as one- or two-star schools, an additional 32 elementary schools qualify as ZOOM schools. Nineteen of those schools are in Clark County, twelve are in Washoe, and one in White Pine.

While designed specifically for schools with high populations of English Language Learners, ZOOM strategies can and should be employed for all struggling students. They provide the fundamental needs of students who are trying to catch up: additional time on task and individualized attention from an adult who identifies and provides specifically what the student needs to succeed.

Schools whose ELL population is less than 35% must also have access to funding to provide assistance to their struggling students. Additionally, students who are not classified as English Language Learners yet still have difficulty in English language acquisition and students of all backgrounds who are struggling to learn to read would benefit from some or all of the same strategies that are employed in ZOOM schools.

The passage of SB504 in the 2013 Session provided meaningful and specific support in this area through greatly needed categorical funding. Continuation of this effort is needed to continue the momentum.

LONG-TERM GOAL:

Adopt the proposed weighted formula with the expectation that additional funding will be used to ensure third-grade literacy for the students in the weighted categories.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATION:

Expand funding to create 32 additional ZOOM schools (1 in White Pine, 12 in Washoe, and 19 in Clark).





PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR OUR EDUCATORS

For "Next Generation Educators"

PRIORITIZE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

High-quality education starts with highly effective teachers and administrators.

“Great teachers help create great students. In fact, research shows that an inspiring and informed teacher is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement, so it is critical to pay close attention to how we train and support both new and experienced educators.”⁵

Particularly during this time of transition, our educators need support. As the Baby Boomer generation moves into retirement, a new generation of teachers will need to be recruited, supported and maintained so that they can meet the needs of Nevada’s students. Think of the landscape our teachers are facing:

- We have adopted the new Nevada Academic Content Standards that require extensive changes in the curriculum to ensure students are prepared for college or a career.
- Assessments are changing at elementary, middle and high school levels. A new educator performance framework is being implemented. Student achievement will impact evaluations.
- Existing opportunities to provide training for our teachers in these new standards and initiatives are minimal.

Ongoing, effective professional development needs to be embedded into the school year in a meaningful way for each district.

Each county would have to determine the most effective method of providing professional development—whether those additional non-student days would be held periodically throughout the year or whether a model utilizing the minutes on an ongoing, weekly basis, before or after school, would be adopted.

LONG-TERM GOAL:

By 2020, extend the teacher work year by the equivalent of five days to provide necessary time for professional development and collaboration.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATION:

Increase the equivalent of an additional day each year of the 2015-17 biennium (for a total of two additional days).



Mount Rose Elementary School
Reno, Washoe County
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places

Maude Frazier
UNLV Library

Boys Basketball Team, 1920
Carson City School District

High school graduate
Class of 1929
Carson City School District



ENSURE ACCESS TO TEXTBOOKS, MATERIALS, ASSESSMENTS AND TECHNOLOGY

Educators need appropriate resources to accomplish what is expected of them.

For educators to effectively implement the Nevada Academic Content Standards, it is essential that we provide textbooks, materials and other resources, both digital and traditional, to assist them. As a part of the budget cuts during our state's economic downturn, textbook allocations were first reduced and then eliminated. While challenging, Districts understood the need to trim budgets and textbook adoptions were placed on hold.

As we move forward with more rigorous standards and new assessments to match, we simply must provide the resources that our students and their teachers (including parents) need to be successful. Taking exams and assessments online is no longer a requirement we anticipate happening in the future—it is a part of today's reality. Students must have access to appropriate devices in sufficient quantity to participate fully. We must also have resources that support parents when they help their children with homework. Teachers need essential classroom materials in order to teach their classes.

LONG-TERM GOAL:

Ensure adequate, ongoing categorical funding is provided for textbooks, assessments, technology and infrastructure.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. Revisit the appropriateness of the "Minimum Expenditure Requirement" (MER) so as not to punish school districts with a requirement that is not current with school funding and costs.**
- 2. Assess the technological needs of schools and districts and fund what is needed for compliance with the mandated assessments and curriculum.**

Pershing County Middle School, Lovelock
Photo by GuiDenby, Inc.





MAKE A FINANCIAL COMMITMENT TO K-12 EDUCATION

For “Next Generation Achievement”

FUND THE BASE

Educators are champions of public education.

