

Governor Jim Gibbons



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GIBBONS EDUCATION REFORM PROPOSAL

Governor Gibbons is firmly committed to improving K-12 education in Nevada. Improvement will require new ideas and fresh resolve to replace blind allegiance to ineffectual and wasteful notions that have demonstrated no substantive gains in academic performance for the last 20 years.

Class size reduction was added to the Nevada Revised Statutes in 1989. According to the Nevada Department of Education, 613 schools served K-12 students during Fiscal Year 2009. Despite 20 years funding class size reduction, the Department recently announced 142 public schools in Nevada qualify as low-performing for the purposes of receiving federal grants for the “worst” schools in the nation. That means 23 percent of our public schools are not adequately addressing the educational needs of their students.

It’s time to stop whining that education in Nevada doesn’t work because of lack of funding. We need to quit throwing money at programs which have not accomplished their stated purposes despite two decades of funding. There are many studies which debate the issue of class size in primary grades, as many pro as con. Utah has one of the lowest per student expenditures in the nation and the highest student per teacher ratio. Utah students consistently achieve above average levels. Washington, D.C. has the lowest student per teacher ratio and the highest per student expenditures, and yet they consistently rank in the bottom for student achievement. If class size reduction is the answer for improving K-12 in Nevada, why haven’t student test scores improved dramatically in the last 20 years?

In order to improve Nevada schools for our students, we need to implement true change - real change. We need to get parents and communities involved in their local schools, and in charge of their children’s education. We need to empower local school boards to make decisions which are right for the children in their community. Local school boards are ultimately responsible to parents and voters in their community. Parents have the most vested interest in the outcome of their children’s education.

The cookie cutter approach has not worked in K-12 education. Not all schools need class size reduction programs. Not all schools need full-day kindergarten. School districts must be empowered to choose the right programs for the students in each of their local schools. Parents must be afforded the ability to choose and guide the education which works for their children.

The current fiscal crisis facing Nevada mandates that Governor Gibbons buck the status quo. If 23 percent of Nevada schools are categorized as underachieving, we need to rethink how we deliver public education in Nevada. We need to make better use of existing resources, and give local school districts the flexibility to use funding to deliver the right programs to the right kids to achieve the best results.

Governor Gibbons will call a special session of the Nevada Legislature to address the fiscal crisis facing the state of Nevada. In this session, Governor Gibbons will introduce a K-12 education reform package which will not only save Nevada taxpayer dollars, but will better utilize existing taxpayer support for schools by empowering local school districts to govern and direct how education is delivered.

Governor Gibbons' education reform package includes:

- Streamlining K-12 school funding and creating empowerment school districts. The proposal will delete special earmarks in the K-12 education budget for programs such as class size reduction, full-day kindergarten, and other legislatively-mandated expenditure items. At the same time, the proposal will raise the amount of Distributive School Account funding (DSA or state General Funds) calculated in basic school support known as the Nevada Plan. The proposal would keep some of the current program funding intact by raising the DSA allocation for each school district, but still generate cost savings and eliminate the official funding requirement for programs such as class size reduction and full-day kindergarten. Local school districts would be empowered to use their basic school support dollars at their own discretion, depending on the needs of the students and the individual schools. This will return control of the education system to parents, students, and school boards in the local communities.
- Eliminating local government and school district collective bargaining as provided for in Chapter 288 of the Nevada Revised Statutes. This will return control of the education system to parents, students, and school boards in the local communities. Parents need to work with school boards and participate in the education process. Teachers are an essential component of the educational system and play a vital role in its direction and delivery. The manner in which education is delivered to children should not be dictated by unions, which by definition promote only the interests of their members to the exclusion of other interests and stakeholders such as parents, school boards, and mostly importantly students. Companies around the country have cut back on wages and employees. Salaries which were barely sustainable in a

growth economy are simply not realistic or possible in the current economy. Either salaries and benefits must be reduced, or jobs will be lost. This is true in education, government, and the private sector.

- Adopting a statewide school voucher program for all parents and students to exercise school choice, and authorizing local school districts, boards of charter schools, and private schools to set enrollment caps at the school level to prevent overcrowding.
- Eliminating the elected body known as State Board of Education, and establishing a five-member advisory State Board of Education consisting of three members appointed by the Governor and one each by the Speaker of the Assembly and the Majority Leader of the Senate. The members of the State Board of Education would have statutory criteria for experience and education relevant to serving as a member of the Board. The Superintendent of Public Instruction would be appointed by the Governor, report to the Governor and serve at the pleasure of the Governor. The Superintendent would receive advisory input from the State Board of Education relating to relevant issues necessary for a consistent system of public instruction in Nevada, such as academic standards, professional licensing, etc. The proposal would also eliminate some of the many duplicative education boards and committees relating to K-12 education, and combine the necessary advisory functions into a few boards with a very narrow focus. This would create a broad framework and standards for academic achievement, while leaving the delivery of services at the local level where parents and school boards can make the best decisions for their communities.
- Eliminating the statutory requirement for class-size reduction by deleting NRS 388.700, NRS 388.710 and NRS 388.720. In the current biennium, school districts received funding for 16 pupils per teacher in grades 1 and 2 and 19 pupils per teacher in grade 3, yet many school districts – including our largest school district in Clark County – have applied for waivers from the State Board of Education to have classes with two to three students over those levels. The State Board will act on the waiver requests in January. Regardless, if schools are funded at the statutory levels and yet still require waivers, it renders the program moot. Despite 20 years of class size reduction, 23 percent of Nevada schools are rated as underperforming. It's time for change. Some teaching jobs will be lost due to declining enrollment, much as jobs in the hospitality and construction sectors have also been lost. With natural workforce attrition and retirements, the number of actual jobs lost should be much lower than the number of teachers currently reported as funded by class size reduction.
- Eliminating any statutory and budgetary requirements for full-day kindergarten. Let parents and school districts decide where and when full-day kindergarten is appropriate.

- Eliminating the hold harmless provision in school funding, which allows school districts to base their funding on a previous school year when student enrollment declines. Cost savings are likely in FY 2011, but depend on school enrollment figures. This program is costing the taxpayers of Nevada \$22.3 million in FY 2010, when the state is essentially double paying for many of the students who have transitioned from a traditional public school to a charter school in the current school year.
- Amending NRS 386.650(1) to delete the provision which prohibits the use of student test scores from being used for the purposes of evaluating an individual teacher or paraprofessional. Repealing this law not only is necessary for Nevada to qualify for the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top competitive grant program, it is also the right thing to do for our children. We must ensure our teachers are held accountable for their performance. Our students are accountable for their academic performance based on grades and test scores. Our students need and deserve to know their teachers will also be accountable for their performance.

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