

Investment in Education, the Key to Our Economic Future

In a state that is desperate for economic diversification and the attraction and creation of the jobs of the future, now is precisely the time to make the education of our kids and our future workforce our state's top funding priority. Some believe that we should wait until we recover from the pandemic-induced shutdowns and that the Covid relief funding from Washington will undoubtedly save us. Unfortunately, Washington cannot fix our antiquated tax system; one that has contributed to our education funding's long-standing decline. In the 1980s, we ranked in the top half of the nation in K-12 per-pupil funding at 24th, falling all the way to 49th in the early 2000s and remaining near the bottom since then. How did this happen, and how do we fix it?

The slow erosion of our education funding continues. There are many contributing factors to the decline in our funding support for education. From the diversion of Initiative Petition 1 Room taxes to the depreciation of our property taxes, the list of culprits is long. Public K-12 funding of education in the state is a complex issue that includes more than a dozen funding sources. The Guinn Center has produced many reports on education funding, and Educate Nevada Now has released a new report. Both agree that funding has declined and is inadequate. A recent Making the Grade report, by the Education Law Center gave Nevada "Fs" in three funding categories: Levels, Distribution, and Effort. We are the only state in the nation to receive an "F" in all three categories. Additionally, since 2010, we increased funding on average of just 1.4% per year, 25% below the average inflation rate of 1.75% during that same period.

Funding for education matters. According to Ed Week Quality Counts report, Nevada is one of the nation's worst-performing states in educational attainment and post-secondary participation. Yet, many still believe that funding is not the problem. They believe the available funding is mismanaged or there is too much administration. These arguments are blind to the fact that Nevada is on the bottom of the per-pupil funding list (30% below the national average) and has sustained a 25% cut in real dollars in just the last decade. According to the National Education Association, we have the largest student-to-teacher ratio in the country, and the impact on student performance is significant. A summary of research published in the "Research in Education" journal found that student performance drops as student-teacher ratios increase. "The needs of individual students go undiscovered, and the quality of instruction plummets as ratios rise."

There are growing needs for a highly educated workforce. A commitment to education is a commitment to our long-term economic success. Without the skills needed for the 4th Industrial Revolution jobs, Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM) or other career-ready skills like the trades, our kids will likely be left behind. According to McKinsey, by 2030, up to 50% of the jobs globally will be automated. Most of the companies moving to our region require STEAM skills, and the wages of these jobs are significantly above the median wages in the area. More importantly, these jobs will be here in 2030. When investing in education, we invest in our kids and diversify our economy while making the state more attractive to these quality companies looking for the talent they need to compete.

Our kids deserve better! There may have been a time in our state when most of the jobs were concentrated in industries that did not require STEAM skills. Those days are over. To afford your own home and have a piece of the American Dream in Reno-Sparks, your annual family income must now be over \$100,000. The higher wage jobs of the future are coming, and we can expect that to continue as long as these companies can find the talent they need here. However, we will not deliver that talent if we do not value and invest in education. It's time to make funding education the top priority in the state.

Please consider [signing the Empower Nevada's Future Pledge](#) to encourage lawmakers to set goals to ***fund public school students at the national per-pupil average.*** Nevada's funding for education and our public education rankings have already discouraged new companies from investing in our state and are putting our kids at a distinct disadvantage in the new economy. Our kids and our state deserve better!