Without a strong foundation, a building will collapse under its own weight. The same is true for education. A strong fiscal base that provides adequate funding for all students is the first step in constructing a strong stable educational system. Without this solid base, the efforts to meet the needs of our specialized student populations will collapse under the weight of inadequate support for all students. While the funding formula must be revised if we are to meet the needs of children in poverty, English language learners and students with learning challenges, this cannot be done at the expense of the basic educational needs of all students.

The Augenblick study (commissioned by the Nevada Legislature in 2006) clearly demonstrated that the funding for Nevada schools is inadequate, but the recommendations were not implemented because the price tag was too high. If we had committed to a 10-year phase-in funding plan in the 2007 Session, we would be approaching the national average this year. In recent years, the financial hit to our economy dug a hole for most systems and businesses including Nevada’s K-12 school districts. Although the 2013 Session began the work of repairing that damage, we are still in a hole. If the Legislature creates a new funding formula without addressing the inadequacy of the base funding for education, we may never climb back out of the hole.

Funding the base is the ultimate responsibility of the Legislature. Regardless of which yardstick is used to measure education funding, Nevada continues to lag on the national scene. Nevada’s educators are facing higher expectations and working with more challenging student populations—yet are receiving comparably fewer resources. The moral obligation to improve student achievement will not be met without providing sufficient funding to provide for necessary materials, services and programs. The cost of operating K-12 education increases continually, even when we are not expanding the scope of what we provide. The cost goes up for providing required items such as utilities and fuel, salaries and benefits. Buses and textbooks need replacing. If we do not implement a plan that addresses these ever increasing costs, the quantity and quality of what we offer our students will continue to diminish.



Eureka County High School, Eureka
Photo by VanWoert Bigotti Architects

What would it cost to bring Nevada’s per-pupil funding to the national average? While “average” is a moving target, Governing.com⁶ reports the 2011 totals for Nevada as \$8,526.85 and the national average as \$10,559.70. With an estimated enrollment of 451,000 students, multiplied by an increase of \$203 per pupil, adding \$91.6 million to the base per year for the next 10 years would put us at or near the average. For Nevada to have gone from “4th in the nation on the basis of money spent per pupil”⁷ to last in the nation in a period of 50 years is deplorable. To dedicate the next ten years to recovering at least part of that ground is essential.

LONG-TERM GOAL:

Fund K-12 education in Nevada at a level commensurate with the national average by 2025.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATION:

Achieve the 2025 goal by increasing the base incrementally in each of the next five sessions. (\$406 per student for each of the next five biennia or \$203 per year for each of the next ten years.)

REVISE THE FUNDING FORMULA

All means all.

Certain populations of students require more time and attention in order to succeed in school and be college and career ready upon graduation. These populations tend to include those who are English Language Learners, children who live at or below the federally defined poverty level, and students enrolled in special education programs. In their 2012 study of the funding formula for Nevada schools, the American Institutes for Research concluded that the Nevada Plan has inequities in it.

The passage of SB500 in 2013 created the Task Force on K-12 Public Education Funding. The Task Force was required to study the Nevada Plan and make recommendations based upon a weighted formula that takes into account the individual educational needs and demographic characteristics of pupils. Its membership includes legislators, school administrators, board members, a superintendent and teachers—supported by the Technical Advisory Committee, comprised of experts in school funding. The recommendations of the Task Force include weighted funding for students living in poverty, enrolled in special education, and English Language Learners.

While the superintendents and school boards maintain that a weighted formula for our DSA will not work unless the base upon which it is calculated is adequate, we believe that all Nevada students—whether located in an urban, suburban or rural setting—deserve an education that will prepare them to compete in our 21st century global economy. School boards from all 17 counties passed a resolution to support a revised funding formula and encouraged its implementation along with the increased funding the new formula will require.

This is the challenge facing the 2015 Legislature: funding for public schools in Nevada must be *both adequate and equitable*. The goal remains unchanged since the inception of iNVEST: to improve student achievement through adequate funding.

LONG-TERM GOAL:

Implement a weighted funding formula to provide additional supports for struggling learners through categorical funds.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATION:

Review the recommendations of the Task Force on Public Education K-12 Funding and use categorical funding to phase in the necessary increases to a weighted formula over the next 10 years.



ESTABLISH A “RAINY DAY” FUND

All citizens are responsible for the education of our students.

