

PUBLIC COMMENT TO THE INTERIM FINANCE COMMITTEE

December 15, 2022

The Nevada State Education Association has been the voice of Nevada educators for over 120 years.

NSEA has consistently sounded the alarm about educator vacancies that have ballooned across the state in recent years. As we near the middle of the school year, there are still thousands of school vacancies with even more positions being filled by long-term substitutes. Last week, the Economic Policy Institute released a report finding the national teacher shortage is both widespread and especially severe in schools with high percentage of students of color and from low-income families. They also found the current shortage is not the result of an insufficient number of qualified teachers, but rather low pay and an increasingly stressful work environment. While we often talk about our educator shortage, we don't have a severe shortage of teachers – just a shortage of those willing to work for 23.5% less than their college-educated counterparts. Nevada can't fill vacant positions, because we aren't paying enough to be competitive.

This is why we consistently articulate what Nevada must do to address this crisis – ***Time for 20!*** With thousands of educator vacancies and some of the largest class sizes in the nation, Time for 20 means a 20% educator raise, a \$20 minimum wage for people who make schools run, and average class sizes of 20 students. We also have called on the state to do better to listen to and respect educators, addressing workplace issues like safety and inclusion of educator voice.

Number 9 on agenda item H will continue to fund a position to oversee the programmatic and evaluation initiatives of American Rescue Plan Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds. This work is important, especially as data is now emerging on ARP ESSER spending in some Nevada school districts failing to meet the moment on the biggest crisis impacting Nevada schools. In data provided by school districts, there is a strong correlation between low ARP spending on staff and high vacancies. For example, the Nye County School District has one of the highest vacancy rates in Nevada while only spending 11% of their Rescue Plan dollars on staff. Meanwhile, the Clark County School District lists over 1700 vacant positions, yet they are spending less than 30% of their ARP dollars on staff. While most individual school districts have prioritized staff-related expenditures, only 37% of ARP dollars across districts have gone to staff.

NSEA has fielded many questions about how to fund Time for 20. Resources are available, including federal dollars and a record state budget surplus. There are also strong recommendations for additional state revenue from the Commission on School Funding. The crisis in Nevada schools is dire, and we need bold action now. It's Time for 20.