Establishing an education stabilization fund would be beneficial regardless of whether Nevada’s economy is robust or struggling. In plentiful years, money would be set aside to preserve education funding during difficult economic times. In years when we struggle, the reserves could be used to ensure critical education programs are not cut. Additionally, it is not unreasonable to expect that revenues collected from tax payers under the banner of education actually remain in education budgets.

The formula in The Nevada Plan uses multiple calculations to determine the level of funding those school districts will receive, ultimately solving for the state’s contribution after deducting other sources of revenue. Basic per pupil support is the level of funding deposited into the Distributive School Account (DSA); it is not the actual cost of education programs nor does it reflect all of the money spent in support of those programs.

The cost of other education programs are then calculated “outside the DSA,” where revenues that are local in name only [e.g., local school support sales tax and ad valorem (property) tax] as well as certain other state revenues are subtracted from the estimated cost of education programs. The remaining program cost is referred to as the “state funding requirement,” a gap that is filled with State General Fund appropriations. The result is a formula that’s difficult to calculate, challenging to explain, and hard to understand.

The resulting “guaranteed per-pupil funding,” always results in either a surplus or a deficit of state dollars to the State’s General Fund. When there is a deficit, the expectation is that the Legislature will find additional revenues to support education to honor the guarantee, which comes in the form of a supplemental appropriation. When the revenues come in higher than needed to honor the guarantee, the state reverts surplus education dollars to the State General Fund where they are budgeted for other pressing state needs (which may or may not include education programs).



Mary Lee Nichols School
Sparks, Washoe County
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places



Applied Analysis⁸ provided an in-depth look at how the formula has worked over the past 35 years. Since 1979, \$765 million of funding generated by taxpayers for the purpose of supporting K-12 education has been reverted to the State General Fund and used for other purposes.

With the turbulent economy we've experienced in recent years, the state has also had to honor its obligation to meet the guaranteed per-pupil funding, and those supplemental appropriations have totaled \$603 million, leaving a net balance of \$183 million that has been diverted from education. However, these figures do not reflect cuts to K-12 education programs during the same period, which take the net balance of this formula to nearly \$335 million in reversions or funding obligations not met during that same study period.

It is worth noting here that if the state had used a "rainy day fund" approach, it would have been able keep K-12 education funding much closer to "whole" through the worst economic downturn in Nevada's history.

LONG-TERM GOAL:

Create an education stabilization fund where DSA reversions over the 10 percent threshold are allocated to Nevada's school districts on a per-pupil basis to be used for non-recurring expenditures such as capital improvements, professional development, and equipment purchases.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATION:

Require that "reversion" funds remain in an education rainy day fund until such time as they accumulate to 10 percent of the annual DSA revenues.

Lander County High School, Austin
Wikipedia Creative Commons
Photo by Ammodramus





ADDRESS CAPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

Safe, optimum learning environments are essential for student achievement.

The physical environment in which we teach children can have a profound impact on the success of our students. School districts have very limited options to raise funds for school buildings and all of them require either legislative or voter approval. In fact, school districts must get approval from other local governments to place a question on the ballot. This is doubly challenging when these same local governments are competing for the same revenue.

One of the fundamental questions the state must answer is, “Whose responsibility is it to provide the physical structures for our students?” With very few exceptions, the responsibility has been placed on local districts to generate local revenues for school construction and ongoing renovation. Because school boards have not been granted taxing authority, the State Legislature has established the method used in each county. Superintendents and School Boards accept the responsibility to provide appropriate school facilities, but they must have the appropriate statutory authority to do so.

Eleven of the 17 counties have reached (or are within pennies of) the property tax cap of \$3.64 and the *only* ballot questions districts can pose are to raise property tax. The Legislature has not provided any avenues for districts to generate additional funding if their county is at the tax cap and (except in rare and extreme circumstances) the state does not provide capital funding.

Without adequate funding for the maintenance and modernization of existing school facilities, districts will be forced to raid razor-thin operating budgets in order to pay for repairs to plumbing, electrical, and HVAC systems as they arise, or be forced to close down schools and bus children to other overcrowded buildings. In some cases, districts have to choose between textbooks and toilets.



Mineral County High School
Hawthorne
Mineral County School District

Southside School, Reno
Washoe County
National Park Service
National Register of Historic
Places collection
Photo by Michelle McFadden



Elgin Schoolhouse, 1922
Lincoln County
Kershaw-Ryan State Park near Caliente



Just like homeownership, these investments need to be maintained and equipped to provide a safe and effective learning environment in which children can focus on succeeding in the 21st century workplace. The community has invested millions of dollars to construct these buildings, however not enough resources have been allocated to maintain the school facilities in our state.

In addition to deferred maintenance and renovation needs, counties facing ongoing growth are unable to provide the seats necessary for their student population. After static growth during the Great Recession, student enrollment has grown consistently statewide over the past three years, exceeding 1%—over 4,000 new students per year—with only one new school facility (built in Lyon County) to accommodate them. The cost of new construction ranges from \$25–\$100 million per building, depending on school level and size. Sufficient resources are not available to support the extensive additional expense. Even if voters will support ballot questions, property tax revenues grow only as residential enrollments grow, and the revenue growth isn't enough to support the high *upfront* cost of building schools. Additionally, as we begin a hopefully robust economic recovery, we have imposed limits on property tax revenue growth with the residential and commercial tax caps of 3% and 8%, respectively. Therefore, even if residential property tax values grow at a rate of 5%, for example, local governments (including school districts) will realize only a 3% increase. This is frustrating given the fact that property tax values dropped so drastically and now we won't be able to “grow our way to prosperity” at the market rate. Because of a self-imposed slow growth rate, districts will leave millions of dollars unrealized that could be devoted to the necessary school infrastructure needed statewide.

LONG-TERM GOAL:

Implement additional funding mechanisms that are dedicated exclusively for school facilities OR provide local elected officials with the authority to generate funding for the maintenance, renovation and construction of school facilities.

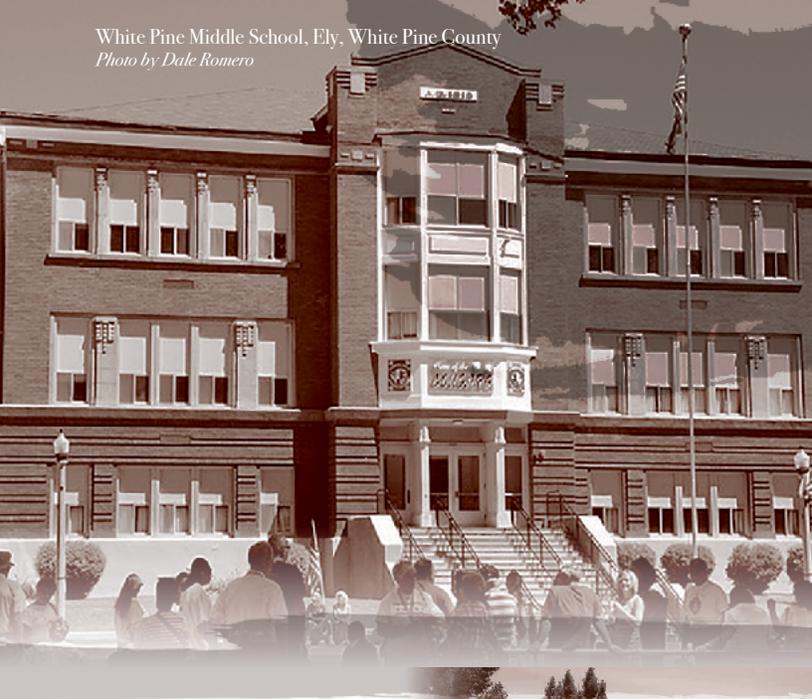
SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. Reconsider property tax caps that limit school district access to property tax revenue to fund school infrastructure.**
- 2. Provide categorical grants to districts to ensure all schools can provide the necessary technology to deliver education in today's environment.**

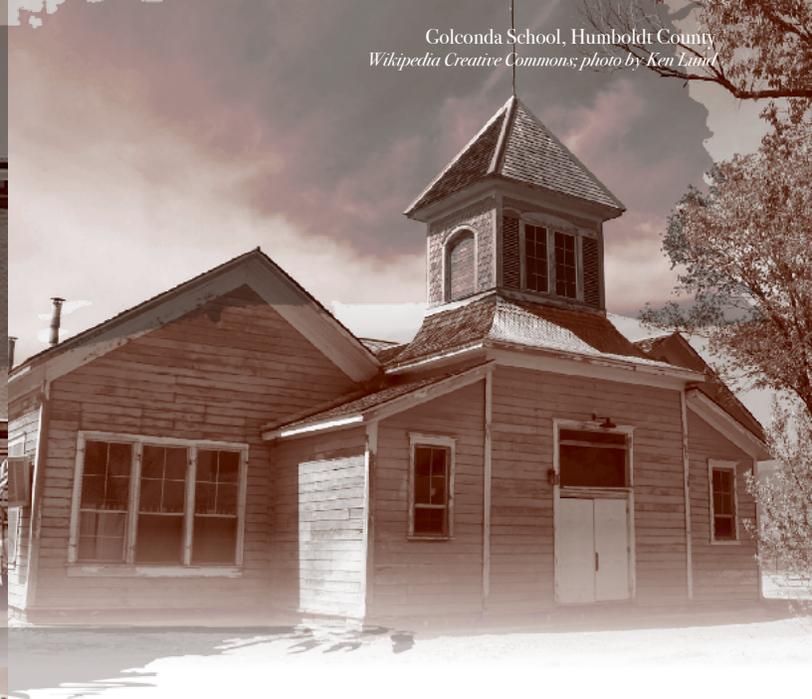
Grammar School, Elko
Elko County
Northeastern Nevada Museum



White Pine Middle School, Ely, White Pine County
Photo by Dale Romero



Golconda School, Humboldt County
Wikipedia Creative Commons: photo by Ken Lund



Midas School House
Elko County
Photo by Marco Oro



Forth Ward School
Virginia City
Storey County
Nevada State Historic
Preservation Office



Minden Grammar School
Douglas County
Wikipedia Creative Commons
Photo by Asilvero



Goodsprings Schoolhouse
Clark County
Wikipedia Creative Commons
Photo by Ymblanter



Overton Gymnasium
Clark County
Wikipedia Creative Commons
Photo by Ymblanter



*“If one advances confidently
in the direction of his dreams and
endeavors to live the life which he has
imagined, he will meet with a success
unexpected in common hours.”*

— Henry David Thoreau

1. “Historical Perspective on Major Education Changes 1861–1966;” p.2, prepared by J. Clark Davis and Mary Davis; 1966
2. Ibid
3. The Constitution of the State of Nevada, Article XI, Section 2
4. Nevada State Legislature Fifty-Second Session, The Second Day, Governor’s Address to the Legislature
5. Why Is Teacher Development Important?; Edutopia, May 10, 2014
6. www.governing.com/gov-data/education-data/state-education-spending-per-pupil-data.html
7. Nevada State Legislature Fifty-Second Session, The Second Day, Governor’s Address to the Legislature
8. Applied Analysis is a Las Vegas–based research and analysis firm that specializes in analytics related to economics and fiscal impact.



We are preparing our children to be problem solvers for issues that don't yet exist, in jobs we have not yet imagined, because of new technology that has not yet been invented. Our world is changing rapidly. We need our students to think at a higher level and apply learned skills to solve difficult problems in a contextual situation – not just memorize individual bits of information that could be found on the Internet in less than a second. We want Nevada students to be great thinkers and doers, whether their adventures and choices in life take them to a career that is just across town or on the other side of the world.

If we've done our jobs well, our students should leave us prepared to collaborate with and compete with those who come from private school educations or those who come from states with more impressive K-12 statistics.

Today's American workplace is not the same one our parents worked in while they were raising us. In the early 1970s, 72% of all U.S. jobs were held by adults with a high school diploma or less. Today, over 66% of all new jobs are tied to a college degree.

Nevada's children are counting on us to ensure that we don't leave them with a gap between what they learned in K-12 and what they need to be able to do to succeed in their first phase of adulthood. The Great Recession forced us to analyze where the future jobs are for our students and maybe more importantly – where they are not.

Our children are counting on us to challenge them. They deserve a vibrant future that is supported by a strong education in their youth. They need us to help them reach high. Nevada's school board members and superintendents are united to promote and advance public education and to improve achievement and success for all students.

We must all be accountable. Students must accept personal responsibility to learn. Parents must accept the responsibility of ensuring their children are in school and have the support at home to create success. Teachers must be prepared to assist students for the demands in an ever-changing global society. Administrators must use resources in a way that positively impact the classroom. Superintendents must set high expectations for students, staff and themselves. School boards must ensure that budgets are set to support the priorities of student learning. And during the 2015 Session, our legislators must have the collective will to provide adequate resources so everyone else can do their jobs.

Educators cannot do this alone.

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